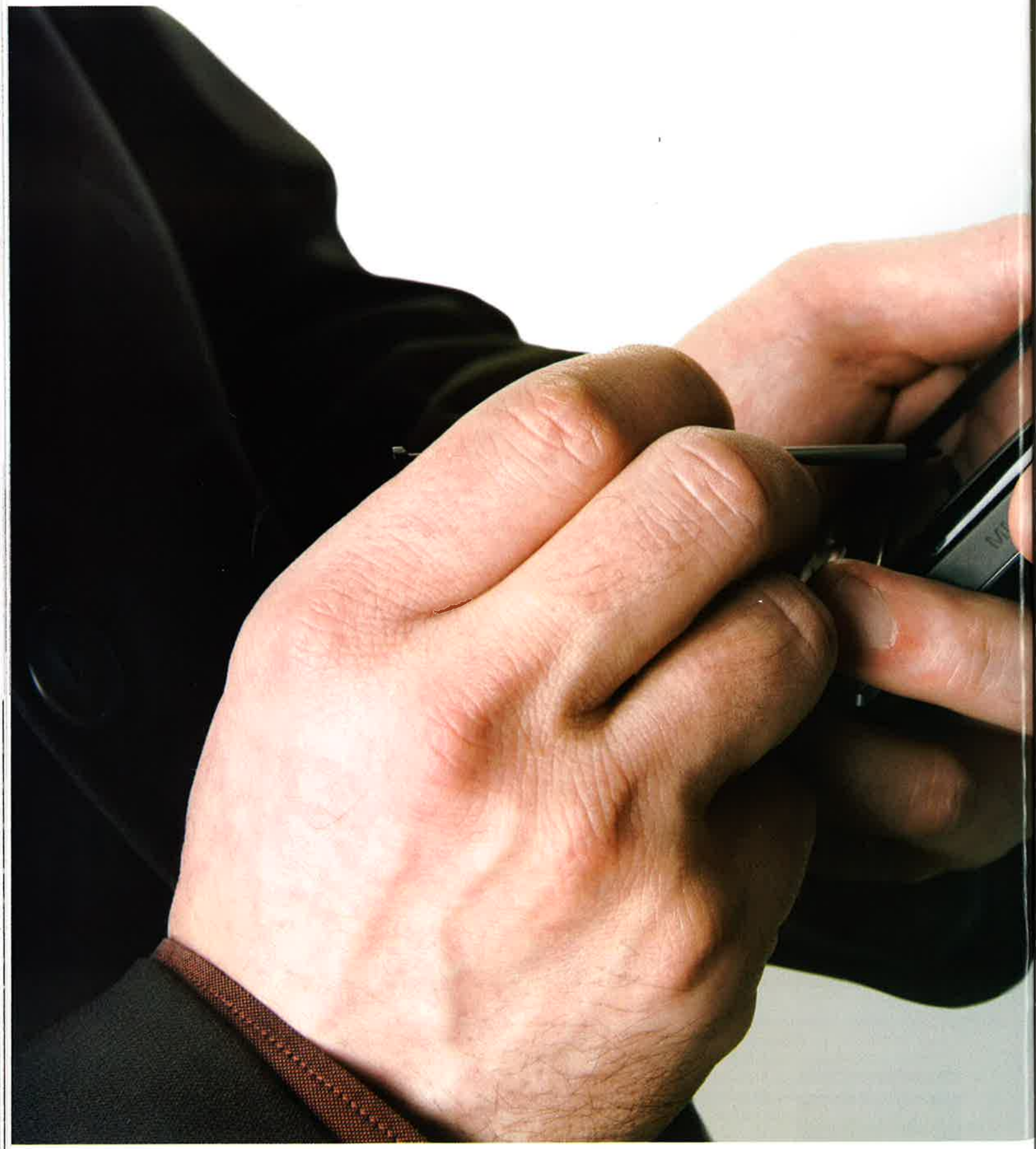

# Enterprise mobility – executive perspectives on mobile business applications

By The Canadian Financial Executives Research Foundation

The use of mobile devices offering Internet access is skyrocketing. Research suggests mobile Internet access will actually eclipse desktop access by 2015, according to a Morgan Stanley Internet Trends report. And, while sales of smartphones and tablets are exploding, the line between the personal and commercial use of mobile devices is blurring.

Businesses are increasingly putting rush orders on smartphones and tablets which support sophisticated applications, then, just as quickly, may expect staff – at least senior managers – to use them beyond typical work hours. Many organizations – seeking improved productivity from an increasingly mobile workforce – have wirelessly-enabled their staff with cellphones and tablets.

According to a February 2011 survey by Robert Half Technology, 49 percent of US companies plan to equip more of their workers with tablets in the next 24 months. Tablets, in particular, with their larger display, offer other conveniences: replacing printed paper reports and other documents for workers, while also serving as lighter replacements for laptops.

Meanwhile, workers accustomed to mobile applications for news, entertainment, and personal task management, anticipate the same level of productivity and connectivity for work-related mobile applications. In addition, many technophile workers are using their personal smartphones and tablets for work regardless of whether their use has been sanctioned by the company.

Some workers, particularly executives, actually expect state-of-the art handheld gadgets with generous data packages as a company perk – one could dub them double-edged devices.

This race to cut the tether of the deskbound office worker has resulted in an explosion of enterprise applications, as businesses seek to make company data, stored at the so-called 'back end' on databases/servers, available to workers through mobile platforms (also known as 'middleware'). Examples of business applications include simple timesheets, spreadsheets, or more complex customer relationship management software. Similarly, it's possible to integrate data on inventory, production, sales and the supply chain on a handheld device.

## Survey

The Canadian Financial Executives Research Foundation (CFERF), the research arm of Financial Executives International Canada (FEI Canada) has published a study sponsored by SAP titled *Enterprise Mobility – Executive perspectives on mobile business applications.* The study is based on a survey of finance executives across Canada between January 5-19, 2011 plus executive research forums held in Toronto and Calgary. For the purpose of the study, mobile devices include BlackBerry devices, iPhones, Android phones or tablets such as the iPad and PlayBook (laptop computers and netbooks or PDA devices weren't included).

Despite the growing number of applications (also known as 'apps') available, many workers continue to use mobile devices primarily for email and web browsing. Although 97 percent of CFERF survey respondents said they equipped at least some employees with mobile devices, concerns about risk management, data security, cost, logistics and technology limitations have stalled the adoption of a range of applications.

As a result, many businesses haven't been taking full advantage of the devices at their disposal. A lack of knowledge and awareness of the potential benefits of mobile business applications has put a damper on the development and adoption of customized business application. Other companies prefer to stick to cloud computing and/or web-based interfaces for employees, believing this offers better security and the flexibility to be compatible with any mobile device.

### Apps

CFERF survey participants were asked about what apps they are currently using and which business functions they plan to create mobile apps for in future. Of all business functions, customer relationship management (CRM) sparked the most interest from survey respondents in terms of future adoption of business applications, followed by social networking, Web 2.0 collaboration tools, automation of tasks done by field workers, mobile conferencing and office productivity apps. Customer service and support (pre- and post-sales) was also cited as a key function.

Respondents were nearly unanimous in their agreement on the leading reason behind the use of mobile devices in the workforce. Improving worker efficiency was cited by 97 percent, the thinking being that mobility allows workers to make more timely decisions, and reduces idle time. The majority of respondents (73 percent) cited improving responsiveness to customers as another key driver. The flexibility of mobile devices clearly allows staff to respond more quickly to complaints, concerns and inquiries, and 59 percent reported that improving customer satisfaction turned out to be a benefit of the adoption of mobile business apps.

The adoption of smartphones and tablets was also driven by other factors, but to a lesser extent, survey respondents said. For instance, about one-third of respondents expected a reduced cost of business operations, and roughly the same percentage said the practice was inspired by a desire to improve utilization of assets. About one in five were aiming to better integrate with suppliers and customers' business processes, and around the same number cited increasing revenue as a driver. Indeed, many participants at the CFERF executive research forums cited the use of tablets and smartphones as a necessary method of preventing *revenue loss*, by avoiding missed sales opportunities.

According to about 70 percent of survey respondents, the top three obstacles to the adoption of mobile business applications for companies were (a) that existing enterprise applications cannot be mobilized; (b) a lack of integration with existing systems; and (c) security concerns. Other concerns included the skill level of in-house IT or telecom staff; a range of hardware, infrastructure and technology issues; a lack of money; and a lack of awareness of the benefits of mobile business applications.

More than half of the financial executives surveyed said their organization was prepared for the implications of a mobile workforce. About one third said their companies were not. The remainder didn't know. The greater use of handheld devices was expected to have a positive or very positive impact on morale and the quality of teamwork, even while workers were in transit, and in different time zones, according to three-quarters of survey respondents.

Mobile workers are also more likely to lose their belongings in transit, including smartphones. Even devices which aren't lost, however, require a plan in place to keep data secure from rivals/competitors/hackers. Nearly half of companies have policies and procedures in place designed to keep data secure on company-issued employee mobile devices, while one-third have policies and procedures in place to ensure data protection on both personal and company-issued devices.

When asked about procedures for data security in the event of lost or stolen devices, 58 percent said they had policies in place for company-issued devices, indicating that companies have done some more preparation in this area than for general data security. One in five organizations has policies for data protection in the event of the loss of either company or personal mobile devices.

Meanwhile, other security issues arise as workers use company-supplied devices for personal messaging and access company data from personal devices. The potential for data loss through security breaches is enormous, although some companies have attempted to mitigate that by restricting their companies to devices which only use encrypted networks for email. However, given that so much other data is accessible anywhere through the cloud on web-based applications, data security presents an enormous challenge for many companies now and will likely do so in future.

Respondents had mixed views about the impact of handheld devices on work-life balance. While some saw the use of business apps on mobile devices as a way to balance the demands of work and personal responsibilities, others saw mobility as an unwelcome encroachment on private life. The practice of setting limits on the use of devices was seen as a way of balancing competing demands.

In an era of constant connectivity, when millions of consumers live with mobile devices in the palm of their hands, personal lives and work duties are overlapping and intertwined more than ever before. The trend is here to stay, and despite critics who say this kind of lifestyle encroaches on the traditional separation between white-collar workers' office and home lives, workers who have embraced mobile devices often view them as a way to unchain themselves from their desks.

The mobility allows workers more flexibility in juggling their job demands with personal errands, tasks, and responsibilities. The increased decision-making which can be done on the go using business applications for smartphones and tablets is viewed as positive for those workers who are fulfilling multiple roles as workers, and caregivers to children or seniors.

Staff who do a great deal of work on the road, for instance sales people, can benefit from increases in productivity when carrying devices equipped with business applications that enable them to enter orders, check inventory, track expenses and time sheets, and tap into customer relationship management (CRM) databases. Field workers can collaborate with colleagues. Managers can do approvals from anywhere, keeping things moving within the cycle of business, whether it is an approval for sick leave or a vacation, approval on a discount for a deal, or allocating resources to a new project or an emergency situation.

Mobile devices are now becoming aggregators of different sources of information. They are being viewed as a potential bridge for disparate silos of information in organizations that have not yet caught up yet to a common architecture. This becomes easier as companies move to cloud-based systems, and begin integrating them all through a common middleware platform with a view to servicing any device, anywhere, at any time.

For instance, a retailer may create an application which takes data regarding availability of stock and meshes this data into an application which pipes out a salesperson's forecast, so it can measure whether procurement needs to address a lack of availability. Ultimately, data from different sources of information, perhaps even different systems or different databases, would be combined on a single device and represented on essentially one dashboard that looks like a customized solution for that device.

The Canadian Financial Executives Research Foundation is the research arm of Financial Executives International (FEI Canada).

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