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Mobile POS Solutions Made Simple

By Wilson Chao, WaveSoft

Mobile technology has made tremendous progress in recent years and the result is showing up in many facets of our daily lives. The popularity of the mobile phone and tablet PC with wireless network access underscores the pervasiveness of mobile technology.

Conventional mobile solutions are expensive and less extensible because they were built for a single purpose application on a proprietary hardware platform. Today's new off-the-shelf mobile devices have quickly gained popularity over industrial handheld devices due to the reduced cost, functional advantage, and improved usability. As a result, a large percentage of retail and

hospitality operators are now adopting consumer-based mobile devices such as the Apple iPhone and iPad solutions for use in their daily operations.

While mobile technologies have a great appeal to retailers as a way to improve productivity, there is a clear trend in utilizing the latest mobile commodity hardware and apps, directly operated by consumers to increase customer loyalty and sales.

According to the latest market estimates from Nielsen in May 2012, over 50 percent of mobile phones used in the U.S. are smartphones. With nearly 100 million mobile phone users across the country, the implication to leverage these smart mobile devices within the retail industry is huge. Many ISVs and system integrators in the retail and hospitality industries are extending their existing solution by integrating new breeds of mobile apps and cloud-based services.

Compared with traditional mobile devices, these smartphone devices offer unparalleled computational powers, intuitive user interfaces, and large screen displays; but most importantly, the ability to access and execute any software applications with open Internet access. The open accessibility of mobile software and cloud data has created unlimited marketing possibilities for retailers and restaurateurs.

Now through proximity marketing, customers have the ability to remotely access inventory, pricing and promotions. For example, a survey done by Cisco estimates that nearly 40 percent of consumers globally are exploring mobile devices to compare the price of an item between different stores and 37 percent said they would sign up for coupons offered from a retailer's online loyalty portal.

Interested in adding mobile solutions to your offerings? Here are some of the more popular mobile applications channel partners should consider.

Mobile POS Applications

Mobile POS solutions have proven to be an effective tool to improve the throughput of regular point of sale terminals in a retail operation. The mobile POS solution is often used as a dynamic, line-busting tool to prevent revenue lost during peak business hours, reduce customer wait times and improve customer service.

Most recently, some retailers have been experimenting with customers' own mobile phones as a self-operated mobile POS device. The scanned goods stored

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in the customers' smartphones are then synchronized with the store POS terminals on the fly. In addition to supplying more product information such as pricing and available choices, these new customer driven mobile apps can deliver invaluable up-sale opportunities such as online coupon access and item promotion. The overall implementation ensures an extremely fast checkout and can significantly reduce labor costs for retailers.

Order Entry Applications

For table and quick service restaurants, mobile apps developed for use on consumer-based devices have quickly gained in popularity. These mobile apps are used to decrease the wait times for patrons and can easily speed up the order taking process 20 percent to 50 percent without adding additional head count. There is also an increased adoption in customer facing, self-ordering or e-menu solutions designed for tablet form factors.

Online ordering has also increased in popularity in the past few years. In order to embrace the huge growth of smartphone devices in the market, many quick service restaurants, pizza delivery chains and frequent diners at fine dining restaurants are revising their existing general web-based online ordering capabilities to be mobile specific or mobile friendly. Quite often, they are also developing brand new native mobile ordering apps to run on popular iOS and Android phone devices.

Mobile Payment Applications

Mobile payment is one of the fastest growing mobile applications in the retail industry. Mobile payment solutions offer the most dynamic and secure way to improve customer service and generate more revenue for retailers. Many retailers have started to use different portable payment terminals or mobile payment software to process credit cards payments.

Mobile payment solutions offer on-demand payment processing anywhere, anytime to help eliminate the potential for identity theft. More importantly, the ability to process mobile payments at the table offers additional security as a customer's credit card will no longer leave the table, eliminating the possibility of credit card skimming.

Contactless payment is another form of mobile payment and is ideal for retail, quick service or drive-through operations where they process a large number of transactions for small amounts. In these environments, speed of transaction plays a critical role in maximizing daily revenue.

Customer Loyalty Applications

Now more than ever, retailers are using smartphones and tablets as a way to enhance customer engagement. Effective customer loyalty or incentive programs have been illustrated as prominent marketing tools that increase repeat business, long term sales and profitability.

Mobile device popularity has offered an enormous new media for retailers to engage effectively with customers. Mobile phones are now becoming the perfect media to receive and redeem loyalty rewards (generally points or coupons) through the use of quick response (QR) barcodes. Starbucks, for example, has generated an amazing 26 million transactions in its first nine months with its latest barcode-based mobile app ("Starbucks Gives Mobile Payments a Jolt", Digital Transactions, Jan 2012). QR codes are easy for consumers to access as merchants' rewards can be collected any time through mobile phones without the need to use or print physical coupons.

Social networks have become the fastest growing engagement points between retailers and customers, and recent customer loyalty and relationship programs are enlisted with popular social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

In 2011, Facebook mobile surpassed 200 million users. As mobile devices are becoming the center of communications and Internet access, many retailers believe they can communicate more effectively with particular customer prospects at these social network sites through special mobile apps. Retailers today are embracing both mobile strategies and social media strategies into a cohesive marketing strategy to increase brand awareness and loyalty.

As wireless networks have become more reliable and mobile devices have become more feature rich and affordable, channel partners have found that recommending mobile solutions is more viable for many types of businesses. With the huge popularity of smartphones, it has become imperative to install mobile solutions in your business.

Although many of these new platforms and applications have just started to recently emerge, it is not difficult to anticipate that the success of future retail

and hospitality operations will greatly depend on how they leverage the latest mobile technologies.

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