

# Is it time to take away company mobile phones from your field service technicians?

*Yes! Doing just that will lead to more customer calls per day—and more profits for your business.*

By Robert Sombach

It's hard to imagine a service technician without a mobile phone today. A few years ago, the primary purpose of the phone was to check in with a tech and direct them from one call to the next, or for the them to contact the office for parts ordering, service issues, directions to the client, or to gather account and device detail history. A standard company issued mobile phone was the order of the day back then. Fast forward to today – a connected tablet is likely the most important tool in your service tech's kit. I'm going to make a case that most com-

panies should strongly consider dropping that company issued mobile phone altogether. Here's why.

## **Mobiles are good, but not great.**

When cell phones first appeared in the mid-1990s, they ushered in a new level of responsiveness and efficiency for service technicians. Do you remember pagers? Even equipping your team with a roll of quarters to call in to the office to check in? Techs often asked the customer if they could use their land line during a call? Considering how service technicians engaged with the office back then, the mobile phone was an efficiency wonder. But, was it that big of a technology leap? Let's think about the nature of those phone calls. Your business still required certificates. Customers often needed to sign off on work order forms. There was no getting around all that paper and paperwork that service technicians needed to do.

## **Are all those phone calls translating to more customer visits?**

It's difficult for people to speak on a phone without first engaging in some form of small talk: how are you? What are you up to? Did you catch the game last night? We often feel the need to converse before getting to our main point. Now also consider that a phone call involves two people. So, multiply your call time by two. It's also important to remember that time studies suggest it takes us seven minutes to return to efficiently doing what we were doing before the call came in. There was, of course, a purpose to all those calls made by service technicians, but more phone calls meant more time. If you ask your admin team, they will tell you that time spent on the phone with field techs can take up a lot of their time.

The good news is that somewhere along the line, our mobile phones became smartphones. They are capable of so much more than telephone calls. Most providers like Verizon no longer focus on minutes per month – it's all about data today. Those smart phones have morphed into tablets. The tablet, coupled with a good foundation of Service Management technology, has potential to make a significant impact on service tech effi-

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ciency so long as the rest of your systems have kept pace with the advances made to tablets.

**How tablets and service management software can translate to more calls per day.**

Your customer details such as their device models and service history, certificates, calibration intervals along with addresses, contact details, and specific locations of equipment should all be accessible to the field technician on demand within a database.

The forms technicians use to execute a calibration including certificates should be created electronically. It's possible to pull the customer details directly from the database such that many of the fields on these forms are already pre-populated with the required information. If your field technician is spending time writing in dates, customer details, and machine information, they are doing redundant work. If they are turning in paper to your admin team to enter in the specifics of a call, that also represents a possibly area of savings.

Most electronic Work Orders can also include signature boxes for your customers and technicians to sign. There may be no need for a single piece of paper during a service call.

Any notes or observations the technician has about potential part replacements or future requirements can also be entered in while onsite via a tablet.

Follow up calls are best scheduled on site. Part your workflow could require service technicians to set it up right then and there. When the call is completed, it can trigger your team back at

the office to do their work. Billing can be initiated. Hard copies of certificates may be sent along with an invoice. Or better yet make them available to your customer online through a customer self-service portal.

Did you notice that none of this required any voice communication between the field technician and the office? As younger millennials enter the workforce, this will become the new normal. They may text each other, or communicate through a platform, but they do not need to speak with each other constantly. All of this can be accomplished with a tablet.

There may always be the need for an occasional phone call, but it should be the exception and not the rule. As you build your new workflow, try to set it up so no steps require voice communication between the technician and the office. Most of your technicians already have a personal mobile phone. Since they only need to call occasionally, then there is no sense adding that extra cost to your business. So, if you have the right workflow, it's not only possible, but profitable to only equip your field service team with tablets instead of mobile phones.

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