

Can you run your company from the palm of your hand? Perhaps not entirely, but there are many functions today that can be performed using an iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry, or other mobile handheld device. The BlackBerry used to be the favorite mobile handheld for business because it was optimized for e-mail and messaging, with strong security and tools for accessing internal corporate systems. Now that's changing. Companies large and small are starting to deploy Apple's iPhone and iPad as well as Android mobile devices to conduct more of their work. They are enhancing their security systems so that mobile users can remotely access proprietary corporate resources with confidence. For some, these handhelds have become indispensable. Eric Jackson is a champion kayaker who spends half of each year following competitions and events throughout North America. He's also president of Jackson Kayak, the leading whitewater kayak manufacturer. It's essential that he participate in athletic events, monitor industry trends in the field, and meet directly with dealers and customers. Jackson's strong customer focus has helped the company expand successfully worldwide, with distributors on six continents. With the iPhone and iPad, Jackson claims he can run the entire 120-person company from afar. Jackson's Wi-Fi-equipped RV connects wirelessly to the company headquarters in Sparta, Tennessee. When Jackson's not on Wi-Fi, he uses his iPad 3G cellular connection. The iPad gives him instant access to his entire operation, so he can analyze customer data, refresh Web site content, or approve new designs. Jackson's iPad includes calendars, e-mail, contact management, and the ability to create and edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations—all the tools this executive needs to communicate with the home office, dealers, and customers. Back at the shop, Jackson Kayak's managers and employees find iPad and iPhone equally invaluable. In the factory, Chief Operations Officer John Ratliff can compare Jackson Kayak's manufacturing equipment side-by-side with images of replacement parts on the iPad to make sure he's getting the correct pieces. The iPhone and iPad have become so indispensable that the company outfitted its entire work force, from customer service, to design, to quality control, with iPhones. Many have iPads as well. Using handhelds to run the business is not limited to small companies. General Electric (GE) is one of the world's largest companies, producing aircraft engines, locomotives and other transportation equipment, kitchen and laundry appliances, lighting, electric distribution and control equipment, generators and turbines, and medical imaging equipment. GE is also a leading provider of financial services, aviation, clean energy, media, and health care technology. This giant multinational was an early adopter of mobile technology. GE employees use their iPads to access e-mail, contacts, documents, and electronic presentations. GE's Mobile Center of Excellence has developed dozens of iPhone and iPad applications, including industry-specific diagnostic and monitoring tools and business intelligence tools that help decision makers find patterns and trends in large volumes of data. The company's Transformer Monitoring app helps manage gas turbine inventory and electronic transformers throughout the world, with the ability to zoom in from a global map to a specific transformer and read all of the key performance indicators. A PDS Movement Planner lets service personnel monitor railway tracks and obtain diagnostic information on locomotives. With operations in 60 countries, Dow Corning offers more than 7,000 products and services for consumer and industrial applications, from adhesives to lubricants, delivered as fluids, solids, gels, and powders. The Roambi Visualizer app lets Dow Corning executives use their iPhones to quickly view and analyze real-time data from

their core corporate system, including sales figures, trends, and projections. It presents managers with simple, intuitive dashboards of complex data. According to Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Don Sheets, in 15 seconds he can get a sense of whether there's a financial performance issue he needs to get involved with. Dow Corning's Analytics App for the iPhone monitors Web site traffic and online sales for the company's XIAMETER brand of standard silicone products. Analytics App interfaces with Google Analytics. When Dow Corning rolls out XIAMETER Web sites across the globe, executives can monitor what content is and isn't being used whether they are home, traveling, or at the office. Sunbelt Rentals, based in Fort Mill, South Carolina, is one of the largest equipment rental companies in the United States, with a \$2 billion inventory of rental equipment. More than 1,200 company employees, including sales staff, field personnel, and executives, are equipped with iPhones to interact with contacts and stay abreast of calendar events. In addition to using iPhones for e-mail, scheduling, and contact management, Sunbelt deployed a custom application called Mobile SalesPro, which ties multiple systems and databases into a single package for the sales team.

This application connects the corporate point-of-sale system, inventory control and management system, and enterprise system, which integrates data from many different business functions. Users are able to share sales quotes based on the most up-to-date information on rental rates and equipment availability. With this application, Sunbelt's sales team can respond immediately to customer requests while they are at a job site.

Questions

1. What kinds of applications are described here? What business functions do they support? How do they improve operational efficiency and decision making?
2. Identify the problems that businesses in this case study solved by using mobile digital devices.
3. What kinds of businesses are most likely to benefit from equipping their employees with mobile digital devices such as iPhones and iPads?
4. One company deploying iPhones has said: The iPhone is not a game changer, it's an industry changer. It changes the way that you can interact with your customers and with your suppliers. Discuss the implications of this statement.