

ON THE GO

By Deb Canning

Part 1 : Understanding the mobile construction workforce and bottom line benefits

In this first installment of a three-part series, Deb Canning, technical services manager for Computer Guidance Corporation, defines the mobile construction workforce in today's work environment and explains the benefits to a company's bottom line.

Approximately 90 percent of enterprises employ remote workers—those who work outside the traditional office some or all of the time, according to Gartner, Inc., an information technology research and advisory company. In the construction industry, for example, business development executives regularly travel in pursuit of new clients, while project managers move from one jobsite to the next. And today's mobile construction workforce relies on remote access to e-mail, file servers, and business-critical data in order to grow their firm's business and share project management information. However, the use of mobile devices poses security risks that cannot be underestimated.

Consider this: An article published last year in *Network World* (12/05/2007) reported the results of a web survey of 893 information technology professionals, concluding that many mobile workers fail to follow simple data security procedures. Conducted by the Ponemon Institute, a research firm specializing in privacy and information management, the survey found that 39 percent of respondents said they have experienced the loss or theft of a mobile computing device containing sensitive or confidential company data; moreover, 56 percent said their employer would be unable to identify the data that had been on the device. Almost half said they share passwords with coworkers; and 17 percent said they have turned off security settings or a firewall on a workplace computer.



Without the proper precautions, proprietary and/or confidential information, as well as equipment, can be lost or stolen, reducing the company's profitability. That is why construction financial managers need to understand the risks.

TODAY'S MOBILE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Mobile workers create a unique environment that requires different boundaries than the traditional office space. There are a variety of mobile work situations that need to be considered:

- **Jobsite and Remote Office Workers:** Whether mobile workers are at a temporary jobsite or permanently located at a remote site, their managers need to create a productive work environment in order to ensure that project schedules and budgets can be met. Security connectivity to the outside world (Internet and main office) needs to be properly installed and configured. Moreover, special attention must be paid to the physical security of temporary jobsite trailers, which may be especially vulnerable to break-ins and equipment thefts.

ABOUT the AUTHOR



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- **Telecommuters:** Mobile workers who work from home rather than commute to an office need effective telecommunication links. Their work activities are facilitated by technologies such as virtual private networks (VPN) and videoconferencing. As Internet connections become more commonplace, more and more telecommuters have enough bandwidth at home to link their home office to their corporate office networks.
- **Teleworkers:** These mobile workers substitute telecommunications for any type of work-related travel. In addition to effective telecommunication links, a successful teleworker requires a self-starting style, a focus on results, and does not require close scrutiny by company management. (The terms telecommuting and telework were coined by Jack Nilles in 1973.)

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE BOTTOM LINE

Because of the nature of the business, construction companies often employ many mobile workers, who must have access to the corporate information network. While this creates potential security risks, it also may have positive effects on a company's financial performance:

- **Improves employee productivity:** Mobile employees spend less time—or none—commuting. Thus, they may be better able to tailor their work day to align with peak business hours and a myriad of professional responsibilities. They may also be better able to balance professional and personal responsibilities, resulting in lower absenteeism.
- **Enables increased business flexibility:** Mobile or remote workers are key to flexible construction-business practices. Mobile workers can start their work day earlier and/or work later than normal working hours. Business travel costs are reduced since employees are equipped to work electronically with other employees or remote jobsites rather than meeting in person. Because they use the office infrequently, they can share office workspace with other mobile workers, reducing overall

office size. Companies also have the ability to hire from a broader pool of applicants, not only because it expands the geographic range of the search, but also because the ability to work remotely is one of the most sought-after incentives among job seekers today.

- **Increases responsiveness to customers:** Mobile workers enable

construction companies to provide local, on-site support for geographically dispersed customers or jobsite projects by allowing employees to live and work near their clients. Customer service representatives can be equipped to take calls from home on shifts around the clock regardless of the company's office hours. ♦

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