Mobile Office Solutions

Small and medium businesses are rapidly adopting mobile office solutions to stretch the boundaries of the physical office, increase responsiveness and improve productivity of their staffs. By turning downtime into fully productive time in places like cabs, trains, client sites and airports, you can save many hours a week and do with them as you please.

Why It's On Our Radar

Two reasons: mature technology and high ROI. Recent years have brought big improvements in the quality of wireless networks, mobile devices and software, making mobile office offerings extremely user-friendly and reliable. Meanwhile, prices are coming down across a broad range of solutions, allowing companies to add a lot of capacity for a relatively small investment. Consider that an average Blackberry user gains 60 minutes of productive time per day simply by checking and responding to email during downtime in elevators, waiting areas and meeting rooms. Mobile broadband and mobile application solutions can introduce similar time savings, while also enhancing responsiveness and streamlining operations across your business.

Solution Types

Let's review three categories of mobile solutions that can help you save time and simplify many daily processes:

Mobile Broadband is an increasingly popular product that gives you high-speed Internet access over a cellular network. Enabling a business laptop with this service can give you instantaneous access to your email, your company intranet, office files and folders or even your office computer desktop through a remote access service. Ideal for employees that spend a lot of time out of the office, mobile broadband services are offered by all national cellular operators, with speeds not much different from your office Internet access.

Mobile email and calendaring products like RIM Blackberry or Microsoft ActiveSync allow you to access your office communications on the mobile device. Connecting these to your enterprise email service usually provides the greatest level of functionality and payoff, although these solutions can also work with personal or POP3/IMAP email accounts.

Mobile applications can be deployed as stand-alone solutions or in conjunction with mobile broadband and email products, depending on whether the application needs to be connected to function. The driving force behind deploying most mobile applications is to simplify the flow of information to and from your office systems like customer relationship management (CRM), accounting and enterprise resource planning (ERP). For example, a mobile app that provides on-the-spot access to a CRM tool like Salesforce.com or Siebel can give your sales staff the tools they need to close deals and keep account information up-to-date. Similarly, a mobile time-tracking application can allow attorneys and consultants to easily capture the time they spend on any given project or client to simplify reporting and billing. A wealth of mobile applications are available for many industries and business functions, and many offer high ROI through increased productivity and better data in your systems.

Vendors to Watch

Wireless Internet access:

- SprintNextel, Verizon Wireless, AT&T

Mobile Email:

- RIM Blackberry, Microsoft ActiveSync, Good Technology

"ROI of a BlackBerry deployment is conservatively calculated at 238%. This equates to a payback period of 154 days, or approximately 5 months."

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