

The "M" Level

By: Andrew Hawkins

Field CRM Applications started in the field service area but have long ago past that boundary and crossed into field sales, field marketing and other applications. With the advent of true mobile applications m-CRM is now taking off in covering all of the traditional CRM and eCRM aspects, plus the m (for mobile).

For many years the field representative has been relegated to a lesser role interacting with the customer ("I am only the technician, I don-t know"). Field representatives were prevented from having richer interactions with the customer, as their access to data was first limited to the printed service order (or equivalent) and later to the not-so-great features of synchronization. As mobile technologies mature and data streams increase through the same, field representatives now open a new front to the customer relationship channel. Field representatives now have the ability to send and receive data on real time, accessing not only customer records and service history, but also sales information, knowledge bases and other data that can make the interaction with the customer more profitable for the company as well as more satisfying for both, the customer and the representative.

How to select and implement a field application in an mobile age? The challenge lies in selecting open systems that can grow at the speed that the hardware and software enabling mobile technologies is growing. Failure to do so will lead organizations into massive efforts to rebuild systems, or fail. With so many different technologies, it is difficult to select the appropriate one, as it is to select the business application that can support and be supported by such technologies.

More recently, organizations equip field forces with handheld devices (PDAs like Palm Pilot and Windows Pocket PC) with wireless network connectivity. In early 2001, Sun equipped about 50 of their field service engineers with a special appliance from Symbol (with scanner). Eventually all of 3500 field engineers would be equipped with this device. a Java and XML-based application called FETools was developed.

Leading CRM Software vendors like PeopleSoft and Siebel have long recognized the need to create, transform and port traditional and eCRM applications to the "m" level. Even so, organizations must ensure that their own implementation will not cripple their ability to remain mobile as the requirements in this field grow.

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