



# Mobile technology from executive toys to effective tools

by John C. Jeston



# Mobile technology

- from executive toys to effective tools

## Reader ROI

- ***why mobile devices in the past have failed to live up to expectations and why so many executives treat them as toys;***
- ***how SMEs can harness the power of mobile devices to decrease their cost base, reduce revenue leakage and increase the quality of executive decision-making;***
- ***the practices that successful mobile senior executives use to avoid becoming a bottleneck and still maintain control and visibility over the business.***

New technology devices have proliferated in recent years. There's the iPhone, Blackberry, Android, the new Windows phone, the iPad, iPad clones and other similar devices. They are lots of fun and we all just have to have one!

There is no question that they have made our lives more interesting (and maybe in some ways more efficient), but have they really made us more effective in our business lives? Have they resulted in more revenue? Have they reduced operating costs? Are we making better decisions?

It could be argued that even the iPad is awaiting the 'killer app' and until it arrives, the device is just a cool iPhone without the ability to make phone calls!

## The SME challenge

Executives in small to medium enterprises (SMEs) play a significantly different role to their peers in larger organisations. In a bank or insurance company, for example, executives have narrower, more defined roles. They might be the CFO for part of the business, the operations manager, marketing manager, compliance manager and so on. Within an SME however, one senior executive can - and mostly does - have multiple roles and responsibilities.

An SME executive role may involve:

- planning for the future,
- close and active involvement in day-to-day business operations (as there are fewer 'sub' managers and fewer organisational levels between them and the operational staff), and
- tight control over the business, and
- responsibility for negotiating with suppliers and potential customers.

SME executives are rarely at their desks because they are running between internal and external meetings. There are never enough hours in the day!



Smart SMEs are always looking at their business processes, finding new ways to make them more efficient and reduce costs (or at least to ensure they stay constant with growth). If they do not focus on this there is a real potential for expense blow-outs. As an aside, it is interesting that most organisations focus on the latter half of this equation - their expenses - when the opportunities in this area are limited and certainly will not provide you with a competitive advantage. Revenue leakage can have a far more devastating consequence upon a business, as we will illustrate later in this article.

Furthermore, fixating on operational costs is only part of the answer. To create or maintain an effective competitive advantage there needs to be focus on operational **and** management processes.

For a senior executive to achieve this level of oversight and control it is critical to ensure that business processes are able to function even while executives are "on the run". For without genuine, effective mobility, the SME executive can easily become a business bottleneck, holding up authorisations and project initiations essential for the smooth running of the business.

## Developing business effectiveness

The answer is to develop business effectiveness that allows the organisation to move from *reactive* to *proactive* to *predictive*.

Leakage of costs, revenue from existing deals and potential future revenue can all mean the difference between success, failure or irrelevancy.

It is totally understandable that SME C-level executives are always trying to find ways of making both themselves and their business more effective. Mobile devices are often seen as the solution but so far, they have been overwhelmingly disappointing.

One issue has been the lack of 'killer apps' married to the physical devices.

Effectiveness will not be achieved by simply deploying 'tick and flick' email functionality to on-the-run executives. Simple and intelligent forms must be integrated seamlessly into business processes. The deployment must also be intuitive (executives do not 'do' training) and it must assist the executive in their role.

If it is only an approval process, they should just have to 'tick' a box. Let's provide a real life example.

### Case Study:

An international manufacturing organisation headquartered in Australia had significant issues with its credit note process. The problems included:

- A significant impact on bottom line profitability from credit notes for warranties, promotions and sponsorships;
- Historical reporting could only highlight lost revenue retrospectively;
- Manual processes lacked systemic controls and information could not be accessed anywhere, anytime.
- All credit notes had to be authorised by a C-level executive all of whom were highly mobile.

Time zone differences plus travel itineraries meant that executives had become bottlenecks causing delayed responses for clients.



## The Solution

The solution was to deploy a mobile-based browser interface to the Sales Director's iPhone when he was travelling. The same process was also made available through Microsoft Outlook for use on his laptop. Resellers and local distribution branches continued to access their part of the process from their normal web browser.

## The Results... were stunning:

- Revenue leakage was reduced through improved review, adjudication and approval business rules.
- Customer relationships improved because of faster response times and better review of requests.
- Reporting improved as a result of accuracy of "root causes".
- C-level workloads and stress were reduced through automated approvals based on thresholds/tolerances.

While this is a typical example of the deployment of business processes via mobile devices, it is not enough. Ideally the reach needs to extend to enable senior executives:

- to be able to provide timely advice and be consulted on important decisions when they are not physically present;
- to have access to real-time business metrics for effective decision-making; and
- to have mobile decision tools, for example, a pricing/profitability impact model to assist in negotiations with suppliers and customers (this is not just Excel spreadsheets as it could have real-time costs and production/inventory availability inputs).

The marriage of such business process applications to mobile devices is finally delivering the effectiveness and efficiencies that business requires so that it can stop viewing the devices as toys and start using them as tools. It's taken a few years to develop the right applications and functionality, but the benefits are finally here. You just have to sit up and take advantage of them **now**.

**Over to you!**



## About the author:

John is recognised internationally for his expert insights into BPM strategy and implementation and has written three books on the topic and in excess of 25 articles. In addition to BPM skills, John has over 30 years' experience in project management, business process re-engineering, systems development, outsourcing, and general management. He has held the positions of Financial Controller, Divisional Manager, Director of a software company, HR Director, Chief Information Officer (CIO) and a partner in a consulting practice where he was national BPM lead and Thought Leader. He currently runs his own consulting practice. John is considered by many to be one of the leading BPM thought leaders and implementation experts in the world.

## About Professional Advantage:

Professional Advantage specialises in helping mid-tier organisations realise the real, measurable benefits of Business Process Management. Our team has extensive experience in designing and delivering both enterprise-wide and discrete business process improvements across all areas of the organisation, in all industries. Our software solution, XMPRO, facilitates change and provides rapid payback with a low total cost of ownership. Our philosophy is to help clients take control over process development and improvement, thereby providing long term autonomy. We know that it's not always necessary to replace systems. Sometimes all that's needed is a little improvement to make things work better.

## Working together:

Professional Advantage and John Jeston present a series of articles focusing on how BPM enables significant business benefits to be achieved by mid-tier organisations. The combination of John's thought leadership and PA's expertise on delivering measurable business outcomes for clients aims to provide valuable information for senior executives within the SME sector.

