Issue Brief

When Your Information Finds You

Giving mobile employees online data and forms in the field
improves responsiveness, efficiency and service

Employee Mobility: No Longer a Question

No more lugging heavy boxes of files to the car. No more rifling through a stack of blank paper forms to find the right one for the next appointment. No more filling out that paper form only to go back to the office to enter the same data into the computer. And no more struggling with a laptop that's too cumbersome to take when visiting job sites.

These are the wishes of public safety officers, inspectors, case workers and other government employees who work primarily in the field. And increasingly, these wishes are becoming a priority for government IT departments, as they create a roadmap to enable more efficient employee mobility through the adoption of tablets and smartphones, tailored apps, and greater access to online content and processes.

In fact, 91 percent of respondents to a Center for Digital Government survey agreed that the future of government service delivery requires going mobile, and 60 percent said that employees are already using mobile apps to improve productivity.[1]

Benefits of Mobility for In-Field Government Workers

Improving mobile capabilities and information access for employees yields numerous benefits, including:

- Increased number of site visits, inspections and other tasks that employees can perform in a single day because more of their work can be completed in the field
- More informed responses to emergency and other public safety field work
- More flexibility in where and when employees can work improves public service delivery
- Compressed timelines for action and decision-making because media-rich information is easily accessible when and where it is needed
- Streamlined data collection and entry tasks with improved consistency and reduced potential for introducing errors
- Reduced paper consumption and storage requirements, meaning lower costs and increased environmental benefits

How State and Local Governments Are Supporting Mobile Workers

The experiences of a county government and a state agency show some of the applications for mobile employees, as well as factors to consider for implementation.

Horry County, S.C.

"Our goal is to get rid of all of the laptops and to have all of our different line-of-business applications available on a standard mobile device," says Tim Oliver, geographic information officer and assistant CIO for the county. Today, the county's police officers, fire department, building inspectors, business licensing inspectors, storm water inspectors and emergency management personnel use tablets for their daily work in the field.

The portability of the tablets and their integrated access to GIS data and documents in the enterprise content management (ECM) system proved especially valuable during a condominium complex fire that destroyed 26 buildings and displaced hundreds of residents. With the mobile capabilities, Oliver and another employee were able to access property valuation data to calculate an estimated cost of damage within 30 minutes. Cleanup could begin more efficiently because of an app that showed whether all residents had been accounted for in each building. In future cases, the fire department will use the tablets to access hazardous materials reports from the ECM system.

Before implementation begins, Oliver recommends defining a policy for how tablets will be assigned to employees. "Everyone envies the person who gets the latest version and the pressure will be on to give those new tablets to executives and hand down their older units to lower-level employees," he says. "But that means extra work for IT in wiping and reconfiguring the tablets. So now we have a policy that new units will only go to users who don't have tablets yet."

Identifying budget allocations to fund ongoing data costs and future replacement of the tablets is another important step. "Mobile laptops may be cheaper initially and they may have a longer lifespan than tablets, but the ongoing cost of mobile broadband service, as well as maintenance and support is definitely higher, so the return on investment (ROI) for tablets is more attractive," says Oliver.[2]

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

A pilot project to outfit restaurant and food service inspectors with tablets is part of a Nebraska Department of Agriculture initiative to go paperless for many of its processes. But in the early stages of the project, the IT and department staff involved are finding that fully considering what's possible can be difficult. "Your users will likely understand the idea of

Mobility Use Cases for Government Field Employees

Inspectors:
- Building and code enforcement
- Public health
- Business licensing

Case workers:
- Child protection
- Healthcare
- Senior services

Emergency responders:
- Law enforcement
- Fire
- Emergency medical aid
- Public works
- Disaster services

Public works:
- Utility services
- Transportation and roads
- 311 reporting

going paperless, but they may be uncertain about making the technology changes that can deliver bigger advantages," says James Ohmberger, IT administrator for enterprise computing in the Nebraska Office of the CIO.

For example, the department previously mailed a paper report for posting on the wall of an inspected site. With the move to an ECM system, restaurants would be able to obtain this document directly through a self-service Web portal. Understandably, the question arose about whether it would be good public service to stop mailing this document. This question has been resolved as the department has identified what documents would be suitable for the customer portal.

Ohmberger notes that an advantage of moving to an ECM system is that it prompts a detailed analysis of all processing steps for a paper form. 'This helps you identify bottlenecks and unnecessary steps in the workflow today that you can eliminate when you move to ECM. And for the department staff, this helps bring the 'Aha!' moment that you want them to reach."[3]

Getting Started

Given all of the benefits that can be gained from enabling employee mobility, it can be hard to identify the best ways to get started. Use the questions below to jumpstart your plans.

- **Who needs what?** Identify which employees need what kind of access in the field to data, documents, electronic forms and online processes that are hosted across your various enterprise systems.

- **Which device?** Select the primary mobile device for use by field employees and configure it with appropriate apps or identify needs for developing custom apps. It's important to distinguish between the latest must-have applications and those that will really make government employees effective, especially with lower budgets and staff levels.

- **Which apps?** Identify whether mobile applications are available from current vendors, or if you will develop your own.

- **How will workflows and processes need to change?** Evaluate current workflows for changes needed to support mobility and for improvements that can be gained by information access and form filing in the field. "When employees can access information across the different systems and lines of business while they're in the field, they can become much more efficient and productive," says Horry County's Oliver. "And in the long run, that's what saves time and money for a government."

Endnotes

1. Center for Digital Government Research Survey: Secure Mobile Productivity, April 2013, www.govtech.com/library/papers/Secure-Mobile-Productivity.html
2. CDG interview with Tim Oliver, May 3, 2013
3. CDG interview with James Ohmberger, May 23, 2013

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One of the world's largest independent ECM software vendors, Hyland Software is the developer of OnBase. An award-winning suite of document and process management solutions, OnBase has a proven record of solving problems resulting from time consuming, costly and error plagued manual tasks. Available on-premises or as software as a service (SaaS), OnBase installs quickly, cost effectively and is designed to grow with organizations. Today, people at more than 11,000 organizations in 67 countries have the time to do the things that really add value thanks to OnBase. For these and other successes in its 21 year history, Hyland Software is a Leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Content Management, 2012.

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