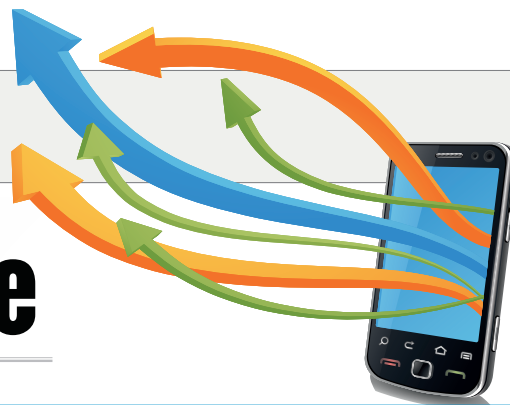## FAST FACTS

On the move

FMJ AIMS TO SUPPORT TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN THE FM MARKET.

In this edition of FAST Facts, FM software expert Service Works Group's managing director **Gary Watkins** explains how facilities professionals can work more effectively and efficiently using mobile technology

WHAT IS MOBILE WORKING AND WHY IS IT ON THE RISE?

The revolution of mobile technology has played a dramatic role in the way we operate on a daily basis, at work and in our personal lives. Individuals are working flexibly and remotely, approaching work in a new, more fluid manner, which fits their own requirements as well as that of the business.

Technology has been a key enabler of these new ways of working. Smart devices, such as tablets, smartphones and PDAs, offer numerous practical benefits, whether it's monitoring daily budgets, staying connected through social networks, or being able to access and complete work while on the move. Thanks to the advent of cloud computing and the convergence of voice and data communications, work can now be done out of the office as readily as in the office.

According to a recent YouGov survey, almost half (47 per cent) of employees reported that they currently use their personal devices for work and 55 per cent of senior directors now rely on smartphones to manage their day-to-day work.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE ON FACILITIES PROFESSIONALS?

Given the increasing pace of technological change, many organisations are opting for solutions including facilities management software, that minimise capital investment, rollout time and training. The most significant development in FM and related software over the last 10 years has been the rise of applications that run on web browsers.

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN MOBILE TECHNOLOGY AND CLOUD COMPUTING?

Cloud computing, which is essentially the supply of IT infrastructure and software over the internet, has been widely adopted. Businesses of every size are welcoming the flexibility of cloud computing and benefitting from reduced costs, increased productivity and speed to market.

The web, cloud and mobile technologies complement each other. A facilities manager can log or report on a job anywhere, not just at their desk, and can be alerted to issues while on the move. Since maintenance and upgrades happen centrally, adjustments and improvements are available immediately to the end-user. The field service industry, and FM profession in particular, is benefiting from cloud-based solutions combined with mobile solutions. Whether the priority is avoiding service level agreement (SLA) penalties, minimising driving time between calls, or securing first-time fixes, the software can calculate the ideal route, identify the best-qualified technician to send and ensure the relevant parts are available – all in real-time.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A MOBILE SOLUTION?

A move to a truly mobile solution for a facilities management professional means much more than efficient work scheduling or streamlined task logging. The introduction of mobile devices ensures that maintenance professionals can work more cost effectively and efficiently.

The benefits are significant, including:

✔ Logging, receiving and closing jobs in real-time

✔ Taking photos of asset condition and instantaneously uploading to an FM software database in real-time

✔ Capturing signatures to confirm job sign-off

✔ Providing notification to the help desk for replacement parts

✔ Effectively managing workforce allocation, tracking and accountability using GPS

✔ Using QR codes to scan and manage asset data, its service and performance history

✔ Up-skilling staff through online collaboration, giving operatives the ability to confer live, onsite with industry experts via video calling facilities such as Skype, thereby increasing the opportunity to secure a first-time fix

✔ Viewing online reports on the move for improved decision making and performance management

All of which means that the facilities management profession can reap considerable rewards from the use of mobile technology; enabling a more effective and efficient way of managing work on the move, delivering far-reaching operational improvements, as well as supporting strategic decision making both departmentally and business wide.

WHAT HARDWARE AND OPERATING SYSTEM SHOULD I USE?

With a mobile implementation, consideration needs to be given to both the operating system under which the FM application runs and the choice of hardware. In terms of operating systems, the main choices are essentially between Android, Apple's iOS and Microsoft's Windows, since the more mainstream your choice, the more functionality you will receive. But given that it is an era of bring your own device to work (especially where security needs to be carefully considered) it may be difficult to limit the number of operating systems within an organisation, with fragmentation possibly creating management, support and application distribution problems.

With hardware, the key trend for mobile working is the move away from bespoke devices to consumer technologies, except in specialised applications. And by running FM applications on a smartphone or tablet, users need just one device for all their day-to-day activities, including email, internet browsing and navigation. Ruggedised devices may be appropriate in harsh environments.

HOW DO I GO ABOUT CHOOSING A SOFTWARE/APPLICATION PROVIDER?

When selecting mobile applications to maximise the efficiency and productivity of FM and field staff, consideration should be given to numerous factors including:

✔ The breadth of the provider's portfolio of available pre-built mobile apps

✔ Ease of configuration of mobile apps (whether the apps are deployable on a wide variety of mobile devices and operating systems)

✔ How fully and easily the mobile apps can be integrated with back-end systems

✔ Ease of adding features and functionality to the solution without having to deploy extensive upgrades

Other areas of functionality to consider include the ability to read barcodes and QR codes for tracking and managing asset data and location mapping with GPS and GIS applications.

This article is based on a new guide from Service Works Group Mobile Technology: A Global Maintenance Management Trend. To receive your copy, please email info@swg.com or call +44 (0)20 8877 4080.