

# The future of mobile workforces

The employees who travel to customers in order to provide a service or fix a problem are part of a profoundly growing sector of the workforce: *mobile staff*. While the existence of field service workers is not new, their importance is on the rise and the way in which they work is changing and improving right before our eyes. So, what will the mobile workforce look like in the future?

## **Greater access to information**

Field service already differs drastically from what it was just a decade ago. One of the major challenges faced by company owners and supervisors is the effective *management* of their field service teams. From timing, scheduling, dispatching, relaying critical information and handling changes in real time, the industry has been plagued by miscommunications, delays and incomplete details at the most vital times.

One of the ways in which companies are improving this, is by providing their mobile workers with the information they need, *when* they need it. As time goes on, this will continue to get better and better as new, connected technologies (i.e. smartphones, tablets, watches) enable real-time data exchange.

## **New industries**

Up until recently, field service has been most prevalent in industries like telecommunications and manufacturing. While they may not always adopt the same title, mobile workers can now be found in many other sectors including home healthcare, insurance, retail, transportation, and food and beverage. As an increasing number of people begin to work outside the office and as consumer expectations constantly evolve and amplify, the field service model will continue to expand into more industries, signifying that it is here for the long-term.

## **Transition from reactive to proactive**

Where customers once contacted companies to report issues with their products, connected equipment is now making it possible for the machines themselves to relay their own troubles – and in some cases, even predict them before they occur. In other words, instead of a technician fixing a broken fridge, they can be sent to inspect a fridge *before* it breaks. IoT innovations can provide clear sight into multiple data points to arrive at conclusions regarding the health and lifespan of a particular asset. In the world of field service, if this kind of information can give mobile workers the ability to be ahead (as opposed to behind) an issue, this will ultimately result in minimized downtime and inconveniences, maximized efficiency, improved service and happier customers.

### **The role of AI and AR in field service**

By accumulating and analyzing large amounts of data over an extended period of time, artificial intelligence and machine learning make it possible to deliver insights from connected devices, optimize self-learning service, and ultimately, give customers what they're looking for. For example, a stove gives readings of unusual vibrations over the course of 10 days, which indicates a high probability of the appliance breaking down within the next month. The company that sells the stove then informs the customer and sends a technician before the stove stops working.

The emerging technology of augmented reality has the ability to greatly improve mobile workers' in-field experiences. They can simply point their smartphones at a product and receive instant diagnostic information and service guidance right on their screens. AR tools also allow for the scanning of barcodes to give technicians precise information about the particular product model along with instructions on how to fix certain problems. It also acts as the platform through which mobile workers can collaborate with one another, as everyone simultaneously shares the same visual of the problem.

### **Innovative technologies and their prevalence**

Beyond AI, AR, IoT and wearable technologies, there are other budding technologies that are poised to play a significant role in the field service sector.

Self-driving vehicles can increase safety on the road, make mobile workers more efficient, reduce costs associated with fuel, vehicle wear and travel time, and boost synchronization across a company with driverless vehicles arriving at a destination precisely when they are needed.

Evolving mobile workforce management tools can give companies tremendous field visibility, similar to that of air traffic control. What this does is it allows for a shift to take place away from a regionalized dispatch to a centralized one. Fast-forward further into the future and this information will create a movement from centralized dispatch teams to simply the responsibility falling into the laps of the mobile workforce itself, slowly yet surely eliminating the need for back-office management in the traditional sense.

Through the use of connected devices, field service work can start to look more like the ride-sharing and food delivery service industry to which customers are becoming more and more accustomed. For example, from their devices, customers will be able to order the service, obtain a price, see a picture and rating of the expert scheduled to arrive, engage in direct messaging, and view in real-time the location of the vehicle coming to their home or business.

### **Getting it right for the future**

The vast majority of service decision makers agree that their mobile workers and the interactions they have with customers directly impact the company brand. In many cases, mobile workers have the ability to increase revenue streams and sometimes even create new ones. When it comes to customer engagement there's just no denying the fact that field service is an integral part of the service lifecycle as a whole, and mobile workers are the face of the company.

Because they are so vitally important, it's worth it for organizations to invest in the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of their mobile workforce. Today, this begins with the acquisition of the right field service management software. Tomorrow, it might mean the management and optimization of any or all of the developing trends we've talked about.

Empodio brings with it a deep understanding of the mobile workforce landscape along with expertise in Field Service Lightning. For organizations looking to arm their teams with the right tools to be successful in the field both today and tomorrow, we can be that valued partner in the background.

Want to talk about *your* mobile workforce?  
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