

Why wireless devices must be connected to critical applications

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Discussing the inner workings of the mobile workforce, Roberta Fox talked about the integrated connectivity her small consulting firm's wireless devices have with important business applications.

"Right now we're using [BlackBerry units], and we have a hosted Exchange email environment that we subscribe to for our consultants," said Fox, senior partner at [Fox Group](#) in Ontario, Canada. "And then on our server, we have Microsoft's Business Contact Manager. And then on our individual desktops we're using Outlook 2003. Outlook talks to the RIM client desktop. The client desktop can talk to our Business Contact Manager server, where we have our common information about sales contacts and clients."

Companies need to maximize their IT investments

While a company like Fox Group may have its act together, Ed Partneope, vice president of operations at [Innovativ](#), said that many businesses deploying wireless devices aren't maximizing their investments, because many of these devices lack integrated connectivity to CRM, ERP, and custom back-end systems.

"Companies have been spending millions of dollars engaging in implementing enterprise-wide solutions and in doing so have created this new realm of connectivity, this mobile connectivity to wireless PDAs," said Partneope, whose Edison, N.J.-based firm provides tools for business communications. "Wireless PDAs today are required to have connectivity to productivity applications -- personal information management, calendar, task list, email."

Research firm IDC has previously predicted that upwards of two-thirds of the U.S. workforce will be deemed mobile by next year. IDC also projected that companies worldwide would pick up 2.6 million converged devices, such as smart phones, by the end of last year. And as wireless devices are used more and more in enterprises, experts are admonishing companies to ensure connectivity exists between their devices and their applications. Doing so involves thinking ahead of time about what software will work best with what devices -- and vice versa.

"My whole push is for technology planning," said Lena West, founder and CEO of [xynoMedia Technology](#), "because if you've got the ERP application and you've got the CRM application and you're purchasing the wireless devices after you've already invested in ERP or CRM, the very first thing that you need to be thinking about is, 'How does this fit in with what we've got?' It's kind of like when you put a puzzle together. You've got to have the right piece that fits."

Large DBs: not much intergration allowed

According to Fox, large database applications such as offerings from Oracle and Siebel don't really provide much in the way of integration between PDA platforms and hosted email solutions. Where there is integration, she continued, is in applications particularly embraced by small and medium businesses. That's where Business Contact Manager comes in, she said, adding that the software provides CRM capabilities.

West, whose Yonkers, N.Y.-based company helps business owners who are struggling with technology, countered that there's a simple reason why small and medium firms are having less difficulty than larger companies are in ensuring there is integrated connectivity between their wireless devices and their critical business applications: the smaller the company, the easier it is to integrate devices and software.

"If you really step back and take a look at it, it just only makes sense," said West. "How much of a back-end does a small business or medium-sized business really have? How much could there possibly be to integrate? But when you start getting into the larger companies where there's lots to do, there's lots of data, you're talking about encryption, you're talking security. For smaller companies, they're not going to have that concern."

The more xynoMedia ramps up its external sales force, the more it will need to ensure back-end connectivity, she said, and addressing this issue internally will help her in assisting clients who are facing similar concerns.

Ian Palmer is a free-lance IT business writer -- and ITMJ regular contributor -- based near Toronto.