

Text messaging for businesses climbs

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Customer-service technicians at Kodak photo developing units glance at their mobile phones when they receive a text message from their dispatcher. They get reminders, directions and instructions for their next project, and then go out and complete the assignment, wirelessly. It's an increasingly common scenario for businesses, experts tell UPI's Wireless World.

Research released this past spring shows that corporations are stepping up their usage of text messaging. A study by the Business Network indicates that companies will send about 1.4 billion text messages this year, double the amount of text messages sent by mobile phones last year.

Another study by the consultancy AT Kearney indicates that business communications are likely to be the next major area for growth of text messaging -- a field that has been propelled by teenagers during its brief history.

"Small- to medium-sized businesses want the ability to know, instantly, what is happening in their mobile operations and want to respond to frontline needs in a timely manner," Tim Bradley, chief executive officer of AirClic, a provider of mobile process automation software and solutions based in Newtown, Pa., told Wireless World.

This week AirClic debuted a new technology called the AirClic MP Xpress, a solution designed to capture data about mobile activities and assets and text message them back to a call center or headquarters, all in

real time. The technology is based on a combination of software and hardware and is being used by customers for an array of business activities like inventory tracking, asset tracking, proof-of-delivery, time tracking and security, said Bradley.

One customer is using the text-messaging-style technology to download customer orders in the field. "Before, when we downloaded more than 30 orders at the end of the day, we'd then scramble to get each order ready for delivery the next day," Jim Hegedus, president of Unlimited Supplies, told Wireless World. Now, "we receive orders from our sales representatives throughout the day and can fill them as soon as they come in."

That, he added, has helped streamline business processes, improve overall productivity, and even increase customer service.

The technology developed by AirClic works with Nextel phones and Motorola accessories, said Bradley.

But high-tech manufacturers are not the only ones embracing text messaging. Another field that is employing the technology is real estate. CellSigns, by Philadelphia-based Qwasi Inc., is the real-estate industry's only interactive lead-generation system that empowers buyers to receive property information via text messaging and qualifies leads for agents.

"Real-estate agents can't afford to waste time creating and copying brochures to fill brochure boxes. We may not be available to take phone calls or answer questions about our listings. Unfortunately, today's buyer will not always wait for a call back. They will call another agent," said Dave Geipel, co-founder of Qwasi and himself a real-estate agent.

But those impatient buyers can -- with a service announced this week -- be reached with text messaging. They can retrieve property information

on their cell phones, interact with the listing agent, request more information and schedule showings, all with a text message.

There are other business benefits of text messaging. "Now agents can manage more prospects more efficiently than ever before," said Geipel. "They can capture prospective buyers with the information, speed, convenience and follow-up that consumers have come to expect."

The best thing about text messaging, experts Wireless World, is that the questions can be answered when the recipient has a moment, not at that second as when a phone is ringing.

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