

Mobility XE Increases Efficiency for Leading Food Services Corporation

For enterprises with large field sales or service organizations, increasing field worker efficiency and productivity can dramatically enhance revenue. One of the most effective ways to realize these gains is through mobile technologies that put information at sales executives' fingertips anytime, anywhere they need it. Whether they are querying a CRM database for customer information, submitting an order request, or checking on product stock at nearby distribution centers; remote access to information lets field sales managers better meet the needs of their customers and work more efficiently.

This case study outlines the use of the Mobility XE mobile VPN by one of the largest food service distribution companies in the US. With thousands of sales managers responsible for several hundred thousand customer accounts; continuous, mobile access to their CRM and order management systems is a business imperative.

OBJECTIVE

Each of the company's field sales managers typically begins his or her morning planning their daily meeting schedule. For sales managers in the food services industry, customer and prospect visits take them to small family-run diners, hotel restaurants, corporate kitchens or other food processing businesses. The majority of their meetings end in an order being placed to restock kitchen shelves or add new food products. The sales people have a daily afternoon order cut-off to get all their orders transmitted to the corporate office for processing. From the corporate office, their orders are forwarded on to a distribution center where the products will be pulled, loaded on trucks and scheduled for delivery. For this company, as is the case for most distribution-based enterprises, their revenues are all based on the successful completion of this order entry / fulfillment process.

The company's key business objective was to enhance their mobile infrastructure by transmitting orders faster to their corporate office using available cellular data or Wi-Fi networks. Currently orders were batch uploaded at the end of each day using a dial-up remote access solution. If orders were sent real-time during the course of a customer visit, however, the order could be processed faster and also allow the sales person and customer to have a real-time view of product availability and volumes. The benefits are easy to realize, sales managers become more productive as they can process orders faster with fewer follow-ups; and customer satisfaction is increased, as they have a greater view into the order process. "The benefit to the business is feet on the street," explains the director of operations, "giving the sales managers back an hour a week would let them visit additional accounts. When you multiply that across 5,000 salespeople, you quickly see that it adds up."

CHALLENGES

Modifying the infrastructure of a mobile deployment is a challenging coordination and management effort. The difficulty of this is magnified many times when the deployment is not for a handful of mobile workers but instead several thousand. The company did not want to disrupt their workers with new processes nor did they want to re-engineer or re-architect their applications to work across multiple types of wireless networks. The sales managers used a number of applications on their laptops everyday, from off-the-shelf products to homegrown and custom-built applications. Whether these applications could all work across wireless networks was in question.

The IT team was also concerned over how to handle device security and OS and antivirus updates to the sales team's laptops. Laptop updates were previously performed in-house by the IT department. This meant sales people needed to bring their laptops in to headquarters where each device would be individually updated. This quickly became a time burden and

Industry

Food Services / Distribution

Challenges

- Wanted mobile workers to have access to existing applications without modification or customization
- Needed to provide persistent connections to applications and data
- Needed a seamless solution that didn't require users to learn new logins or change network configurations
- Wanted to manage bandwidth in order to increase productivity

Solution

- Mobility XE VPN solution
- iAnywhere Afaria
- iAnywhere Information Anywhere Suite

Results

- Mobility XE VPN kept application sessions alive through wireless coverage gaps and suspend & resume
- Field sales managers could access networks and applications without complex logins or network configurations
- Mobility XE's Policy Management Module managed network/device processes to ensure fastest access to mission-critical applications

reduced the productivity of both the IT team and sales people. As an alternate strategy, the company tried burning CD copies of necessary updates for each member on the sales team. But the drawback was that there was no way to guarantee that the updates were made, nor was there a way to monitor the overall deployment to ensure that all devices were properly secured and on the latest software versions.

SOLUTION

As the company's mobile project was taking shape, they considered a "product framework" solution. The advantage of this model is that only one vendor's products are deployed to manage the mobile workers. Should a problem arise, only one vendor needs to be contacted to resolve the issues that are occurring. In a test deployment, however, they found this model an inappropriate solution to their mobile needs. It did not deal with all of their wireless challenges in a manageable way. This was a significant issue as the solution that they deploy needs to be straight forward in design, and yet offer rich features and functionality as their mobile needs evolve.

To better meet their needs, the company looked to a "best of breed" solution which offered them the feature set they were looking for at a cost-effective price. But this strategy does come with a risk whether all products will mesh together and function without conflict. Their solution was made up of three primary products: NetMotion Wireless' Mobility XE VPN which provides a secure, continuous connection to application servers as the users traveled across their territories; and iAnywhere's Afaria and Information Anywhere Suite which supported CRM and order management functionality as well as remote servicing/updated of mobile devices.

After thorough testing the company determined it was feasible to broadly deploy their "best of breed" solution. The results were significant and quick to be realized. Mobility XE's persistence capabilities enabled iAnywhere's applications to survive through momentary disconnects, lost coverage, and even when sales managers suspended and later resumed their laptop connections. In all instances, Mobility XE negotiated the connections behind the scenes providing users with reliable, continuous access. "From the salesperson's perspective," explains one of the sales managers, "it's really been seamless. We don't need to understand all the technology and how it works, we just know it is working for us and we can concentrate on what we are supposed to be doing -- be out there selling product and taking care of our customers."

The company also implemented Mobility XE's Policy Management Module. Policy Management lets IT managers create policies that control access to applications and networks based on any number of factors such as network type, mobile device, users, etc. In order to best manage available bandwidth and support the company's productivity goals, the IT department established two policies, for day and night data traffic. During normal daytime business hours, their mission-critical CRM, order management application and email would be accessible but bandwidth-burning OS and antivirus updates, patches, etc., are blocked until non-work hours. By developing these policies, the company ensures that their sales people have the fastest available access to the applications they need to do their jobs and remain productive.

RESULTS

The company's sales team has seen significant enhancements following the mobile roll-out with simplified workflows and increased productivity. As one sales manager explains, "Before our current solution, it was difficult to get connected in the field. Now you just open your laptop and within seconds you're connected." The director of operations adds, "There's no user intervention required, they just turn on their laptops and it works." For the company's bottom line, the mobile solution has been a success, "Our projection for ROI," concludes the director of operations, "is about seven months from full rollout."

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-- Director of Operations

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