

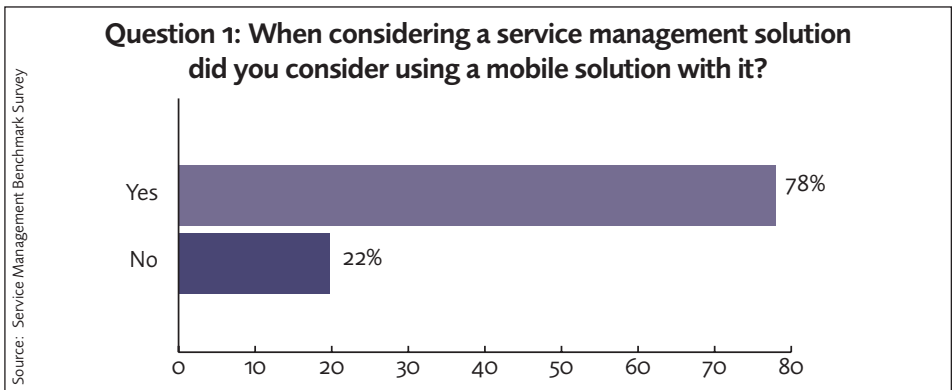


# Moving in less mysterious ways

Mobility is the name given to a range of technologies that support remote workers and as field service has always been a business based on mobility it is set to dominate the agenda for 2007. Using exclusive research carried out for Service Management, **Steve Downton** sorts out fact from fantasy and assesses what is really driving the service business.

For anyone considering how to improve their service operation mobilisation will figure somewhere in their thinking. The Service Management research examined what that thinking was and what they have done in practice.

It wanted answers to some of the questions most commonly asked by service managers and directors investigating the 'noise' behind mobile solutions. So the first question asked – 'When



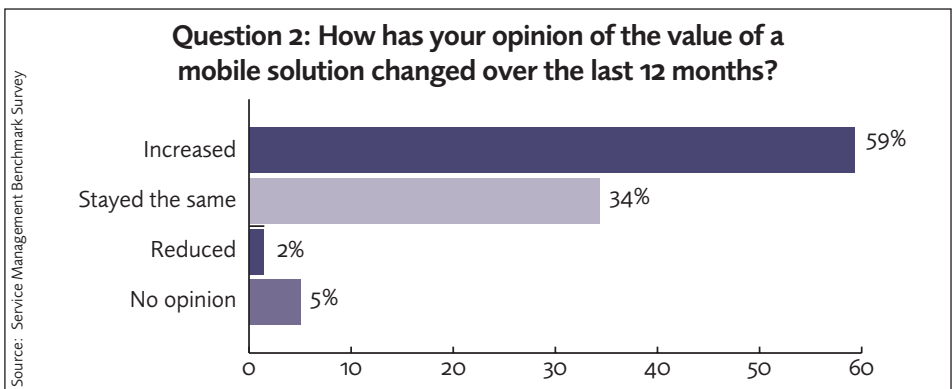
considering a service management solution did you consider using a mobile solution in conjunction?' Not surprisingly, considering the publicity surrounding mobile solutions, nearly 80% of respondents were considering the use of a mobile solution. The reasons were many and varied but predominantly stemmed from a desire to explore the aspect of rapid access to data information from the field, coupled with closer communication with field staff. Some even cited the aspect of improving health and safety for their field staff and some raised the potential value of being able to monitor engineers.

Of the 20% not taking a mobile solution into

consideration, the usual excuse was that mobile solutions were not properly developed or integrated into the type of solutions they were considering or they did not want to further complicate the implementation process and saw mobile solutions as another cost on an already costly project.

These answers and the very strong positive response prompted the second question:

'How has your opinion of the value of a mobile solution changed over the last 12 months?' In this case 60% said they assessed a value increase over the last 12 months, and attributed this to both marketing by the suppliers and their own networking with peers.



Software companies push the value of the solutions, ensuring that they include a mobilisation solution in their offering, although concern was expressed about some of these offerings being more 'fluff than content'. More interestingly and significant was the experience of peers in other companies already using or researching into mobile solutions, and their positive comments.

At this point it is important to put in a word of caution. More than one in three (35%) of the respondents to this question stated that the value provided to their businesses by mobile solutions had not increased. This scepticism was borne out of a concern that mobilisation was just another fad dreamt up by software providers to sell more of their product, and that claims were being made that could not be properly substantiated so early in the lifecycle of these products – the number of reference sites is still low and the specific value that mobilisation can bring is still under debate. What was fairly convincing was that less than 2% believed the value of having a mobilisation solution had decreased so the overwhelming impression from the interviews was that mobilisation was becoming an established tool in the service environment.

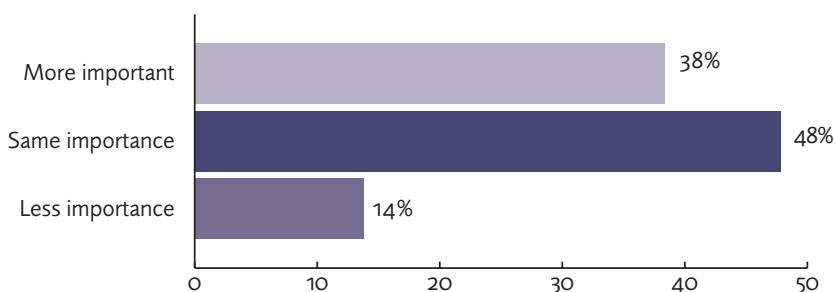
The third question asked 'Over the next 12 months do you see mobile voice communications as becoming more/less/of same importance'. The reaction to 'voice communications only' was markedly different to the question about full mobile solutions. This probably stems from the fact that most service operations have exhausted what benefits there were to be gained from connecting with the engineer during the day by the traditional phone – gaining voice information but not very effective data information.

In fact fewer than 40% consider voice communications are becoming more important in supporting the service environment, whereas almost 50% consider the value of voice communications as having reached its maximum poten-



**Question 3: Over the next 12 months do you see mobile voice communications as becoming**

Source: Service Management Benchmark Survey



the 'ability to connect with engineers; the use of mobile phones has evolved gradually, as early issues around cost and potential abuse of the 'company phone' inhibited companies from formalising the use of mobile voice. Full mobile PDAs on the other hand are regarded as specifically designed to enable a quick, accurate and efficient 2-way flow of information between engineer and office. In addition, most PDAs are becoming a total data/voice/tracking module providing an effective communication device for all pertinent information.

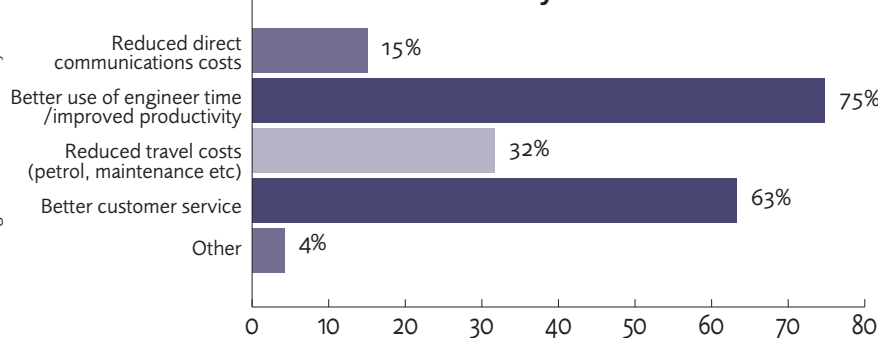
Having recognised the interest and move-

tial. Most significantly nearly 15% consider voice communications is becoming less valuable and of less importance. When pressed for a reason for this difference between mobile voice and full mobility, respondents cited the engineer's ability to be on-line with data information and time-compressed communication all the time, and able to use the equipment as though always connected, passing on information much more effectively through the PDA, particularly with data presented in template form, with drop-downs to speed up the communication process and also control specific input.

Mobile phones and their costs have significantly improved in the last 10 years, improving

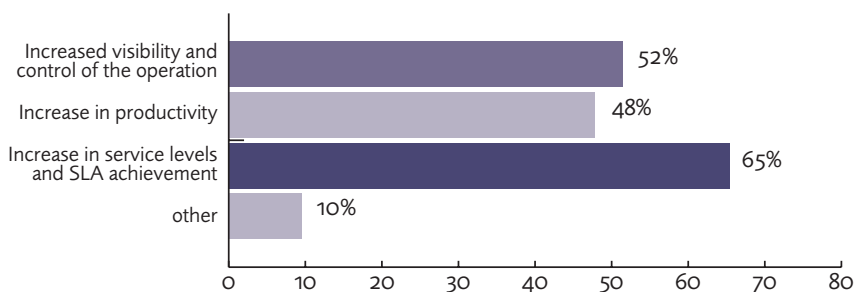
**Question 5: Where would you expect to see the most returns from a mobile system?**

Source: Service Management Benchmark Survey



**Question 4: Why would you introduce a mobile solution?**

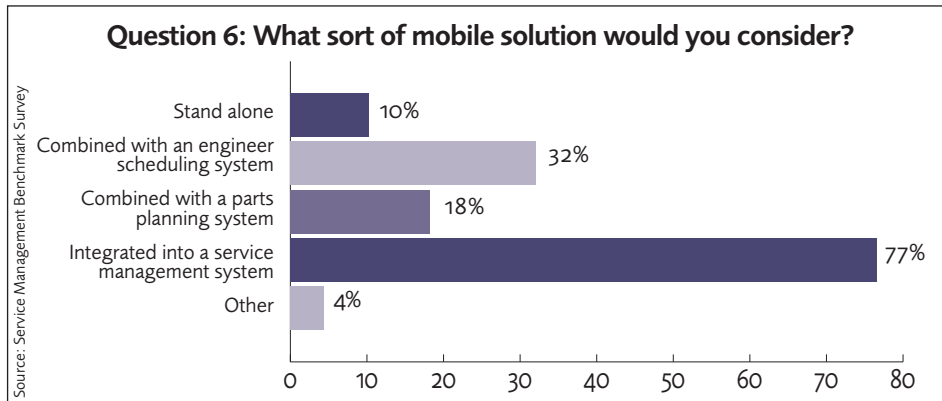
Source: Service Management Benchmark Survey



ment towards full mobile solutions, the next obvious question was 'Why would you introduce a mobile solution?' The answers again were varied (more than one answer was accepted) but the top three reasons were improving service execution, better visibility and control and higher productivity.

Fewer than 10% gave a different answer.

'Where would you expect to see the best returns from a mobile solution?' produced another mixed bag as shown. In both of these questions customer service scored very highly in importance, as did productivity improvement,



underlining that for most service operations the two driving factors are keeping costs down and service up.

Curious to find out more of the detail behind these two answers we followed up this research in the special briefing sessions at the recent Service Management Europe event. The overwhelming reason for introducing a full mobile solution was to avoid failing service level agreements (SLAs) by having much more visibility of potential failures and to provide the ability to act upon information quickly and efficiently, increasing the effective productivity of the operation. One company even cited a 10% improvement in visits per day by engineers and also a 10% reduction in failed SLAs – in both cases a significant improvement which had covered the costs of the software and raised the satisfaction of both customers and engineers alike.

Issues of customer and engineer satisfaction raised much comment. Despite some negative press originally associated with mobile solutions, most of the service operation customers felt that it was a clear sign of investment by the supplier and an ambition to deliver better customer service. Once engineers became used to the system and processes – as happened with mobile phones and satellite navigation systems – engineers wondered how they managed before and therefore became positive advocates.

One aspect that came out in discussion was the need to have 'joined-up' software and processes, so the obvious and final question

'What sort of mobile solution would you consider and why?' The very high score for 'integrated into a service management system' does highlight the growing need, identified by most

respondents, of the value of having the systems joined-up. Some responses were stated as 'preferred options' – though acknowledged as not necessarily practical, as many companies already have service management or enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. In such circumstances management have considered bolt-ons using stand alone solutions as their preference.

In summary, the research has shown that mobile solutions are considered a very important facet for those planning the service environment in the future. It has also highlighted that many companies are treating the full mobile solution as a software tool which limits their ability to create a totally new process within their service delivery.

When treated as a total solution, as those who have been working with mobile solutions have found, it heralds new ways of working and opportunities to improve performance quite dramatically in the key areas of operational productivity and customer service levels. These new ways of working require a different mindset by engineers and the whole business alike as they work together in a more collaborative fashion, secure in the knowledge that they can now manage themselves more efficiently and effectively, to the benefit of all – especially the customer. Customers value total commitment to service from their supplier through the service engineer, creating a rewarding and loyal relationship. **SM**

*If you would like further details in this research or are interested in taking part in future research please contact Mark Turner, editor, Service Management. Email: mark.turner@ithacamedia.co.uk*

Downton Consulting has established a reputation for providing effective business advice within the Services Sector specialising in guiding senior management teams and supporting service operations both large and small to manage their customers, improve performance profitability and deliver service excellence.

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