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## **How Small and Midsize Firms Worldwide Can Capitalize on New Mobile Resources**

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*The growing use of mobile devices — specifically smartphones and tablets — is having a major impact on the ways that people interact with the environment, with employers, and with each other. "Anytime, anywhere" access to voice communication was made possible by cellphones, and now that same kind of access is being extended to a wide range of company resources. The availability of network resources can allow remote and mobile workers to be more productive in new and exciting ways. For small and midsize firms, the impact of new mobile technology can be dramatic — there is a clear opportunity for effective practices to make a difference in worker efficiency while ensuring network security.*

The following questions were posed by SAP to Raymond Boggs, vice president of IDC's Small/Medium Business Research practice, on behalf of SAP's customers.

**Q. What kinds of mobile resources are small and midsize companies using now? Aren't we still at an early stage of adoption?**

A. We are actually pretty far along in the adoption of advanced mobile technology in small and midsize firms (those with up to 1,000 employees). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from every geography and size category are making active use of mobile technology, with employees often leading their companies to adopt new technology.

It's now common for firms to open up remote access to email and calendars so that workers can be productive wherever they are. Of course, the greater challenge is getting access to more critical internal resources, and that's where we are at an earlier stage of development.

**Q. What mix of different mobile technologies are small and midsize companies using? We've been hearing a lot about media tablets. Are they really as effective as some suggest, and are their capabilities worth the investment?**

A. The optimal mix of smartphones, notebook computers (including newer lightweight netbooks and ultrabooks), and media tablets will vary depending on what companies want from their mobile workers. Mobile devices may be used for creating content (where notebooks shine) or for accessing and processing content (where smartphones and tablets are especially effective). In either case, it's almost always better to phase in new technology rather than replace products that still have useful life left. The key is the kinds of applications you want to support, and if processing and displaying information is critical, speeding up replacement cycles will make sense so that people can benefit from the latest technology.

Media tablets have really become quite a phenomenon, and IDC surveys show exceptional support for the technology in surprising places. Online SMEs in China, India, and Brazil are every bit as likely as those in the United States, Germany, and Japan to use media tablets and even more likely to plan purchases in the next 12 months. Mobility is becoming the rule.

**Q. What best practices can we learn from SMEs that have successfully implemented advanced mobile solutions?**

A. Firms are taking a number of key steps to get the most from mobile investments:

1. Make sure to support and encourage the use of employee-owned devices (bring your own device or BYOD). This doesn't mean absolute freedom and total chaos; it does mean arranging to provide network access for appropriate equipment that will allow employees to do a better job. A critical part of this is establishing effective mobile device management.
2. Continually refine and update the types of mobile products supported and the applications used. Understand that some people will be looking to tap the latest mobile capabilities but others will be somewhat reluctant users. Both groups should feel that the company is responsive to their needs.
3. Encourage and sponsor small pilot groups of users that might be interested in using mobile technology in innovative ways. This is likely happening in your company anyway, and by providing support (and oversight), you will be able to learn from and leverage successes and understand what approaches may not be quite right for you. A "bottom up" approach may not seem efficient, but it will actually be the best way to generate enthusiasm and support for your mobility efforts.

**Q. What kinds of problems are mobile solutions most effective at addressing? Where can we expect to see the greatest returns for our mobile investments?**

A. No two companies are the same when it comes to the benefits of mobility, but IDC has seen a natural progression of success as firms advance policies and practices that leverage mobile resources. The most immediate advances are the ones you are likely already benefiting from — improved internal efficiencies associated with mobile data communications, email, and texting. In many respects, SMEs in developing countries have been especially effective in leveraging advanced mobile capabilities to sharpen their business practices and improve productivity. In firms with multiple locations, the role of mobile communications has been especially important.

The next level of capabilities being used has been external — enhancing relationships with partners, customers, and prospects. This can relate to the support of field sales or other externally facing staff who operate away from the office. Of course, even the most advanced smartphones and tablets don't offer the same level of functionality as PCs. The ability to create new data or records may be limited (and you may not want to allow comprehensive changes in key databases to be made remotely). Some companies address the issue effectively by having separate procedures for data checking new orders that come in remotely, which can be done as part of the posting process. This helps the sales staff ensure that orders are captured in a timely way (especially important as the end of the month or quarter nears). It also helps support staff by converting data entry to data checking, which cuts both time and errors.

**Q. In the future, what kind of advanced capabilities should SMEs look at from a mobile perspective?**

A. The highest level of mobile resource engagement is still a stretch for most small and midsize firms, but of increasing interest. Mobile access to advanced business intelligence (BI) and other applications can be invaluable to remote workers, allowing them to be particularly effective. Part of the benefit can be related to real-time information gathering, which can improve the quality of business decisions. But even more important is the ability to leverage company resources on the spot to improve operating efficiency or reduce sales cycle time. In both cases, the business benefits of advanced mobile solutions can be especially compelling.

**Q. What do users expect from BI applications, and what capabilities should service providers be investing in to provide SMEs more value?**

A. Business intelligence is an area where vendors can definitely invest more to improve the user experience but also where SMEs are just beginning to realize the kinds of benefits that might be possible. In general, users are interested in three critical capabilities. The first is simple: **reporting** — what's going on? This is the first BI stage, the understanding of internal activities, whether account updates, inventory positions, or company financials. The second capability is **analysis** — what's behind different activities? This speaks to patterns that are emerging or causal relationships. The third is the most sophisticated of all, **predictive insight** — what will be happening? The predictive aspect of BI is a much more sophisticated area than the descriptive aspect and potentially much more valuable. This is an area where more vendor resources could certainly be applied because effective and easy-to-use capabilities are not yet here, at least for mobile platforms. In addition, mobile devices can offer real advantages in **presenting results** to others. The graphic capabilities of media tablets in particular make them a terrific potential resource for sharing information in real time with colleagues and customers, especially on a one-on-one basis. For SMEs, this could make a difference in accelerating the quality and pace of business decisions and improving sales efficiency, which of course would help justify the investment in new mobile technology.

#### ABOUT THIS ANALYST

*Raymond Boggs oversees SMB research at IDC where he examines the acquisition and use of networking, storage, and advanced technology by small and medium-sized businesses. As part of his work, Mr. Boggs directs survey research, forecasting, and market analysis for advanced telecommunications, personal computing, and office automation products. Mr. Boggs is a regular presenter at industry conferences, including IDC's annual Directions Conference, and is regularly quoted in the general and business press.*

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