

# New strides in mobility signal opportunity calling

Right now there are over three billion cell phones in use throughout the world, which easily eclipses the installed base of personal computers.

So how can midsized businesses get more out of the explosion of mobile devices? Think more employee efficiency, says David Brigida, a business executive for mobility and end-user services at IBM. “I think these handheld devices—the smart phones—are getting so powerful that they’re really becoming a great tool, specifically in communication and collaboration,” he says. “They’re going to be effective in increasing employee productivity.”

Brigida’s enthusiasm is understandable. As our systems and processes become more interconnected, our mobile devices need to evolve to keep pace with the new ways we work and live. And as mobile capabilities continue to evolve, midsized companies are discovering new ways to work smarter to be more flexible and responsive to customers.

Today’s pocket-sized devices can make work smarter—and midsized businesses more competitive—by providing a host of new capabilities, such as instant messaging and presence awareness. To leverage them for the sake of a smarter workforce, consider some best practices in mobile security and provisioning.

## Pilot program boosts the IQ of mobile phones

Low cost, high bandwidth, wireless access, and better browsing capabilities are accelerating the promise of the mobile phone as a compelling platform for accessing information services.

A glimpse into the very near future of mobility can be found in recent work performed as part of IBM’s First-of-a-Kind (FOAK) BlueStar pilot, which recognized this paradigm shift and developed automated mobile management services for insurance claims processing.

The pilot enabled an insurance company to significantly reduce the amount of time required to process claims by leveraging technology to locate—and contact—the most appropriate and available claims adjusters for each case. The right agent was identified through a combination of GPS location technology, presence awareness capabilities and calendaring functions, and the case information was sent to the agent.



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Integrating new technology and business processes like these are a big step for many industries, explains IBM’s Randy Moulic, manager of mobile services research. “There’s a challenge to get insurance companies into a more computerized environment for most of their field workers—truly computerize and mobilize their business processes. It is a huge step for them.”

In order to make this big step, Moulic says, smarter devices like advanced handhelds needed to be provided in a way that ensured security. On the back end, BlueStar ensured that mobile workers at the insurance company could access information securely as well as more effectively. “We only put corporate and policyholder confidential information out onto the phone during the time period of the transaction of the claim,” Moulic explains. “The agent in the field does the processing, and then, boom, all the critical information is sent back to the server, and information on the device is wiped clean by the back-end server so the field agent is not carrying around a whole lot of customer data.”



This policy-based approach to configuring information for on-the-go staff simplified the maintenance of mobile service products. Rather than having information dispersed on hundreds—or even thousands—of handheld devices, information briefly provisioned by a central server can be better monitored, upgraded and secured.

The BlueStar pilot has demonstrated how to successfully deploy and manage mobile devices out to field workers. The approach enabled not only smarter device management, but also a smarter way to work. By leveraging BlueStar, the insurance company was able to integrate new technology and business processes, empowering mobile workers and boosting their productivity.

### The mobility menu expands

According to Moulic, BlueStar capabilities are likely to be generally available by the end of 2009. But in the meantime, midsized businesses with employees on the go can investigate a number of mobility advances that are either available now or will be shortly.

In the future, adds Brigida, traveling executives and road warriors will find even more ways to spur productivity and efficiency with mobility. As an example, he points out that many people use separate phones for personal and company business. “You don’t want to carry multiple devices with you, a personal device and an enterprise device when you’re traveling,” he observes. “I think the dual-mode phone is something that in the short term—maybe in the next two years—could change the way we operate.”

Professionals in a number of industries are also likely to find more ways to quickly capture information remotely or while on the go. “Mobile technology can be used in a number of ways in healthcare—certainly to create and capture information quickly and at once in a hospital environment so you get that electronic medical record,” Brigida explains. “I also see where mobile technology can be used for patient monitoring—connected to devices that do critical measurements in the home—being able to lower costs.”

Presence awareness appears likely to be another big draw. For example, technologies are now available that allow users to set parameters for how they would like to be contacted at different times of day, or in specific situations. And just ahead, says Moulic, presence awareness seems poised to play a big part in making cities smarter. He points to the pilot smart-city program in Masdar City in the United Arab Emirates as an example of what the future may hold. There, commuters will soon use mobile devices to order driverless electric cabs. Built-in presence awareness capabilities based on GPS and context-based awareness technologies, he says, will ensure that residents of this planned smart city will get to their destinations on time.

### Four steps to making smart mobility work

In the here and now there are several things midsized businesses can do to start taking advantage of new mobility capabilities—while also setting themselves up for future advances. It all starts with security and provisioning, Brigida says. As he notes: “You have an asset out there that can easily be lost or stolen—and device management becomes very important.” With these concerns in mind, he suggests that midsized businesses consider four areas critical to securing and provisioning mobile devices and technologies:

**1. Use asset management and tracking.** As Brigida notes, technology is now available that allows IT departments to easily deploy—and delete—data over the air, or remotely. This, he explains, cuts costs in making mobile workers more productive, while also helping to secure critical information.

**2. Keep data safe—regardless of what happens to the phone.** Because these devices are small, they are easily lost and stolen. This makes a disaster recovery plan essential—not just to protect critical data, but to remain in compliance with data regulations that require companies to be able to track and manage devices containing sensitive information. It’s important, says Brigida, to be able to “back up and restore my devices, either on a user-initiated backup and restore or on a predetermined basis set by my policy. So if something happens to the device, I can quickly send out a new device to someone, and they can simply restore it over the air.”

**3. Give employees access to real-time support.** Ensuring that employees stay connected and more productive should be an important consideration for midsized businesses, Brigida says. “Have the ability to solve problems real-time. You don’t have to send that device back to the office just to reconfigure the device,” he advises.

**4. Choose a hosting platform ready for universal access.** Hosted support should take into account all the ways in which mobile technology is used. “You have many carriers and you have many devices—the challenge is being able to take advantage of various devices in an enterprise and also personal devices in an enterprise across a variety of networks,” Brigida says.

Put together, these steps can go a long way in making the workplace smarter. “The number one thing they want to do out there is improve worker productivity,” says Brigida of companies with mobile workforces. “The immediate need I see for mobile technology in today’s economic times is to lower costs of doing business,” he adds. But as mobile devices begin to eclipse other kinds of electronics, such as personal computers, midsized businesses can get ready to connect with new opportunities for greater competitiveness. ●

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