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## Warehousing & Distribution Technology

# Sales Tech Update

Tablets and smartphones are helping beverage salespeople make a big impact in field sales calls. **By Dan Alaimo**

Get some tablets and make sales calls in the morning. In essence, that is the advice beverage distributors are getting as mobile technology gets more sophisticated and easier to use. This results in more productive sales calls driven by more and better information.

Devices designed for the consumer market—like tablets and smartphones—have greater versatility and are replacing outdated tools. What they may lack in durability, they make up for with connectivity, relatively low costs, and high-impact and high-information sales presentations. Familiarity with the Android and iOS platforms simplifies training. Vendors also are making advances with compact and wireless printers and the direct store delivery (DSD) software programs that support these new tools.

While rapidly evolving wearable technologies are receiving media attention, and smartphones have become ubiquitous, it's tablets that are best-suited for widespread use in beverage sales and distribution, says Andrew Borg, founder and principal, eC3 Consulting. A smartphone is a sales enablement tool for the individual, while a tablet provides that same capability but in such a way that it can be shared with a small group, he says. "That makes a difference in terms of being responsive to customer needs, with the perception of the vendor as being agile and caring, when the customer is presented with and can interact with their own data. Because of their larger screen real estate, tablets are better for information sharing or collaboration, which can be seen as a competitive advantage for a distributor," he says.

This is part of a larger trend. "The notion of connectivity to all of the elements of the supply chain, in what is

often known as 'The Internet of Things,' or IoT, is absolutely strategic and part of the near-term future for beverage distribution," Borg says. With IoT, "every unit and every distribution point can have sensors that are connected via the Internet for management visibility, which can have quantifiable positive business impact," Borg notes.

For example, if all of the pallets and beverage cases in the delivery truck have RFID tags, and the truck is equipped with an RFID reader, (which enables all the contents of the truck to be tracked and managed in real time), and that data is shared wirelessly to either the corporate data center or a cloud service for the distributor, then sales staff can know the inventory of all of their trucks, as well as the warehouse in real time. "If a customer says, 'I'm out of X beverage, it's been a hot seller during this holiday season,' the salesperson can instantaneously determine whether they have the product on the truck and in what quantity, and if not, when it can be delivered from another truck. Or, if no trucks are available, when the next shipment is scheduled to arrive at the warehouse," he says.

The overlying trend with mobile is having all of the business intelligence about the customer available to the salesperson at the customer interface. "Mobility can provide an advantage to salespeople who can use it to access all of the relevant information about their customer in real time, while they are interacting with the customer. In the near future, as the Internet of Things begins to connect all of the essential elements of the supply chain, it will provide additional opportunity for distributors who can use this as a platform to provide enhanced services, and even new ser-



Route sales forces are transitioning to tablets like Motion Computing's F5-Series Tablet PC, a Barcoding Inc. partner.



The Brother RuggedJet 4™ mobile printers are built tough to meet the needs of beverage sales routes.

vice offerings," Borg says.

Beverage distribution companies are taking a close look at their legacy field technology solutions, says Kenneth Currie, vice president, business development, Barcoding, Inc. "We are seeing prospects and customers and



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participants in this space become more interested in upgrading and refreshing this year than any time in the last five or six years," he says.

Companies that are adopting the new platforms have many choices. "The consumer technology that has arrived in the past few years has changed the game from the sales and merchandising perspective," he notes. The tablet is widely used because it provides a better end-user and customer experience for sales and merchandising personnel.

But the lifecycle of a particular tablet as compared to the older technology is much more compressed, and the platforms are frequently upgraded. "A few years ago, when you bought the traditional rugged mobile technology, it seemed to work forever. Unless there was a serious failure on the hardware or software side, this stuff is kind of bulletproof and just ran and ran and ran," Currie says.

A key trend is the adoption of consumer devices with enhanced user interfaces, says Michael Krumm, director of marketing, Brother Mobile Solutions. "Today's consumer mobile devices have raised the bar on how mobile applications should look and behave. The beverage industry is in the process of adopting these new devices—smartphones and tablets in both iOS and Android—as they involve less training and get the sales and delivery people productive rather quickly."

Mobile wireless handhelds and printers provide great value to beer and beverage distributors. "Before wireless technology became mainstream, the day-to-day delivery pace was more leisurely and hand-written receipts and orders were commonplace. Today's drivers are expected to make more deliveries per day to keep up with demand. Truck-mounted and/or handheld mobile printers are designed to support this demand and here, too, technology has made great strides, resulting in a wide range of rugged, versatile and flexible printing solutions," Krumm notes.

Mike Lowey, mobility solutions sales director at Datamax-O'Neil, confirms the

trend to tablets and smartphones. "Beverage company sales personnel have been using consumer oriented tablets for sales presentations for awhile. That familiarity and experience with consumer devices is leading to phones and tablets being tested with route drivers. The jury is still out on how big a slice of the market these new consumer devices will take, but there is no doubt they are here to stay," he says.

Many beverage companies are focused on making sure that their route salespeople have the tools and technology they need for their specific roles and responsibilities.

"For example, from a device perspective we are seeing companies gravitating their pre-sales reps primarily to full-screen devices, particularly tablets, which provide them with better selling/ordering tools and data, while the focus for deliveries is on rugged, handheld devices that will stand up to the demands required when delivering product," says Brian Schulte, industry marketing manager, Intermec by Honeywell.

### What's Available

**Barcoding, Inc.** is a systems integrator and is now focused on cross-platform go-live and stay-live services, Currie says. "That means we've oriented our company to helping our customers rapidly deploy this technology, whatever the brand or platform or form factor, and then helping them keep it live."

He continues, "The complexity is such that there are so many pieces and parts, life cycles are so short, we have built a service to facilitate our customers being on in the moments that matter, and the moments that matter today are when a sales force is in front of the customer."

A second area of focus for Barcoding, Inc. is the analytics on mobile platforms focused on the effectiveness of the platform, user adoption, and measuring and managing things, Currie says. "Particularly in mobility for beverage distribution, at the end of the day, the success of the business is a measure of labor vs. volume productivity," he notes.



Honeywell's latest mobile computer for DSD routes is the CN51.

**Brother Mobile Solutions** has two new printers useful for beverage route sales personnel. The Brother RuggedJet 4-inch mobile thermal printer series features lightweight, compact units that can be used to print pre-sales documents, delivery receipts, invoices, and return labels to help drivers improve ordering, delivery and billing accuracy. Another option is the Brother PocketJet 6 full-page thermal printers. These compact units are typically mounted within the vehicle and connect wirelessly to laptops and handhelds.

**Datamax-O'Neil One** is focused on Mobile Device Management solutions. "A robust MDM solution solves a number of operational problems experienced by the end user. It allows them to really understand where their devices are located—printers or otherwise—how they are being used and whether they have the most recent software and security settings," Lowey says.

And **Honeywell** offers a wide variety of products suitable for DSD route use, Schulte says, such as the Captuvo line of enterprise sleds. The Captuvo sleds enable Apple products with great scanning capability, additional battery life, protection and optional magstripe readers for payment collection. Honeywell's latest mobile computer for DSD routes is the CN51. Like the Dolphin 70e Black, the CN51 supports Windows Embedded and Android operating systems. In printers Honeywell offers 2-inch wide to full-page printers. 