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Wireless expert asks: Why give CEOs a BlackBerry?

6/18/2003 5:00:00 PM - Smart Toronto event looks at range of devices, deployment strategies

by Paul Fruitman

Wireless solutions can make companies more efficient and profitable but only where the business requirement exists, a Smart Toronto Technology Alliance audience heard Wednesday.

Scott Murphy, a consultant with Waterloo, Ont.-based IT consulting firm [Data Perceptions](#), told a breakfast seminar that business processes must drive solutions and not the other way around. He said the question companies must ask themselves is, "Is there a business process reason to take something from a manual process to an automated process, and can wireless enhance that?"



For a classic example of a solution trying to drive a process, Murphy pointed to some of the early adopters of Research In Motion's BlackBerry handheld device. "At first it was CEOs and VPs with BlackBerrys, but they're not the real mobile people." Executives who spend most of their time at their desks cannot maximize the benefits of wireless solutions, he said, but in the hands of a mobile sales force, a BlackBerry can deliver a real benefit.

Once a company determines it can in fact benefit from a wireless solution, the next step is deciding what solution to implement.

Jim Brown, vice-president of sales and marketing for mobile applications provider [mBiztech Corp.](#), said customers face a dizzying array of devices — from phones to personal digital assistants (PDAs) to tablet PCs — along with a number of carriers, networks and application providers from which to

choose. Allan De Paulsen, associate director of mobile communications for Bell Canada, said each network has its benefits. For example, with 1X networks users pay for data use rather than airtime; paging networks offer good coverage even though they are hampered by slow data transfer.

Cathal Copas, mBiztech's founder and chief technology officer, said potential customers must also be conscious of how a wireless solution would integrate with a company's legacy systems. Murphy said companies should decide if they need a real-time or almost real-time solution and noted that wireless includes not only mobile applications but also fixed wireless IEEE solutions for remote satellite offices and WiFi hotspots.

Brown said development in these areas will help the market make real the promises and predictions of analysts that have thus far gone unfulfilled.

"We haven't realized expectations sent to us by Gartner," he said. "First, the networks weren't up and ready. Second it costs money. Companies have to be certain they're going...to save money."

Brown said he expects a large increase in company pilots this fall. "Now the networks are there [but] we're still a year away from significant deployment," he said. "I think we're better positioned now than ever before, but it's going to be gradual."

Copas said hype around wireless has been a barrier to its own adoption. He pointed to wireless access protocol (WAP), which was falsely promoted as the true "Internet on your phone."

"It was a hard sell, because it was being sold as something it wasn't," he said. "It's not a revolutionary technology like everyone was expecting three or four years ago. You're [just] building on your business processes. You eliminate data entry steps, lost work orders."

Murphy's own company's experience provides an example of this. He said before [Data Perceptions](#) implemented a BlackBerry solution one of his colleagues was always being double-booked because he was making his own appointments at the same time his office was penciling him in for meetings, but the two were not in sync. As well, the colleague was using 5,000 cell phone minutes a month, at considerable cost. The BlackBerry solution stopped the double booking, cut the cell phone usage to about 800 minutes per month and allowed for better optimization of travel schedules, all of which resulted in a productivity improvement of between 15 and 20 per cent.

Shawn Fuller, carrier sales manager for [RIM](#), said as long as two years ago, BlackBerrys were saving the average user 53 minutes a day, equating to \$11,042 in savings for someone with a \$100,000 annual salary.

Of course, RIM's success to date has largely been based on a simple application, email, that does not require more advanced 2.5 and 3G capable-networks to be effective.

But Murphy said that kind of bandwidth is becoming increasingly available.

"You'll see more bandwidth and you're starting to see that today. This is one thing that has held back some of these [advanced] applications," he said. "The applications are getting more integrated and moving forward, with the bandwidth it's becoming a reality."

Murphy also said concern over wireless security has been somewhat overzealous.

"A lot of things about security, it's not a wireless problem, it's an infrastructure problem," he said, adding wireline security solutions should be used the same way for wireless applications. "Security doesn't change because it's wireless."

But both Murphy and Copas stressed the importance of pilot trials. "Until you can touch and feel the to a certain degree, you don't really know what the benefit is," Murphy said.

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