

# ENTERPRISE MOBILITY FOR SUPPLY CHAIN ORGANIZATIONS: MAKING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WORK FOR YOUR BUSINESS



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Two interconnected technology trends—enterprise mobility and digital transformation—are well underway in large enterprises today. Market research firm Global Market Insights forecasts that the market valuation of enterprise mobility will cross \$11 billion by 2026.<sup>1</sup> IT industry analyst firm IDC predicts that worldwide spending on digital transformation will reach \$2.3 trillion in 2023.<sup>2</sup>

Companies making these investments focus not only on empowering workers with the right mobile devices, but also on understanding the impact of digital transformation on their business operations and their customers.

Companies of all sizes recognize the importance of the intersection of enterprise mobility and digital transformation. But unlike large organizations, small and midsize businesses (SMBs) don't have the budgets and tech resources of their bigger counterparts to invest in a complete digital overhaul in how they operate.

That doesn't mean SMBs must forego the advantages of mobility and digital transformation. In fact, SMBs can use enterprise mobility as an initial first step toward modernizing how they work.

The good news is that with cloud-based apps, wireless connectivity and powerful, rugged mobile devices, mobile-driven digital transformation is well within reach for SMBs. Experienced enterprise mobility technology providers with industry expertise are ready to help you get there with the right mobile technology, apps and an ecosystem of partners to provide real business solutions.

For regional or light manufacturing, warehouses and distribution centers, and transportation and logistics operators, mobile and digital devices offer significant opportunities. Who wouldn't want to increase productivity and streamline operations?

The challenges lie in moving from tactical mobile projects using consumer-grade devices to an enterprise mobility deployment and fully leveraging the data available "at the edge." That data is the key to improving business performance and customer service.





## WHAT IS THE EDGE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The edge matters because that's where your mobile workers are—at the edge of the network. Are you turning that to your advantage?

Ask yourself this: How do you handle rush orders that arrive in the middle of the day? If your warehouse or production staff pulled batch data on today's orders or tasks at the start of the workday, you do it manually. Same as when you send drivers into the field with a hard copy of the day's run printed or downloaded off the office computer.

When you put today's powerful, rugged mobile devices in their hands, you can empower your remote workforce and energize your business by sending real-time information to where they are doing their jobs. So, you can be agile and responsive to customers, which is the real business value for investing in enterprise mobility.

It works in reverse, too. Today's rugged handhelds and tablets, equipped with barcode scanners, RFID readers, GPS, Bluetooth® and wireless communications, and even thermal imaging technology, function as devices for collecting and communicating data at the edge. Because they are powerful computers, capable of running full-blown applications, they can process data and allow decisions to be made quickly in the field or at the edge before sending the results over the network and back to your enterprise systems.



# ENTERPRISE MOBILITY PROJECTS VS TACTICAL MOBILITY PROJECTS FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The first question you might ask is, "Where do I get started?" The tendency is to focus on a single task or a single problem to be solved, rather than looking at your overall way of working. Maybe you need to replace aging forklift-mounted terminals, or get tablets for your manufacturing floor supervisors, or give your drivers company-owned mobile devices.

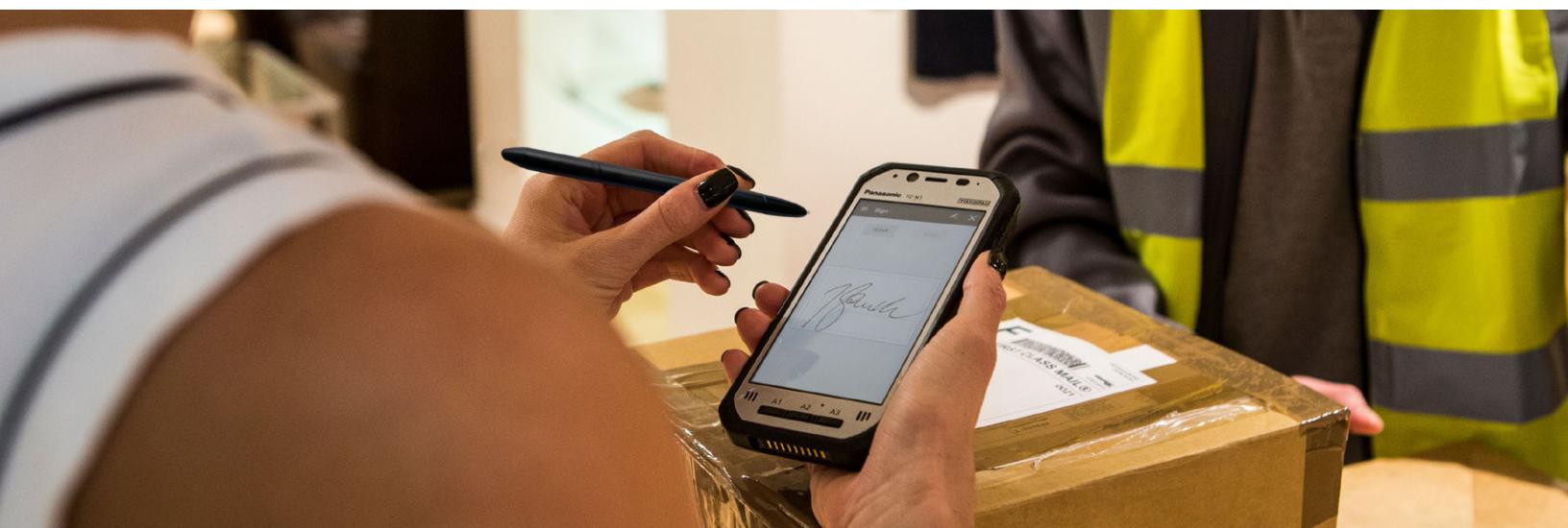
Those are tactical mobility projects. While those tactical single-task fixes are quick and easy in the short term, they do not solve bigger data and workflow challenges. This results in greater inefficiencies over time that eliminate any of the initial cost-cutting benefits tied to this quick fix.

With an enterprise mobility plan, on the other hand, you're taking an end-to-end view of your business processes, both on the front line and in the back office. Here's where working with an experienced mobile technology vendor or partner can help. For example, an experienced mobile technology partner that understands your business can walk you through digitizing paper-based processes incrementally while planning how to connect these processes end to end.

That's enterprise mobility thinking, and it's affordable because you can implement it in stages.

Tactical mobility projects often create a walled garden effect when it comes to sharing data across devices. For example, in the warehouse, you may have an inventory management app that runs on your handheld or tablet devices but is not connected and updating the enterprise eCommerce ordering system. The data may live in the warehouse management system (WMS) and be manually exported and shared at the end of the day—but it's not shared directly with the enterprise eCommerce system via the network.

Taking an enterprise mobility approach to these challenges, however, shares that information in real time and makes workers and operations more efficient. For example, for supply chain companies, once an order enters your business systems, data about it can flow seamlessly in near real time as the order moves through inventory management, warehouse management, order fulfillment, shipping, delivery and billing applications. That way, you and your customer can know the status of that order at any point in time.



The goal is to enable work to be done and processes completed more quickly, efficiently and safely—ultimately leading to cost savings, better customer service and increased revenue.

## Realize Immediate Productivity Benefits with Enterprise Mobility

An enterprise mobility strategy, crafted with help from your technology partners, looks at end-to-end data flows and provides a plan for incremental implementation. But it's important to realize that day-to-day productivity benefits begin accruing as soon as you put powerful, rugged mobile devices into workers' hands.

One of the biggest advantages that Panasonic TOUGHBOOK® devices offer is equipment consolidation—you can cover communications, GPS tracking, barcode reading, driver logging and more with one device.

These benefits are also specific to industry sectors. Transportation, delivery and shippers, for instance, can take advantage of a wealth of mobile apps aimed at increasing the productivity of drivers and deliveries, from point-of-delivery confirmations to getting instructions throughout the day for the next pickup or delivery.

In the warehouse, boosting the speed and accuracy of order picking and packing can reduce labor costs, increase picked-per-hour metrics and improve customer satisfaction. Enterprise mobile tech can help with that. For example, voice picking technology, available from Panasonic, combines the TOUGHBOOK N1, a Bluetooth headset and a customizable software template and directs workers to the right inventory with voice directions keeping hands free for scanning and picking.

Using GPS feeds from rugged mobile tablets to track forklift movement and location can reveal hot spots and inefficiencies to help you design a more productive floor layout. And overall, you get the data you need to measure performance and track critical productivity indicators.



# HOW TO IMPLEMENT AN ENTERPRISE MOBILITY SOLUTION PROGRAM

We've discussed how enterprise mobility can begin with a single project that can put your organization on a path to digital transformation. The difference between enterprise mobility and tactical solutions will depend on the data you can capture with your implementation and ultimately what you do with it. It also depends on empowering your frontline workforce with the right mobile technology to make better decisions.

The goal for your frontline environment is to get to a solution that you can deploy and run for at least a two- or three-year period, with minimal changes or disruptions. This minimizes IT resources focusing on constant device updates and administrative tasks. To do this requires deploying enterprise, purpose-built mobile devices designed with long-life processors and components, as well as vendor support for service and repairs. You also want technology that meets rugged specifications, like MIL-STD-810G. But most importantly, you want technology that will be supported by the manufacturer for the long term, so you can focus on your business.

Here are three things to consider when implementing an enterprise mobility project.

## Beware the “Big-Box Store Solution”

Thinking tactically about mobility often goes hand in hand with what we call “big-box thinking.” That means putting consumer-grade devices into “rugged” cases, downloading apps from the app store, and sending them out into the field or onto the warehouse or factory floor. What could go wrong?

For one thing, you don't know whether the app will work well on the device and with the functionality needed. Also, your ability to customize anything to fit your specific needs is very limited.

The “ruggedness” of the device is another consideration. A consumer device in a rugged case may claim military drop specs, but devices built from the ground up to be rugged go beyond that. Devices purpose-built for harsh, frontline work—like Panasonic TOUGHBOOK—offer features like visibility in sunlight, the ability to use with gloves on, durability and drop resistance, the ability to use while the screen is wet, an easily warm-swap-capable battery, and lack of sensitivity to vibration. Other benefits include various port and input options, as well as superior wireless connectivity.

And then there's longevity and support. Will that same consumer device be available next year or the year after when you expand your program? What will happen when a battery goes bad or a device breaks, or an app freezes and you can't get to your data? Where or how fast will you get support or repairs? All these are things to think about before you make a trip to the big-box store for your business mobile devices.

## Make Enterprise Mobile Deployments Manageable

SMBs may hesitate to move forward with frontline enterprise mobility projects because of limited IT resources. Linking mobile devices with company data flows can create new security risks, for one thing. And adding a new fleet of devices to set up, configure, deploy and manage can seem daunting.

Mobile device management (MDM) software—aka enterprise mobility management (EMM)—can help simplify your move to new enterprise mobility devices and management by giving your IT staff easy-to-use tools. For example, EMM software can track devices in the field and remotely wipe a device should it “wander off.” From the administration tool or console, one person can distribute apps, control who can do what

with any device, push out updates and security fixes, and enforce passwords and data encryption.

Mobile devices like Panasonic TOUGHBOOK tablets and handhelds that are Android™ Enterprise Recommended come with standard features for device management and have been tested and validated to work well with industry-leading EMM solutions.

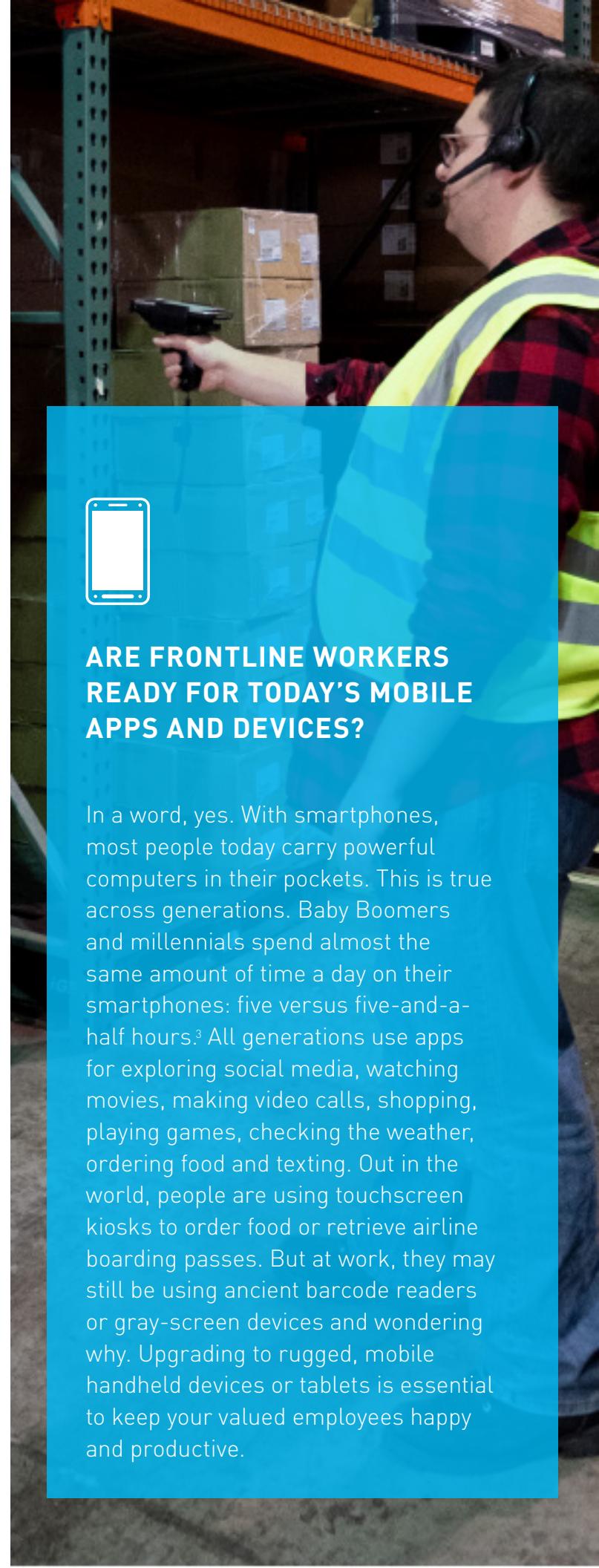
Working with a technology partner who can take care of initial setup and deployment work for you can also help you get started. For example, Panasonic offers kitting and provisioning services that deliver preconfigured devices to the right location, ready to use out of the box.

### **Work with an Industry Specialist**

Partnering with the right mobile tech solutions vendor is the key for organizations that want to pursue enterprise mobility and digital transformation. These solution providers have deep experience deploying mobile devices in businesses and have developed, tested and integrated software platforms and solutions that they can tailor to your specific business requirements.

You want to find a vendor that can address your end-to-end requirements, from the right mobile apps for frontline workers and operational systems like warehouse or transportation management to integration with your back-end systems. The vendor should also be able to provide data and analytics solutions or an ecosystem of partners for software applications.

You also want a vendor that can bring together all of the hardware components you need at the edge, from mobile devices, vehicle docks or mounts, hand straps, and cases to integrated barcode scanners, RFID, networking, printers and more. When you work with an OEM vendor and industry expert, you will get the advantages of enterprise-grade technology that is purpose-built for the rigors of a harsh or demanding environment like a warehouse, a vehicle or a manufacturing line.



### **ARE FRONTLINE WORKERS READY FOR TODAY'S MOBILE APPS AND DEVICES?**

In a word, yes. With smartphones, most people today carry powerful computers in their pockets. This is true across generations. Baby Boomers and millennials spend almost the same amount of time a day on their smartphones: five versus five-and-a-half hours.<sup>3</sup> All generations use apps for exploring social media, watching movies, making video calls, shopping, playing games, checking the weather, ordering food and texting. Out in the world, people are using touchscreen kiosks to order food or retrieve airline boarding passes. But at work, they may still be using ancient barcode readers or gray-screen devices and wondering why. Upgrading to rugged, mobile handheld devices or tablets is essential to keep your valued employees happy and productive.

# THE NEXT STEP IN TRANSFORMATION: PUTTING ALL THAT DATA TO WORK

Once you've made those transformations at the edge, you'll have a wealth of data that you can use to make better decisions and get real-time insights into what's happening in your business. It's not unusual for SMBs to be using spreadsheets to analyze data about their business. There are drawbacks to this approach. For one thing, you are always looking at the past—from last week to last month. Extracting insights is difficult, and spreadsheets are not built to handle the volume and variety of data that will be generated at the edge.

## Drive Performance Improvements with Real-Time Data Insights

The insights you can get from all this data can mean the difference between surviving and thriving in today's competitive environment. For example, one study<sup>4</sup> showed that manufacturers who depend on manual data updates to key functions like inventory control, production reporting and pricing reports are

achieving only 40% of their potential compared to competitors using real-time data.

Shippers can use data insights to increase visibility and expand the reach of operations into the truck, where you can evaluate performance by factors such as driver, type of load, location, route and more—all with an eye toward increasing speed, reducing costs and meeting customer expectations.

In the warehouse or distribution center, every action generates data that can be used to improve processes, whether it's unloading, receiving and transferring goods from truck to storage, picking goods from shelves, or loading orders for delivery. For example, you can identify fast-moving goods and place them nearer to entry or exit points, optimize scheduling, and increase safety by designating "fast" and "slow" areas of the warehouse floor.



## Leveraging the Cloud for Data Analysis

Today's cloud-based data storage and apps make it possible for SMBs to deploy sophisticated data management and analytics tools without large investments in new IT infrastructure. You can use cloud-based data storage to house and manage all that data, for example, and make it available to apps and end-users. There are also cloud-based data integration tools that connect data from all those different systems and formats.

Cloud-based business intelligence and predictive analytics tools offer easy-to-read dashboards—visual displays of data—to help you understand what is happening in your operations now, and what is likely to happen down the road. Predictions could be about impending equipment failures, for example, or surges in demand that will require more resources. Finding the right technology partner who can help you bring it all together, from mobile solutions to analytics, is the critical component for most SMBs.

### TALK WITH OUR EXPERTS

If you would like more information or guidance deploying an enterprise mobility solution from a partner that understands your business, talk to our experts. Panasonic has decades of technology experience with all major industries and applications and has strong relationships with a wide range of industry-vertical solutions providers. Together, we help you deploy Panasonic TOUGHBOOK solutions that deliver enterprise mobility and digital transformation:

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#### Sources

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