



Remote Access Devices – Real World Applications Part 2 of 3

In the last issue, we introduced remote access devices – today’s technology for mobility. We discussed the two modes of communications (batch and real time), and presented the various data collection devices on the market today: batch data collection terminals, handheld computers, and tablets.

As we discussed, no one communication type or device is better than another for all applications. The method you choose depends upon your purpose (usage), your budget, and other factors such as your Return on Investment (ROI).

APPLICATIONS

You can use remote access devices to collect data for a variety of applications including, but not limited to, Vendor Managed Inventory (VMI), crib operations, mobile warehouses, and sales force automation.

VENDOR MANAGED INVENTORY

In a Vendor Managed Inventory application, a mobile worker collects information about product usage at a customer site. For instance, if you are a distributor and one of your customers is a manufacturer, you can go to that manufacturing site and take inventory of the items that he has on his production floor and then re-order product accordingly. You would, in effect, become your customer’s stock taker. A batch terminal is generally adequate for this type of operation.

CRIB OPERATIONS

In crib operations, a data collection device is used in a similar way, but tracks inventory usage and records charging information in a crib rather than on a production floor. A batch terminal can be used to record crib activity. However, a real time device can provide the additional capacity for the crib attendant to order items for projects or special circumstances while eliminating paperwork.

MOBILE WAREHOUSE

Another use for remote access devices is in a mobile warehouse (van) application such as a construction site. A scanner is used to check inventory levels at the site. Your mobile worker goes out to the construction site to deliver ordered items and also take orders onsite. If he has the requested item in his van, he can service the customer right there on the spot.

If he is using a real time device, the sale is automatically posted in Accounts Receivable. It’s done on the fly, on the site and right from the truck. The system records that items have been sold off the truck rather than ordered and delivered. When your mobile worker gets back to the warehouse at the end of the day, there is a pallet sitting at the end of the dock for him that has the product he needs to replenish his mobile warehouse as well as all the stock he needs to deliver the next day.



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If he is using a batch terminal, the process works the same, except the worker has to transmit his information to the corporate computer before it is processed.

In both cases, you are able to maximize your mobile worker's time. He is able to focus on meeting with his customers to generate revenue, rather than doing paperwork in the office or picking in the warehouse.

SALES FORCE AUTOMATION

A high-level mobile work application for remote access devices is extremely useful to your sales force. Both outside sales people who are prospecting for new customers and salespeople who are at their customer's office will benefit. Remote devices give them access to what their customer buys, sales history, and available inventory as well as current cost and pricing information. More importantly, they have the capability to actually take an order on the fly, negotiate a contract or create a quote all while they are with their customers.

BENEFITS

The real empowerment of using remote access devices for workers in the field is that it reduces errors dramatically. Inventory and order information is scanned or entered and verified right there on the spot. Workers are not writing information down on a piece of paper where they have to worry about a transcription or multiple transcriptions. You have significantly shortened the cycle of delivering that information back into the system and you have reduced your labor tremendously because once an order is entered, it's done.

Since the ordering process takes so much less time, you can be very responsive to your customers. You can help them reduce their inventory levels. And your customer satisfaction will go through the roof because you can be very, very flexible. There are dramatic possibilities for improvement in all of these areas.

BUDGET

Obviously your budget will be a factor in which data collection method you choose for your application. You can buy a batch data collection terminal for as little as \$400 for the bare minimum unit. For a unit used for a mobile worker application, it will be closer to \$1,200, which includes a modem, a barcode scanner and other applications. If you get a ruggedized unit, expect to spend between \$2,500 and \$3,500. Tablet pricing is about the same \$500-\$600 with ruggedized versions at about \$1,300-\$1,500.

Keep in mind that when implementing one of these projects, price is only one factor. You need to look at this like any other capital investment. What is your Return on Investment (ROI)? If you can buy a terminal that is twice as expensive but it saves you



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half of your labor, that might be a better tradeoff than buying a less expensive device that has higher error rates, takes longer for data transmission, or is more complicated to use.

We will discuss ROI in more depth, as well as the future technology in remote access devices in the next issue of *American Fastener Journal*.

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