

# Web-Based **REVOLU**

## A 'Window of Opportunity' for the Water Treatment Service Industry

**T**he media predicts that virtually all work as we know it soon will be Web-based and wireless. With the proliferation of PDAs and cell phones, and with their continually decreasing costs, this statement is hard to refute. An article published in *Software Technology* magazine stated that to characterize this new technology as a "revolution" is an understatement. Rather it is a "cataclysmic change."<sup>1</sup>

Whether revolution or cataclysm, the Web-based and wireless technology radically will change our work environment and opportunities. Most industries currently are evaluating how to take advantage of the new technology. Servicing water treatment equipment, PDAs, cell phones and the Web environment truly are great opportunities. The Internet permits this industry to cost-effectively solve problems that have long created inefficiencies and costly remedies.

By their very nature, field service industries involve a myriad of logistical problems that so far did not have cost-effective technology solutions. Only Herculean effort allows many companies to run operations effectively and profitably. The following set of "tough problems" will give readers an idea how complex the problems are that these companies face.

Water treatment companies share the following problems of any field service company with varying difficulty and cost.

- Creating efficient dispatching schedules while handling emergency calls and making dynamic changes to the schedule.
- Creating and continually changing complex geographic routes and assigning the right technician to the right customer.
- Maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction, which is dependent on rapid response time, availability of the needed parts and the right technicians.

- Maintaining good communication among field personnel, customers and the dispatcher.
- Insuring effective inventory availability and tracking against work orders.
- Providing accurate contract maintenance including warranty, service, preventive maintenance and time blocking.

# and Wireless SOLUTIONS

- Maintaining complete and accurate history of service.
  - Providing accurate and prompt invoicing for time and materials work.
  - Measuring productivity of technicians.
  - Determining profitability by job, customer and technician.
- the dispatcher to click and drag the service call to a technician, date and time;
  - the technician to retrieve the service order by wireless phone;
  - the technician and the dispatcher to communicate via the Web page;
  - the technician to wirelessly check service history and inventory availability;
  - the technician to wirelessly order needed parts;
  - the dispatcher to reschedule the job when the part is received;
  - communication of job status with the customer via the Internet;
  - the technician to wirelessly close the work order;
  - closed work orders to appear on the accounting screen for invoicing, applying to the contract and/or job costing;
  - and, overall, to insure the rapid and accurate flow of accounting data from service order to accounts receivable to general ledger.

Above all, these tasks must be tightly integrated with the firm's financial software and reporting systems.

The field service industry including water treatment companies consists of more than 800,000 companies. Most of them address the aforementioned challenges every day. These difficulties, inherent to the industry, make ideal candidates for Web-based and wireless solutions. The technology "fixes" the processes. In real-time, daily transaction information immediately is accessible among office, field staff and customers.

The sea change revolution of the Web-based and wireless technology offers a plethora of systems solutions. They enable

- customers to report their service problems via the corporate Web page;

As a net result companies enjoy greater efficiency, more profitability and enhanced productivity reporting.

Web-Based and wireless technology promises to revolutionize the way field service companies operate. PDAs and wireless Internet access will enhance their potential to compete and grow because the technology enables the handling of more work with less effort and greater customer satisfaction. The positive results benefit the bottom line directly in an industry in which profit margins often are slim.

Field service companies need to aggressively pursue the opportunity offered by this new advance in technology. The opportunity is there, but as with any technological solution it is essential that companies match their specific needs to the solutions offered. Companies need solution providers who understand both the technology and the specific needs of the water treatment industry.

Today, Web-based and wireless field service solutions are available from vendors familiar with the water service industry. These software developers seized the

opportunity to bring to the market solutions that address the industry's needs. Leading service companies will take advantage of this "window of opportunity" and transform available software technology into highly profitable solutions.

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#### About the Author

Lorraine Keating is president of Prism Visual Software. Prism Visual Software has been developing software products for the

product delivery and field service industries for more than 12 years. Prism's industry-specific products integrate with off-the-shelf accounting software from AccountMate Software Corp. The equipment servicing software products continually are enhanced to offer the industry the best of the current technology as it fits the industry's needs. All of Prism's products are Web-based, wireless and combine operations and financials.

For more information on this subject, write in 1011 on the reader service card.

<sup>1</sup> EBN, DSP Expert, Delagi, Greg, December 11, 2000, p. 34