

INTERACTIVE SESSION: MANAGEMENT

The Mobile Pocket Office

Can you run your company out of your pocket? Perhaps not entirely, but there are many business functions today that can be performed using an iPhone, iPad, or Android mobile handheld device. The smartphone has been called the “Swiss Army knife of the digital age.” A flick of the finger turns it into a web browser, a telephone, a camera, a music or video player, an e-mail and messaging machine, and, increasingly, a gateway into corporate systems. New software applications for document sharing, collaboration, sales, order processing, inventory management, and production monitoring make these devices even more versatile business tools. Mobile pocket offices that fit into a purse or coat pocket are helping to run companies large and small.

Sonic Automotive is one of the largest automotive retailers in the United States with more than 100 dealerships in 14 states. Every year Sonic sells 250,000 new and used cars from approximately 25 different automotive brands, and it also sells auto parts and maintenance, warranty, collision, and vehicle financing services. Sonic Automotive managers and employees do much of their work on the iPhone and iPad.

Sonic developed several custom iPhone and iPad applications to speed up sales and service. Virtual Lot, a dealer inventory app, lets sales associates quickly search for vehicles held in inventory by all Sonic dealerships. They have immediate access to vehicle information, pricing, trade-in values, interest rates, special promotions, financing, and what competitors are charging for identical vehicles. The associates can quickly find the best selection for each customer and often offer far more choices than the competition. Dealers are not limited to selling only their own inventory.

A mobile app called the Sonic Inventory Management System (SIMS) has speeded up and simplified trade-in appraisals and pricing. Sonic staff use their iPhones or iPads to take photos of a car, input the vehicle identification number (VIN) and mileage, and note any issues. The data are transmitted to corporate headquarters, which can quickly appraise the car. A Service Pad app simplifies the steps in repair and warranty work. In the past, customers with cars requiring repairs had to go inside the dealership and sit at a desk with a Sonic staff member who wrote up the repair order by hand. Now the Sonic staff

members go outside to the customer's vehicle and enter the repair order on an iPad on the spot.

SKF is a global engineering company headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden, with 140 manufacturing sites in 32 countries and 48,500 employees worldwide. SKF produces bearings, seals, lubrication systems, and services used in more than 40 industries, including mining, transportation, and manufacturing. SKF has developed more than 30 custom iPhone and iPad applications for streamlining workflows and accessing critical corporate data from anywhere in the world.

For example, a virtual reality app uses the iPhone or iPad camera to identify a factory machine and produce a 3-D overlay of the SKF parts it contains. A sensor-driven app called Shaft Align is used by SKF service teams and customers in the field. Shaft Align connects via wireless Bluetooth sensors to a piece of machinery such as a motor-driven fan to ensure that the drive shaft is running in proper alignment. If not, the app generates step-by-step instructions and a 3-D rendering to show how to manually align the motor. Then it checks the work and produces a report.

A mobile app called MOST enables factory operators to monitor some SKF factory production lines. MOST links to the back-end systems running the machinery and provides operators with key pieces of data. Operators using this mobile app are able to use secure instant messaging to communicate with managers and each other, update maintenance logs, and track products in real time as they move through the factory line.

SKF's Shelf mobile app allows sales engineers and customers to access on demand more than 5,000 pieces of product literature, catalogs, product specifications, and interactive marketing materials. Sales teams can use Shelf to create custom “shelves” to organize, annotate, and share materials with customers right from their iPhones or iPads. The iPhone, iPad, and Shelf app save company sales engineers as much as 25 minutes per day on processes and paperwork, freeing them up to spend more time in the field supporting customers. This increase in productivity is equivalent to putting 200 more sales engineers in the field.

SKF auditors perform about 60 audits per year, and each audit used to take more than a month to complete. With the SKF Data Collect app, auditors

are able to use their iPads to collect data and present customers with detailed reports instantly.

SKF Seals offers specifications and information about SKF's machined and injection-molded seals and plastic parts, while the Seal Select app helps users select seals and accessories using several different input parameters to find the right solution for their needs.

Sources: "Sonic Automotive: Driving Growth with iPhone and iPad" and "Driving Innovation in the Factory and in the Field with iOS," iPhone in Business, www.apple.com, accessed March 31, 2016; www.skf.com, accessed March 31, 2016; www.sonicautomotive.com, accessed March 31, 2016; and "Why the Mobile Pocket Office Is Good For Business," ITBusinessEdge.com, accessed March 6, 2015.

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of applications are described here? What business functions do they support? How do they improve operational efficiency and decision making?
2. Identify the problems that businesses in this case study solved by using mobile digital devices.
3. What kinds of businesses are most likely to benefit from equipping their employees with mobile digital devices such as iPhones and iPads?
4. One company deploying iPhones has said, "The iPhone is not a game changer, it's an industry changer. It changes the way that you can interact with your customers" and "with your suppliers." Discuss the implications of this statement.

taking on multiple roles and tasks and collaborating with others on a team. They put greater emphasis on competency and skills rather than position in the hierarchy. They emphasize higher speed and more accurate decision making based on data and analysis. They are more aware of changes in technology, consumer attitudes, and culture. They use social media to enter into conversations with consumers and demonstrate a greater willingness to listen to consumers, in part because they have no choice. They show better understanding of the importance of information technology in creating and managing business firms and other organizations. To the extent organizations and business firms demonstrate these characteristics, they are twenty-first-century digital firms.

iPhone and iPad Applications for Business

1. Salesforce1
2. Cisco WebEx Meetings
3. SAP Business One
4. iWork
5. Evernote
6. Adobe Acrobat Reader
7. Oracle Business Intelligence Mobile
8. Dropbox



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Whether it's attending an online meeting, checking orders, working with files and documents, or obtaining business intelligence, Apple's iPhone and iPad offer unlimited possibilities for business users. A stunning multi-touch display, full Internet browsing, and capabilities for messaging, video and audio transmission, and document management make each an all-purpose platform for mobile computing.