

Field Service: the forgotten workforce?

A report by WorkMobile



WorkMobile
OUTSIDE DATA | INSIDE KNOWLEDGE

Published May 2022
workmobileforms.com

Field Service: the forgotten workforce?

A report by WorkMobile, an award-winning mobile data capture solution

Introduction

Managing field service employees effectively has long presented a headache for businesses. Scheduling conflicts, communication problems, work order management issues, inefficient data collection and poor data analysis are all rife and have a serious impact on productivity, efficiency and customer satisfaction.

With the advent of digital technology - particularly cloud-based technology -

we might expect many of these issues to be a thing of the past, with many tools and solutions designed to tackle them now readily available. However, this doesn't seem to be the case. According to recent research by Verizon Connect, 56% of field service businesses have difficulty meeting customer expectations, 48% are struggling with reduced profit margins, and 38% with scheduling and dispatching inefficiencies.

continued overleaf...



"We spoke to 500 CIOs to uncover the challenges they are facing and to 250 field workers about their experiences"

So why are so many businesses still finding it so hard to make their field service operations run smoothly, despite the huge attention that has been given to enterprise mobility over the past two years thanks to the pandemic?

IT teams have suddenly been faced with the challenge of enabling typically, office-based workers to work either entirely remotely, or to switch seamlessly between home and the office.

either entirely remotely, or to switch seamlessly between home and the office. However, field workers have always spent the majority of their time away from the office; have their needs historically been given the same attention?

Or have IT teams now been woken up to the possibilities available thanks to the impact of Covid on other employees?

In this report, we will establish what types of technology field workers are currently using, and even whether they're using technology at all. We also want to know whether they have ever felt overlooked when it comes to IT, and if they feel that this prevents them from doing their jobs to the best of their ability.



About Workmobile

WorkMobile is an award-winning mobile data capture app enabling staff working remotely to digitally record all essential business data. This can include any kinds of forms you have with the ability to make complex calculations, embed Photos, Video, Audio, Signatures, GPS Locations, Barcodes, Maps, Dates, and Timestamps.

It also has the feature of a Job Dispatcher and Document Share function, allowing you to effectively communicate with your remote staff.

When the data is transmitted back to your central information hub, it can then be used in a variety of ways, enabling you to create all kinds of improved Workflows, Reports, Business Intelligence Dashboards, Alerts and Notifications - and all in real-time.

The WorkMobile Enterprise Edition enables IT Managers to easily create their own Mobile App to make better workflows and management tools for their business.

With Low or No Coding or Capex required our simple Drag and Drop App Builder can accommodate both simple and the most complex of requirements. Stored securely in the cloud this central hub of information can be accessed, shared and integrated with any current systems you have.

Available on every type of mobile device and covering all manner of industries, WorkMobile are specialists in data capture and have helped 100's of companies realise significant cost savings and improved workflows.

Key Findings

To gain an insight into the feelings of field service professionals towards IT and technology, we spoke to 250 field workers, all employed by businesses that have an IT department, about their experiences with technology at work both pre- and post-pandemic. We also spoke to 500 CIOs to uncover the challenges they are facing, particularly when developing and implementing mobile solutions, and how this is impacting the field workers within their organisations.

What we found:

- **27%** of field service workers use no technology at all
- Only **36%** currently use a digital data capture app
- Only half of businesses have implemented new tech for field workers since the start of the pandemic
- **53%** of field workers feel like their needs are overlooked by their company's IT department, in comparison to home or office-based employees
- Only **17%** of field workers feel they are regularly given the opportunity to provide feedback on tech used in the field, and only **16%** say that they feel very listened to when they give feedback
- **25%** have needed to make a complaint regarding the implementation of new tech

Current State of play

Given the fact that digital transformation has been a prominent buzz word in almost every industry for many years now, it is easy to assume that the vast majority of businesses, especially those with a dedicated IT department, will have made some investment in technology to improve the productivity and effectiveness of their field service employees.

There is an ever-increasing array of digital tools and software available on

the market, many of which are designed specifically with field workers in mind, as well as more generic tools used to facilitate easier collaboration between employees across the whole business.

Alternatively, businesses can choose to develop their own bespoke digital solutions in-house. However, our research revealed that uptake of technology in this area is still surprisingly low.

Worryingly, more than a quarter (**27%**) of field service professionals surveyed said that they currently use no digital technologies while out in the field. Amongst the remaining **73%**, the most widely used technologies were instant messaging apps (**58%**), and video conferencing (**44%**). From this, it would seem that businesses are prioritising speedy communication when it comes to implementing technology.

While quick communication is vital and will be having a positive impact on aspects of field service like workflow management, the data shows that a significant number of businesses are overlooking another, equally as important aspect of the role: data collection. According to the data, only **24%** are currently making use of a digital data collection solution or app. Of those, just **37%** have rolled out bespoke solutions.

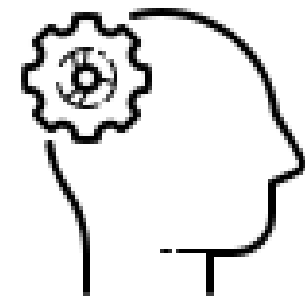
This suggests that many field service workers are still reliant on paper forms and reports to record data while in the field, which will be having a serious impact on these employees and the organisations they work for.

27% of field service workers use no technology at all

64% do not use a digital data capture app

53% of field service workers feel their needs are overlooked

76% do not make use of their solution



Colin Yates, chief support officer at WorkMobile

“Not only does a large amount of paperwork create an unnecessary administrative burden, but it also comes with far greater risk of inaccuracy and non-compliance than digital solutions, and can be difficult - and expensive - to organise and store safely. In turn, these outdated processes have the potential to further compromise the productivity of an already overstretched workforce.”

“Digital data collection, on the other hand, greatly enhances both the quantity and quality of data available, while also making field workers’ lives easier. The insights provided by this wealth of new data can enable businesses to make more informed decisions quicker regarding day-to-day operations, helping to save both time and money.”

A breakdown in communication

Although the pandemic presented some extremely difficult challenges for many companies, research by LSE found that Covid-19 spurred a wave of new technology adoption by UK businesses, with at least 75% adopting productivity-enhancing technologies following the start of the pandemic. Technologies for remote working were the most frequently adopted, either alone or in conjunction with other technologies, including online sales, cloud, data analytics and cyber security.

However, our research revealed that only **50%** of businesses have introduced new technologies specifically for field-based employees since the beginning of the pandemic. In light of this, it is unsurprising that around half (**53%**) of field workers said that they feel like their needs are overlooked by their company's IT department in comparison to office-based employees.

A lack of communication was an issue for many respondents, with **42%** stating that they don't receive regular communications from their company's IT department, or other areas of the business regarding the technologies they are expected to use. At the same time, just **18%** of those surveyed said that they are frequently given the opportunity to provide feedback to their IT department regarding those technologies, while **37%** said that they are given the opportunity rarely or never.

A breakdown in communication

Even more worryingly, when asked if they feel that changes are made to the technologies they use based on the feedback they give, only **16%** of field workers said that they feel listened to. Around half (**57%**) said that changes are sometimes made, but they can take a long time to be implemented, but **27%** said that they don't feel like their feedback is ever taken into account.

53% of field workers feel their needs are overlooked

37% said they are rarely given the opportunity to feedback

27% felt their feedback is taken into account

16% of field workers said that they feel very listened to

Colin Yates, chief support officer at WorkMobile

“Our research highlights a widespread breakdown of the relationship between IT departments and field service workers. Many businesses have proven since the pandemic that they have the capability to innovate quickly when needed but are still failing to apply this to their field service teams.

“If businesses want their field workers to perform to the best of their ability and consistently use digital solutions to their fullest extent, it’s essential that all of their employees feel listened to. Without proactively and reactively communicating with field

service workers, there’s a risk that they will disengage, and business performance will be negatively impacted.

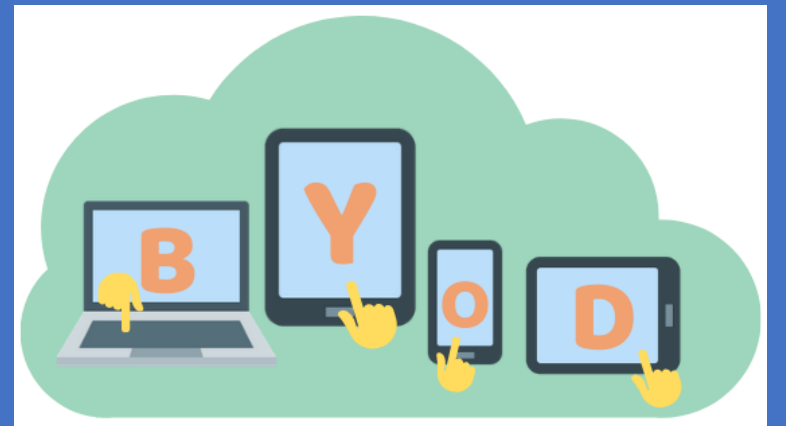
“As we will explore in the next section, IT teams are under a huge amount of pressure that is contributing to this perceived feeling of neglect, however it’s important for them to remember that the end user is by far in the best position to provide constructive feedback regarding digital tools and solutions, so they should always take any comments they receive seriously and act on them wherever possible.”

CIO's: pressures from above and below

In order to establish why there is such a lack of communication between IT teams and field service workers, we asked CIOs from a range of sectors about the struggles and challenges they are currently experiencing. This revealed that nine out of 10 **(90%)** feel that they are under intense and varied pressures from the rest of the C-suite.

Nearly half (**48%**) are expected to enable employees to work remotely more easily, and **35%** are under pressure to facilitate a 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) policy. A further **32%** are expected to improve data collection across the business, while **14%** are facing demands to enable more efficient communication between employees.

However, their concerns are far from limited to enterprise mobility management. CIOs are also expected to play a key role in helping their businesses work towards a number of other strategic goals.



CIO's: pressures from above and below

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of cyber-attacks on UK businesses, with government figures showing nearly 40% faced an attack in 2021. Consequently, **37%** of CIOs surveyed said they are under pressure to protect their business from cyber threats.

More than a third (**34%**) of CIOs are also expected to improve the efficiency of the business by helping to streamline business operations. Achieving all of this is no mean feat, particularly when **44%** of CIOs are expected to do so while adhering to restrictive budget constraints.

48% expected to enable employees to work remotely more easily

35% are under pressure to facilitate BYOD policies

32% are expected to improve data collection across the business

14% are facing demands to enable more efficient communications between employees

37% of CIO's surveyed are under pressure to protect the business from cyber attacks

34% of CIO's are expected to improve efficiency

44% expected to do so within restrictive budget constraints

Meeting the needs of the end user

While they must of course always strive to meet the expectations of senior members of the organisation, CIOs must also ensure that they are balancing the needs of the business with the employee experience, or risk rising levels of employee dissatisfaction and possibly even higher levels of staff turnover.

In theory, mobile apps offer the

ideal solution for many of these pressures and expectations that CIOs are facing, particularly when it comes to field-based workers. When implemented correctly, they can enable remote working for employees, regardless of where they are based, facilitate digital data collection that can often be downloaded to employees' own devices, simplify communication, and even

improve information security.

However, while mobile apps may satisfy the demands of the C-suite, the research revealed that a staggering **88%** of CIOs have received complaints from end users regarding their mobile solutions. The two most common issues reported by workers are that their business's mobile apps are difficult to navigate, and don't

Meeting the needs of the end user

function in areas of low or no connectivity, with **35%** of CIOs having received complaints related to these problems.

Nearly a third (**31%**) of CIOs have been told that their mobile apps offer a poor user experience, while more than a quarter (**26%**) have received complaints from employees because apps are not sufficiently tailored to their specific needs.

Other commonly reported problems include that the apps are not updated frequently enough and that they can only be used on company-owned devices, which **19%** of CIOs have received complaints about. A further **16%** have encountered difficulties due to apps not being compatible with all operating systems.

But what's behind these complaints?

88% of CIOs have received complaints from end users regarding their mobile solutions.

31% of CIOs have been told that their mobile apps offer a poor user experience.

26% have received complaints from employees because apps are not sufficiently tailored to their specific needs.

19% that the apps are not updated frequently enough and that they can only be used on company-owned devices.

Barriers to in-house mobile app development

Generally, there are three options available to CIOs when it comes to the implementation of mobile solutions: develop them in-house, outsource their development to an external agency, or purchase solutions off-the-shelf.

A key advantage of in-house development is that it should be possible to create apps that are tailored to meet the specific

needs of that company's employees, which may differ from the needs of those doing similar roles in other organisations. However, according to our research, **85%** of CIOs face significant barriers that affect their ability to successfully develop mobile apps in-house.

The digital skills shortage is one of the biggest challenges

businesses across all sectors are currently trying to overcome; according to the European Commission, there are currently as many as **756,000** unfilled roles in the European IT sector.

With mobile apps now so prevalent in both our personal and professional lives mobile development is a particularly in-demand skill. It's therefore somewhat unsurprising that **36%**

Barriers to in-house mobile app development

of CIOs claim that their teams do not have the coding skills or expertise required to develop enterprise mobile apps in-house, and nearly half (**47%**) say that they have found it difficult to recruit new employees with the right skills.

However, the necessary technical capabilities are not the only requirement for successful app development. IT teams are often very overstretched, and **38%** of those surveyed admitted to not having the time or capacity to develop mobile apps in-house.

As a result of these barriers, many businesses instead choose to outsource the development of their apps, or purchase ready made products, but all three of these approaches present their own set of challenges for CIOs.

36% of CIOs claim that their teams do not have the coding skills or expertise required.

47% say that they have found it difficult to recruit new employees with the right skills.

38% admitted to not having the time or capacity to develop mobile apps in-house.

In-house development: where do the problems lie?

According to our research, the biggest challenges when it comes to developing apps in-house come down to timing. Nearly two-thirds (**63%**) of CIOs have experienced difficulties developing apps in-house within a particular timeframe.

As a result, more than half (**56%**) have been forced to abandon the development of a mobile app before completion due to issues

around the speed and build of deployment.

Thanks to the time-consuming nature of mobile app development, it can also be difficult to keep solutions regularly updated, with a fifth (**20%**) of those surveyed having experienced problems ensuring their apps are nimble enough to meet changing business requirements.

These difficulties with timings are likely to be a major contributing factor to the financial concerns that are also commonplace; our research showed that **36%** of CIOs admit to having struggled to develop apps within a particular budget.

BYOD policies, while highly sought-after by both businesses and employees, can cause additional headaches for CIOs

In-house development: where do the problems lie?

when it comes to developing mobile solutions. According to our research, nearly a third (**30%**) have found it difficult to develop apps for a range of operating systems.

Security is another key concern, with a third (**33%**) of CIOs struggling to ensure that data stored within their apps is secure,

while a quarter (**25%**) worry about whether or not their apps adhere to regulatory compliance.

Understandably, data security and regulatory compliance are both a particular priority for CIOs in the debt collection industry, due to the highly sensitive nature of their work, with **50%** of those surveyed reporting difficulties.

63% of CIOs have experienced difficulties developing apps in-house

56% have been forced to abandon the development of a mobile app before completion

36% of CIOs admit to having struggled to develop apps within a particular budget.

30% have found it difficult to develop apps for a range of operating systems.

Why outsourcing isn't always the answer

Given all these difficulties inherent with in-house development, outsourcing to an app development agency or purchasing an off-the-shelf product may seem like a preferable alternative. However, 83% of CIOs that we surveyed confessed to having experienced difficulties with externally developed solutions too.

There are a number of areas in which the two options' shortcomings overlap. For example, a fifth (**20%**) of CIOs have had trouble implementing a BYOD policy with external products, and nearly a quarter (**23%**) have found that they are not nimble enough to meet changing business requirements.

Cost is also a major concern again, with **40%** reporting difficulties adhering to financial budgets when paying for someone else to develop apps for them. This is understandable, given that many businesses will require a number of different apps for employees in different functions, meaning the expense can quickly add up.

Why outsourcing isn't always the answer

However, they also present their own unique, equally significant, set of challenges.

The most pressing of which, according to **42%** of CIOs, is an insufficient level of technical support and maintenance, which can cause significant problems for the end user.

Nearly two fifths (**39%**) of those surveyed have experienced difficulties ensuring that apps are tailored to meet the needs of their employees, suggesting it can be hard to accurately convey specific needs to an external development agency, or find an off-the-shelf app that is flexible enough.

Integration is also a big problem for many CIOs, which can lead to operational inefficiencies within a business.

According to our research, a fifth (**20%**) have struggled to integrate apps with their back-end systems, and **16%** have struggled to successfully integrate different apps with each other.

Attitudes to new technology

When looking at the challenges faced by IT departments, it becomes easy to see why so many CIOs have been experiencing complaints from employees regarding their mobile solutions, and why so many field workers reported a lack of attention and communication.

When looking at the challenges faced by IT departments, it becomes easy to see why so many CIOs have been experiencing

complaints from employees regarding their mobile solutions, and why so many field workers reported a lack of attention and communication.

When asked to describe their feelings towards the roll out of new technologies many seemed apprehensive, with more than a third (**35%**) saying that they are generally reluctant to embrace them, and the majority (**55%**) that they think it can cause problems if

they're not implemented carefully. Some of this may be linked to a lack of support from the business during the roll out, with **41%** of those surveyed saying that they don't feel they are given enough help and support when they are expected to start using a new piece of technology or digital solution. As a result, **32%** of field workers also stated that they often struggle to learn how to use new technologies.

Effectiveness of current solutions

Not only is the lack of attention having an impact on employee morale, but it also means that the technologies used are not necessarily having the desired impact on business operations, rendering any attempts at digital transformation within field service less effective than they should be.

Very few field workers (**28%**) said that technology enhances their

day-to-day life, and one in 10 (**10%**) even said that it prevents them from doing their job to the best of their ability. Less than half believe that it improves efficiency (**44%**) or productivity (**36%**) – two of the key benefits of carefully chosen and implemented digital tools – and just **12%** think that it positively impacts customer relationships.

However, the good news is that only **7%** of field workers think that the traditional way of operating is more effective, while **45%** of respondents said that they appreciate the benefits of new technologies, suggesting that the situation could be improved, provided the right tools are implemented with a good level of support and guidance from elsewhere in the business.

Colin Yates, chief support officer at WorkMobile

"It's important to bear in mind that while digital transformation makes companies more profitable, enhances the customer experience and enables them to keep up with competitors, it should also always improve the employee experience. If a new technology will not ultimately make the daily responsibilities of employees simpler or more efficient (following the appropriate training), then it is not the right technology for that business and will likely not be a success in the long run."

28% said that technology enhances their day-to-day life

44% less than half believe that it improves efficiency

12% think that it positively impacts customer relationships

The no-code revolution

While advances in technology have undoubtedly made mobile apps more accessible than ever, it's apparent from our research that the three most common approaches to implementation still leave a lot to be desired as far as the end user is concerned, while also failing to meet the needs of the business and causing additional challenges for already stretched CIOs.

But how can CIOs provide their employees with perfectly tailored, secure, easy to use apps that can be updated regularly and don't break the bank? The answer may lie in no code development.

Colin Yates, chief support officer at WorkMobile

"A no code development platform is a development platform that uses a visual development environment to allow users to create apps, often through a drag and drop method, adding various app components to create a complete app.

"As the name would suggest, with no code development platforms, users don't require any prior

coding knowledge to create a mobile app. They therefore enable users to sidestep many of the typical issues associated with both in-house development and off-the-shelf products.

"With apps designed and created by an in-house team, they are always built with the specific end users in mind, which should help to ensure a consistently positive

experience for employees and help to minimise any frustrations that can arise from off-the-shelf or externally designed solutions.

"Until now, many businesses have adopted a 'multi app strategy' which forces end users to flip from one app to another depending on the activity they are undertaking. With no code development platforms, businesses can ensure

Colin Yates, chief support officer at WorkMobile

each employee is expected to use as few apps as possible, making their work life easier.

“These platforms can also be used to build and update apps far more quickly than traditional methods. This keeps costs as low as possible, eases the burden on overstretched IT teams, and means any issues that are reported by users can be resolved

more swiftly. It also enables CIOs and their teams to be far more agile when faced with changing business requirements.

“However, choosing the right platform is essential. If selected carefully, businesses should find that robust security measures are in built automatically, and they may even be able to find a platform that helps them to ensure

apps adhere regulatory compliance for their particular industry.

“They should also be sure to choose a platform that allows them to build apps for a variety of devices and operating systems, in order to support any existing or future BYOD policy that the business may have in place.”

The no-code revolution

Despite offering a seemingly ideal alternative method of enterprise mobile app development, surprisingly many CIOs are yet to explore the option for their business.

When asked, nearly two thirds (**64%**) said they would be interested in using a toolkit that allowed them to build their own enterprise mobile apps

with no coding requirements but hadn't yet done so.

While uptake is currently relatively low, our research implies that perceptions of no coding app builders among CIOs are generally positive.

We found that:

28% think that these tools would help to reduce the workload for their team

44% believe they would make it easier for them to meet the expectations of the senior leadership team

12% think that no coding app builders would enable their team to implement enterprise mobile apps more quickly

12% think they would help their team to adhere to financial budgets more easily.

The no-code revolution

This suggests that, given a nudge in the right direction, many CIOs would be open to trying a no coding platform for their business, and may find that it relieves many of the headaches they currently experience when implementing mobile apps as part of their enterprise mobility strategy.

A range of no coding platforms are now available, including [WorkMobile Solutions](#), a toolkit that allows businesses to quickly build apps that enable staff to capture all essential data. The toolkit is therefore ideal for businesses requiring multiple solutions for its field-based employees.

Conclusion

Our findings show that many businesses are still yet to invest in the right digital solutions for their field service workforce, and amongst those that have, many are struggling to get it right.

Facing intense pressures from all angles, particularly following the pandemic, it's not surprising that IT departments are paying more attention to certain areas of the business than others.

However, with the right toolkit, it's possible to quickly and easily develop bespoke solutions that will help to unleash the full potential of field service teams, and give IT departments more capacity to really listen to the needs of end users.

Something has to change if CIOs are to satisfy the needs of all employees and the rest of the C-suite.

No-coding app development platforms, if chosen carefully, should enable CIOs to do just that, while also easing many of the challenges that currently stem from existing methods of implementation.

