



Handhelds, What Does the Future Hold?

This is probably one of the most common questions I get from clients. As our personal business lives become more consumed with smart phones and tablets; from starting your car to turning on the crock pot all from work it is natural to continue to ask the question, what else they can do for us at work.

Many of you may remember I did a [Tip of the Month](#) on handheld's and it speared a lot of discussion about all of the natural concerns and problems organizations are being challenged with like durability and internet security. I strongly believe if you are going to use any type of handheld it needs to be wireless and be able to update data information in 'real time'. I feel the web-based system will be the most favorable in the long run. I do believe for the maintenance world handhelds are *inevitable*.

- They are just too easy, fast, and convenient not to be used by our maintenance teams
- For your reactive and unplanned work, they can be a big help in assigning and dispatching work
- It can have a positive effect on work response times and ultimately your customer satisfaction

Let's get distracted a little and get off of topic somewhat. I am hearing some rumblings from many organizations I talk with, they are considering going back to paper! Yes, I said it, going back to paper. I know that seems crazy but they are finding that unless you have a large tablet or laptop the technicians are not following directions and checklists because the screens are too small to be easily read. And, entering information with those big maintenance fingers is not working too well. In short, what they are doing is going back to paper for all non-reactive work like preventive and predictive maintenance and low priority routine corrective work. That way the technician has an easy to read paper work order with his instructions, paper check sheets for PM's, attached pictures and drawings, and an easy place for them to sign their name once the work is completed which takes care of the accountability component.

So back on topic now, I think the thing to consider is to set-up handhelds for your reactive workers and use them as your beta test group. I would also add your maintenance supervisors and lead technicians to the list so they can keep up-to-date on the status of incoming work and also assist them with keeping up with who is assigned what reactive work requests.

The next big problem you will run into when you begin talking about handhelds is; [Can my existing Computerized Maintenance Management System \(CMMS\) handle the use of handhelds?](#) Many say they can but there quite a few out there that are struggling with the handheld component. So a couple things to consider if you are starting the handheld debate:



1. Do I need handhelds for everyone or just management and my reactive workers? *Keep in mind if you are working towards a leading class maintenance team only 15-20% of your employees would need handhelds. The rest could, and maybe should, use paper.*
2. Will my IT computer group allow the maintenance organization to go wireless with 'real time' data transfer?
3. How many broken tablets will my budget allow?
4. Do the screen shots on my desktop PC match the screen shots on my tablet? *This is more important than it sounds, the good systems will match and use the same fields and pull down menus. This makes for a much shorter learning curve.*

Again, I think the use of tablets and the like is inevitable and will improve our overall maintenance performance if we set them up and use them with discipline and accountability. So...

- Spend some time researching the handheld process
- Make sure your CMMS is not part of the problem, and
- Find a way to perform field testing before you jump into the deep water.

Keep your eyes and ears open because who knows what the next gadget is going to be.