

# TEXTILE SERVICES

## The Evolution of Route Accounting

Companies produce new versions of software  
designed for use with mobile phones and tablets

**+** See Laundry Innovations...Live!  
Join us after Texcare for TRSA's  
International Laundry Tour, May 9-12.

**INVENTORY DEPLETION II**  
Get More For Your Textiles!

**GAYLORD WASHINGTON OPL**  
Quality, Efficiency in Action

**LOTW SAFETY DAY**  
Enhancing Staff Involvement

# Mobile Technology Evolving Capabilities

Recent advances  
in high-tech  
communications  
systems can  
enhance your  
competitiveness

By Camille Peters

**M**odern technology isn't a magic bullet. But when it's molded to a business, the transformation can be almost magical. Technology can help companies work smarter, distinguish themselves from the pack, and better serve customers while reducing costs.

Envisioning the possibilities in abstract terms, though, without context, can be tricky. So here's a concrete scenario: Picture a textile services route service rep. (RSR) en route to serve customers. Much of the company's success hinges on how well the RSR delivers what customers order and picks up what they return.

Obvious fact: the RSR's office is the road. Not long ago, that meant many RSRs only connected with the office when they started their route and when they returned to the office.

Given today's mobile technologies, that limitation is long gone. But business leaders need good reasons before outfitting RSRs with wireless gadgets like notebook computers, tablets or specialized devices.

Let's explore some of those business reasons, in terms of what the technology is and what it can do to support a business that relies on customer delivery.

.....

**Each industry varies, so route-optimization systems often are tailored to a company's needs.**

.....

## SYSTEMATIC ROUTE OPTIMIZATION

As technology labels go, this one's refreshingly clear—the system helps companies that employ delivery fleets optimize their routes. That means creating routes that help a company effectively serve the most customers, using the shortest routes possible. The technology leads RSRs systematically through their routes, while helping them avoid the inherent problems of paper-based workflows (more on that later).

Each industry varies, so route-optimization systems often are tailored to a company's needs. While the system provider can be called upon to tweak the system when workflows need to change, certain systems allow people who know the business to tweak the system's business rules without having to become programmers themselves. Changed business

rules and system updates should travel to all connected devices without disrupting customer service.

## INTEGRATION WITH CURRENT SYSTEMS

Route information should feed automatically in to other systems, so that staff people don't need to handle it as much. For instance, information gathered during an RSRs day can prove useful to systems like those for accounting, invoicing, inventory, order entry, payroll and others.



Tablet computers like the one shown above are ideal for showing customers your latest marketing materials.

### IMPROVING CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

Many customers always want to see the same RSR since they're more likely to know what to do, where to sign in and how to get around. The RSR's employer likely appreciates this as well, since familiarity breeds efficiency. The optimization system lets supervisors configure routes to ensure that a given RSR always services specific clients.

With greater familiarity come questions that your customer might ask your RSR about things like their accounts or other services the company can offer. While brochures can help explain services, running back to the truck to pick them up (while hoping

they aren't out of date) and bringing them back wastes time. Better to simply show materials on a mobile device (a tablet would be ideal for this, given its size).

Whether it's a simple sales sheet or a short video, the RSR can share it with the customer and even e-mail the customer a link to the material, thus greatly improving the odds of upselling the customer.

As for account information, RSRs can easily show clients things like past invoices and current charges on a tablet or other mobile devices, all pulled from the company's systems in real time, and answer customer questions on the spot. When RSRs do

such things, they project an image of a company that invests in serving customers without having to say a word.

There's the chance a customer faces the same types of challenges that prompted the company to invest in a mobile routing system. If you've implemented the solution to a problem your client faces, that reflects well on your company.

### FEWER BILLING AND TRACKING ERRORS

Using mobile devices results in marked improvements in order and billing accuracy.

If a company uses a paper-based system, sending RSRs on their routes using binders and clipboards, expecting them to complete order forms and perform calculations (order amounts, fees, surcharges, taxes and so forth) on-site at customer locations on the fly, and under time pressure... well, you get the idea. Once the forms get back to the office, either RSRs or dedicated data-entry people manually re-enter the information, introducing yet more opportunities for errors.

Yes, the scenario above is a little melodramatic, but it's also realistic. And it doesn't take into account the fact that electronic forms on mobile devices can eliminate the need for double data entry and manual calculations.

### TRACKING AND MANAGING REPS

Various events can necessitate changes to an RSR's route, while the driver is en route. For instance, an RSR stuck in traffic might fall behind to the point that later deliveries won't arrive on time, or a customer might call with a last-minute request.

Route-optimization systems bring news of such events to supervisors in real time, thanks to GPS-enabled mobile devices and links to other communication systems like cellular networks. Supervisors then can react accordingly. For instance, a supervisor might arrange with another driver to cover appointments that a tardy RSR might miss.

Supervisors can track such information using dashboards, which provide real-time operational information and alerts in much the same way as a car's dashboard tells the RSR how the car is running and if it's experiencing problems such as low oil.

For instance, if it's tied in to inventory systems, the mobile system can tell the supervisor whether a truck near a last-minute-request caller has the goods needed to fill the request.

Once a route change is made, the RSR's device sounds an alert, the RSR checks for changes and adjusts accordingly, all without jamming a phone between his ear and shoulder, while scribbling change instructions on a notepad, a scrap of paper, or a napkin left over from a coffee stop.

While forms capture much of what RSRs need to report, modern devices can enable text chat with their colleagues. Office staff can link such messages to specific client files and route information. This helps build a knowledge base that

can provide insights upon review.

### IMPROVING HUMAN RELATIONS

Making an RSR's work more straightforward and less stressful is one way to help management lower staff turnover. To that end, a mobile system can relieve RSRs of burdens like han-

dling paper and data entry at the end of a workday, which essentially duplicates the work RSRs did en route.

On the recruitment side, younger workers who never knew a world without gadgets or the Internet (they're often called "millennials") may seek tech-savvy employers where they feel they can fit in more easily.

Some HR and payroll systems can collect route-performance information. People who use these systems can easily perform tasks related to these areas, such as preparing performance reviews and salary payments.

### SUPPORTING BUSINESS DECISIONS WITH MORE INFORMATION

A mobile work system records not just planned routes but also how long it takes RSRs to complete routes. That information helps management make better decisions by knowing the cost to service a route, the revenue generated on each route and the types of changes specific clients regularly request. This and other data can lead

.....  
**While no one's saying technology can solve every problem, what it can do is simplify processes and improve communications with customers and colleagues.**  
.....

## SEE NEW TECHNOLOGIES AT TRSA'S FALL CONFERENCE



The constant upgrading of route-accounting technologies requires textile services operators to pay close attention to these advances—your profitability could depend on them!

The best opportunity in America in 2012 to learn about the most significant developments in systems for laundry routes, plants and offices is likely to be TRSA's Annual Conference & Exhibits this Oct. 14–17 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago. This event's exhibit hall will feature TRSA Associate Members' tabletop displays of their latest offerings. See it live in Chicago!

to improved routing and scheduling, better-balanced routes and other changes that produce better customer satisfaction.

Mobile technology isn't just for delivery people. Vehicle telemetry can send valuable information to staff who track fuel consumption, idle time and vehicle maintenance.

### RUNNING A GREENER BUSINESS

Companies already do things like recycle water and invest in improved washing and drying equipment. They're 'green' on the inside, which means both preserving the environment and controlling costs.

But green doesn't end with the plant. Optimized routes and information from vehicle telemetry systems help keep the operation green on the road as well. The information these systems record lets managers figure out how to save fuel and improve efficiency.

### CHOOSING MOBILE DEVICES

The right device helps a company meet its business needs.

Brick-like devices like those used by major courier companies tend to be specialized so that they can only do certain things. They also can be pricey and costly to update.

Tablets are gaining attention among mobile workers since they're general-purpose computing devices. They are relatively inexpensive due to their widespread popularity. Properly configured, they also can take the place of several devices as well as paper.

While 'ruggedized' devices (i.e., tablets or other mobile computing sys-

tems that are specially designed for harsh conditions) still have a place in the hands of field workers, they're more costly than non-ruggedized equipment. Protective accessories are widely available that can protect non-ruggedized devices. Together, consumer-grade devices and protective accessories often cost less than ruggedized devices.

Regardless of the device(s) selected, it's important to work with an expert to determine the overall cost of ownership and the value of the investment.

Bottom line? While no one's saying technology can solve every problem,

what it can do is simplify processes and improve communications with customers and colleagues. What's more, having advanced route optimization can put your company a step ahead of business rivals, while providing you with tangible ROI. In today's competitive market, that can make a real difference in your growth prospects. **TS**

**Camille Peters** is president/CEO of Mobile Computing Corp. Inc., Mississauga, ON, Canada. MCC is a provider of real-time mobile route delivery and optimization solutions for businesses. Contact her at [cpeters@mobilecom.com](mailto:cpeters@mobilecom.com) or 905/405-4861.

## EMPOWERING THE MOBILE WORLD WITH M-LINX™

MCC is a leading full service provider of real-time field force mobility and optimization solutions. M-LINX™ is proven to dramatically enhance customer service and retention while reducing operating costs.

**Call us to find out how you can transform your business.**

- Increase route delivery productivity
- Promote green initiatives, reduce carbon footprint
- Real-Time visibility into field operations
- Reduce fuel and over-time costs
- Eliminate paperwork and data entry errors
- Reduce A.R. billing cycles

**ANYTIME. ANYWHERE. ANY DEVICE**



[mobilecom.com](http://mobilecom.com)

800.392.8651

[MCCMarketing@mobilecom.com](mailto:MCCMarketing@mobilecom.com)

