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Ideas to Power Your Business

Winter 2001

Wireless CRM: A Competitive Advantage?

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STRATEGICALLY DEPLOYED,
EMERGING WIRELESS TECH-
NOLOGIES CAN PROVIDE

your business a critical competitive advantage by providing up-to-the-minute information to your field force--but rolled out without carefully considering the end-user's needs, they can be also be a costly disaster. Today, there are two emerging methods of seamlessly keeping your mobile workforce and customers in-touch that should be evaluated: two-way text messaging and wireless web applications. The following information should be useful in shaping your own research.

Two-way text messaging takes the power of e-mail and makes it available to mobile professionals through wireless "web-enabled" phones and PDAs (personal digital assistants). Text-based communication offers the advantages of accuracy, convenience and the ability to reach multiple addresses.

■ **Qualcomm**
(www.qualcomm.com/qwbs/products/omniexpress.html) recently introduced its

OmniExpress, a wireless information system for metropolitan-based fleets. Features such as vehicle location and status, on-board inventory, customer orders and personnel productivity can be integrated into route, operations, inventory and payroll software for accurate and timely company-wide access.

■ **Interact Commerce**,
(www.interact.com/home/index.php3?cellid=206000001011&promoid=0010) partnering with Philadelphia-based **Practical Sales Tools** (www.practical-sales.com/scripts/act2/overview.html), is now offering real-time information access to its CRM database. Mobile users can access and update customer information on the go without having to synchronize their laptops or PDAs.

■ Short messaging service, or SMS, an alternative to e-mail, has become tremendously popular with the services from **America Online** (www.aol.com/aim/home.html) and subsidiary ICQ. AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) Mobile allows users to send and receive instant messages from web phones to anyone, anywhere in the world who has an AOL Instant Messenger screen name.

Wireless web applications are able to provide field force application content to mobile users through handheld devices such as cell phones, pagers and PDAs. Web Application Protocol (WAP) is the current standard for enabling wireless devices so they can access the Web; major sites such as MSN, Amazon, and Yahoo use WAP to deliver their content to the handheld market. Despite its widespread acceptance, however, WAP has not yet brought a uniform user experience to the wireless Internet.

Service delivery across all devices is not consistent because delivery speeds and screen sizes vary widely, and many businesses are waiting for a second generation standard to emerge before taking the plunge into this technology.

■ In the health services industry, **Novamed Corp.**, (www.novamedcorp.com) an independent provider of healthcare technology management services headquartered in Connecticut, rolled out a wireless web application powered by a solution from **iMedeon**, (www.imedeon.com/solutions/products.html) an Alpharetta, Georgia-based provider of WAP-based CRM applications. Novamed reports an overall 30% productivity improvement by providing real-time information to its maintenance technicians.

■ Institutions like the Bank of America and San Diego's USE Credit Union have rolled out or have announced plans to implement full-service WAP-based wireless services, while other firms such as Charles Schwab, Fidelity, and Bank of Montreal have moved more cautiously, only slightly enhancing the limited functionality of their existing wireless offerings as they attempt to figure out what services their customers really want. **Open Financial Exchange** (www.ofx.net), a version of XML designed specifically for the financial services industry, is worth looking into to enhance a wireless offering.

To ensure success, businesses need to determine where wireless technology fits into their CRM business plan, evaluating their channel strategies to make sure that any wireless service deployment flows from a clear understanding of the needs of their work force and customers.



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