

The company did manual book-keeping and had virtually no IT but wanted to lift productivity and efficiency. Today, it uses PDAs and software for inventory, job dispatching and invoicing and believes using mobile technology has boosted its revenue by \$1.36 million a year.

It previously had taken several calls to get hold of workers on the move and inform them of their next task or order. Meanwhile, all customer records and invoicing were paper-based.

With business booming and contracts sometimes worth some \$100,000 a year each, VIP Lighting boss Arran Blomfield was worried his staff were drowning in paperwork. Orders might be lost, incorrect customer details recorded and service levels drop as a result.

To solve the problems and mitigate the risk, Blomfield decided to invest in a package from 3G provider Three and AV Notes. The solution combined Motorola A1000 PDAs from Three with AV Notes voice-and-data software that could do real-time job scheduling, job dispatch, inventory and invoicing.

The Three-AV Notes offering lets VIP Lighting manage its mobile workers and work all over Australia while letting its staff communicate with head office as needed in real time.

"The solution allows each employee to receive an extra two jobs per day. Mobile staff don't have to go to the office. All jobs are dispatched electronically in real time, eliminating the time wasted receiving and making voice calls, mobile staff have access to all client information and can update on the spot [and] the solution stops the loss of communication or paperwork and provides better service to customers that head office can monitor," VIP Lighting said in a statement.

Today, head office knows the status of each job in real time, how many jobs are completed each day, the exact time staff start and finish work and how long it takes them to do each job. It also lets the boss keep tabs on individual staff.

All invoicing can now be administered centrally by head office. Invoices are sent out more quickly and unpaid debts can be managed more effectively, the company says.

Manufacturing and trades

Melbourne-based Aspect Packaging makes packaging for customers in Australia's automotive, electronics and manufacturing industries. The firm earns \$30 million each year serving 2,000 customers from five sites. Until recently, its sales staff had to record all their sales leads and customer information on unrelated spreadsheets. Updates and follow-up notes were written on paper or not at all.

Brett Lynch, CFO at Aspect Packaging, says the old system saw only about 50 of the largest customers get consistent attention and service. Doubtless, business was being lost.

The company has since adopted Microsoft's CRM Mobile for handheld devices and on laptops. The new customer relationship system was deployed and the whole sales team were using it within a week to enter customer and order data, he says.

Orders from small customers have since grown by \$1 million, Lynch says.

"The system is very easy to use," he says. Aspect is going to expand its use of PDAs and laptops in the near

future. "It's just become part and parcel of how we do business."

Australian company The Service Manager (TSM) has had considerable success selling its mobile solutions into SMB and large air conditioning, IT, security, catering equipment, plumbing, electrical firms.

Velocity Electrical uses TSM to stay on top of customer details, history and contracts, work scheduling, notification and dispatch, tracking of labour, parts and charges, equipment and inventory management.

Sales and invoicing can also be done and the software integrates with standard accounting packages. So almost everything can be done in the field using a Pocket PC or other handheld device – i-mates, in this case.

Michael Brewitt, manager at Velocity Electrical, uses TSM in conjunction with MYOB to manage Velocity's largely commercial maintenance and real estate-based business. "All details can be updated in the field," he says.

The deployment and integration was "a bit of a long hard road" but worth it in the end, Brewitt says.

Jobs no longer go unrecorded as workers enter the job details on the spot and send the information back to the office over GPRS, he says.

Also, technical staff and administration are now 'speaking the same language' – using the same product codes to communicate details about parts and services sold.

Future proof

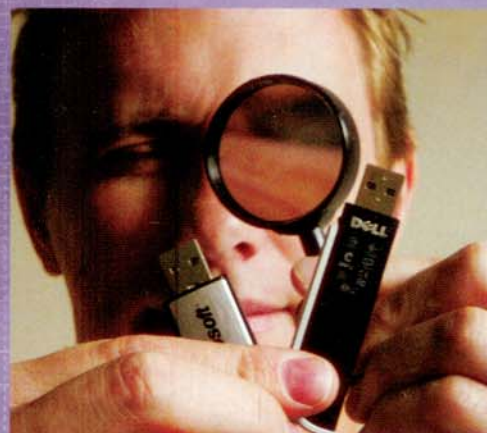
Mark Duncan, manager of convergence practice at communications vendor Avaya, says many sectors have put mobility under the microscope in a big way over the last year or two. However, relatively few have made major inroads into mobile technology adoption, he says.

But that's only a matter of time and it will happen gradually over years or even decades. Smart businesses and professional people in many fields will seek to adopt the streamlined, more efficient processes promised by the new mobile technologies ahead of the pack, Duncan notes.

● Fleur Doidge



▲ Avaya's Mark Duncan says mobility adoption will ramp up.



▲ Lync's Kim Welsby says business should look closely at removable device use.

Risky business

Sometimes, the more mobile the IT, the more risk exists for your business. One large Australian organisation recently had its computer network audited – only to find that its network security had been breached some 1,800 times in 10 days.

The security auditor, Lync Software, said the breaches were mainly occurring via USB ports. The ports are the perfect opportunity for unauthorised connection to a business' computer network.

"Removable media devices such as iPods, BlackBerrys and digital cameras [may] get under the radar of network security systems," says Lync managing director Kim Welsby. "Risks range from corporate espionage and business disruption to malicious viruses. Unless businesses can identify and control iPods and other removable media devices, they're leaving a gaping hole in their security."

The company – which cannot be identified – had good computer security practices otherwise, according to Lync. "Companies are locking the back door with firewalls but leaving the front door wide open," Welsby says.

Digital music players, USB memory sticks, personal organisers and PDAs, mobile phones and digital cameras can connect undetected to corporate networks, downloading gigabytes of data in seconds. They can also introduce viruses.

Lync Software's tracking of 768 computer users within the organisation found that:

- 39 percent of users connected to the corporate network with USB devices
- 154 different types of device were connected to the network
- 1805 files were transferred between the network and the devices
- transferred files including images, music, video, Office documents and system files

Protecting yourself

Some research has suggested that up to 80 percent of IT-related corporate crime is committed from inside the organisation itself. Create a mobile device use policy, communicate it to your staff and enforce it. Products such as DeviceShield can be installed to help identify and control the use of portable devices by users of your computer network.

Lync Software's DeviceShield, for example, identifies when removable media devices are connected to networked computers and control whether data is downloaded to the device or copied from it.