Field service optimisation
Improving efficiency across the enterprise

Field service optimisation

While the field service sector adapts to the growing expectations of today's businesses, switched on providers are enjoying the competitive advantage associated with being early adopters of emerging technologies.
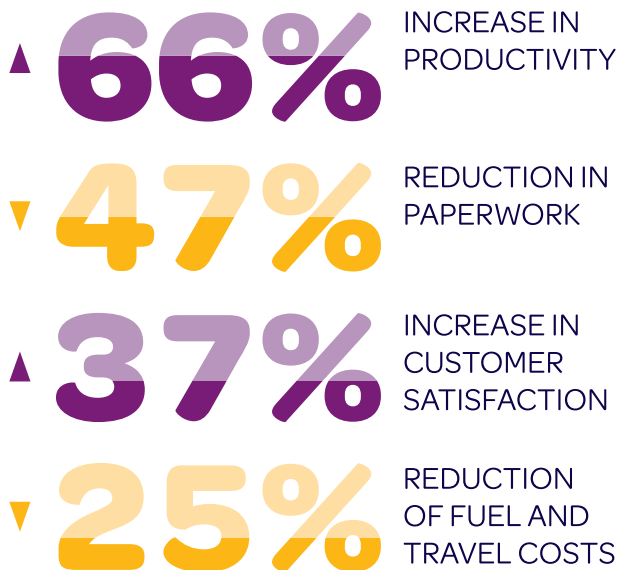
Meanwhile, aging field service systems and processes make growth and increased workloads increasingly complex. In worst-case scenarios, they can even sabotage service agreements and delivery processes, alienating customers in the process.

Return on investment is the key consideration for many businesses considering migrating from legacy systems to more agile, modern equivalents. But even with rigorous due diligence, it can be difficult to be sure a solution will solve service delivery issues today, let alone in the future.

In this paper, we outline how technology can help resolve five key issues facing service organisations.

Measuring ROI on enabling enterprise mobility[1]

CUSTOMERS HAVE EXPERIENCED:

▲ **66%** INCREASE IN PRODUCTIVITY

▼ **47%** REDUCTION IN PAPERWORK

▲ **37%** INCREASE IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

▼ **25%** REDUCTION OF FUEL AND TRAVEL COSTS

Getting it right first time

Greater productivity and lower costs are the key motivators for providers adopting new technology. For field service businesses, both of these goals hinge on a field service employee's ability to resolve customer issues on the first visit.

However, the complexities of supporting a field service fleet can make one-stop solutions elusive. A recent Aberdeen Group study on the services sector found that a quarter of all service calls require an average of 1.6 additional visits to resolve the customer's problem.[2] When you consider that the cost of a second callout could be $200–300, it becomes clear the factors that stand in the way of first-time fixes have substantial consequences for both customers and providers.

First-time fix rates depend on a technician's capacity to deliver the best service and value within a prescribed timeframe while minimising obstacles. While this may sound simple on paper, service providers face a number of barriers to resolving challenges on the first pass. Lack of access to the necessary technical information, mismatched skillsets and failure to carry the necessary parts to a job site can all derail the resolution of a customer's issue.

Field-based technology can help mitigate these obstacles for service providers. They allow customers to communicate their faults in detail, enabling technicians to better prepare before leaving for the worksite. The right software can also allow technicians to access detailed technical information using mobile devices and use instant messaging to discuss issues with field service colleagues who have resolved similar problems in the past.

Each of these factors help technicians to address faults quickly and efficiently to realise greater productivity, lower costs and better customer outcomes.

Retaining knowledge

The ageing workforce presents challenges for providers trying to improve productivity and service quality.

Aberdeen Group research recently found that although the average technician is 32 years old, 8 per cent of the service workforce is over 60.[3] This percentage is likely to increase in Australia in coming years – although there were five people of working age supporting each Australian over 65 in 1970, Treasury has projected this will fall to 2.7 by 2050.[4]

Older workers often hold valuable knowledge about customers and business processes. When these workers retire, organisations can lose valuable insights into customer preferences and process efficiencies.

Technology platforms can help bridge this gap by providing a framework for documenting and archiving information recorded by field service technicians while on site. This knowledge can be easily shared with staff members and used to inform training programs for new hires. Used well, information management platforms enable organisations to create their own centralised knowledge resources, minimising risk of information loss when employees leave or retire.
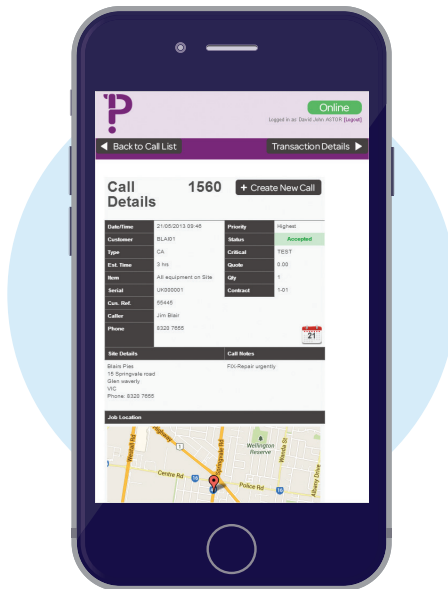
Managing customer expectations

Managing expectations is vital in any service business. Without a transparent way to communicate information about a job's progress or warn of unavoidable delays, service providers risk disappointing and even losing clients.

Technology provides enterprises with the tools to shift from a customer service to a customer care model that prizes transparency and communication over a 'break and fix' mentality.

Web portals are ideal as customers can log calls, keep track of expected arrival times and gain an understanding of what type of service will be involved. As the expectation is set up front, this reduces confusion and ensures customers are fully informed.

By providing business-to-business customers with real-time information on service-level agreements and project milestones, the level of customer satisfaction can be significantly improved. Conversely, platforms can empower customers with a direct and responsive channel for feedback.

This trend allows businesses to align expectations with field service capacity and outcomes, resulting in greater transparency and fewer disappointed customers.

Maintaining fleets of customer devices

Large hardware vendors face substantial challenges monitoring and managing fleets of customer devices. Without a transparent way to keep track of faults in customer hardware and document service history for each unit, organisations often struggle to meet customer expectations and improve service efficiency.

Machine-to-machine technology (M2M) is already beginning to help service businesses resolve this challenge. By embedding intelligent sensors in devices, businesses can monitor and document hardware faults and performance in more detail.

Combined with central mobile platforms, M2M technology makes it possible for field service engineers to review and diagnose faults in detail, consult device history and technician notes, and select appropriate parts before going onsite.

The growth of the Internet of Things (IoT) – internet-connected devices excluding PCs, tablets and smartphones – means the potential reach of M2M technology is likely to expand significantly over the coming decade. Gartner has predicted that the IoT will grow to 26 billion units by 2020.[5]

Given this trend, M2M is likely to allow service providers of all sizes to greatly reduce unplanned maintenance activity and improve efficiency with more accurate information about customers' hardware issues.

Collaboration and the empowered employee

Field-based technology is now a common way for service delivery leaders to empower their employees.

Mobile field service platforms that use technology such as HTML5 and mobile connectivity allow businesses to give field service staff constant access to up-to-date product information and technical documents.

These platforms improve productivity, reduce paperwork and let travelling staff share insights and observations about common challenges. This collaboration allows for greater efficiency, faster billing cycles and happier customers who are less likely to look for more effective alternatives.

By streamlining administrative tasks and reducing the time necessary to complete service calls, mobile-friendly information management platforms also allow field service agents to spend more time interacting with customers. This positions field service employees as brand advocates capable of improving relations with customers and adding value.

In a constantly changing service industry, these capabilities are invaluable for overcoming delivery challenges and maintaining competitive advantage into the future.

Contact us

If you want to learn more about Pronto Software and how we can help you simplify your field service management processes, get in touch with us today at info@pronto.net.

1. Research conducted by Aberdeen Group 'Field Service 2012: Mobile Tools for the Right Technician'
2. Aberdeen Group, 'Fixing First-Time Fix: Repairing Field Service Efficiency to Enhance Customer Returns', March 2013, de.ptc.com/File%20Library/Solutions/By%2 Enterprise%20Application/SLM/Aberdeen_Fixing_First_Time_Fix_2013.pdf
3. Pinder, Aly Jr., 'Service Mobility: The Right Technology For the Tech', July 2014, www.aberdeen.com/research/9505/rr-field-service-mobility/content.aspx
4. The Australian Government Treasury, 'Australia to 2015: future challenges', January 2010, archive.treasury.gov.au/igr/igr2010/report/pdf/IGR_2010.pdf
5. Gartner, 'Gartner Says the Internet of Things Installed Base Will Grow to 26 Billion Units By 2020', 12 December 2013, www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/2636073.

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