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Going mobile

The adoption of mobile technology to help rental companies manage everyday operations is a growing trend. *IRN* **takes a look.**

Orion Software's Sirius-e mobile app was designed to facilitate the day-to-day tasks of users in the field, and is compatible with iOS, Android or Windows

Rental software developers aim to streamline different business functions for their users, speeding up processes and ultimately boosting business. With the uptake of smart phones permeating every aspect of society, it should come as little surprise that new platforms are being created to allow rental companies to go mobile too.

New from MCS, for instance, is a mobile app for Android designed to simplify and automate a rental company's workshop and maintenance functions. Created in partnership with workforce management company BigChange, the idea is to allow workshop fitters in the field to view and update orders in real-time, allocating them to the most suitable engineer and viewing the status of all workshop jobs.

MCS managing director Guy van der Knaap said, "Equipping workshop fitters with the latest smart phone technology means they can update the status of workshop orders 'on the spot', add associated notes, order spare parts and synchronise information with the MCS-rm hire management system."

"The app eliminates the need to print out works orders and checklists, and helps improve data integrity and duty of care obligations. Depot managers can analyse the overall efficiency of the workshop, gain up-to-date visibility of their engineers' activities and increase control over their resources, resulting in better communication and new operational efficiencies."

UK rental company Nixon Hire recently made the MCS Workshop Mobile app available to its repair and maintenance team. Nixon Hire project manager David Balmer said, "The key driver for us was letting our workshop engineers access their works orders in the field, which frees up time to focus on the job in hand, reducing the demand for paperwork and provides a much better service to our customers."

Meanwhile, rival UK rental company Speedy Hire has shown an interest in the latest mobile technology from Annata Dynamics. The company's Mobile Mechanic app is designed to be used by mechanics that need to perform work on-site and equally importantly, out of network connection.

Annata said it had several other apps in the pipeline, including one dubbed Rental Inspections, and highlighted the development of mobile applications as of key importance for the future.

It said Speedy Hire was keen to move towards the use of tablet apps, with the Mobile Mechanic app being the first it was looking to use, and others to follow.

Other developments for the company include introducing its Rent software platform to cloud computing, through the new version of Microsoft Dynamics AX7. The company hopes to double the number of users of its Rent software during 2016, with the main growth areas coming from moving or expanding into new territories. It recently opened new offices in Chile, Austria, South Africa and Australia – with more to come in the near future.

Day-to-day tasks

And another company working to develop mobile apps for rental companies is Orion Software, which introduced its Rental platform in 2015. The company's Sirius-e mobile app was designed to facilitate the day-to-day tasks of users in the field, and is compatible with iOS, Android or Windows.

Using the app, logistics personnel can view a map of all current shipments and returns for the day, while rental customers can access, modify and submit orders too. Orion has also established a dispatching centre integrated with its Sirius-e software that it said eliminated the need for fleet owners to invest in expensive GPS devices and installation.

As soon as drivers connect using the mobile app to see their route plan for the day, the dispatcher can see them on the dispatching map in real-time. The drivers can choose any trucks in the fleet. Orion said this allowed users to instantly add a rented truck or update third party delivery companies to the dispatching centre.

In addition, Orion's app offers e-signatures for documents such as quotations, rental contracts or technical agreements. As well as reducing costs and supporting a paperless environment, the company pointed out that this technology can speed up approval processes for order and delivery confirmation as well.

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Ramco Systems vice president of enterprise asset management Rajeev Singh

And inspHire managing director Graham Dobbs also said the rental industry was calling for increased mobility. "There is an air of positivity around the rental industry at the moment in most geographic areas but especially in the UK, Europe, Australasia and the USA.

"The market is demanding mobility, and inspHire are well placed to meet this demand with our Mobile working solutions covering many operations in the field and on the move. CRM (Customer Relationship Management) solutions are becoming essential for keeping in touch with existing customers and prospects, managing sales pipeline and managing time for chasing quotes so they should never miss a deal. inspHire CRM helps maximise the sales process and allows you to instantly act upon customer requests, ensuring you never let opportunities slip through the net."

Mr Dobbs said inspHire's systems had been implemented in over 1500 businesses across 40 countries. "Based on feedback and industry research, we have decided to officially launch the USA version of inspHire Office Edition at The Rental Show in Atlanta (see page XYZ for more information), however we already have companies showing extreme interest and have systems being implemented as we speak.

"Office Edition is our most widely used product and has been built for small- to medium-sized businesses that require a feature rich, easy to use application that is saleable and gives businesses the tools need to grow."

Natural fit

Ramco Systems vice president of enterprise asset management Rajeev Singh also told *IRN* that the company was working to make its technology a natural fit for mobile users.

"Most legacy ERP apps on Mobile phones are not 'designed for thumb'. With Ramco, one can complete transactions by following the thumb's natural, sweeping arc. The app senses context and defaults the most probable transaction and lists down other often used transaction."

Ramco is also focussing on tailoring its technology to individual users - its new Genie system, for instance, is designed to intelligently prompt users on the next course of action, pre-empting requirements and keeping documentation ready for approval.

"As Genie gets used to the user and organisation it'll evolve into a more powerful system that can act on its own to complete transactions that does not require the user's attention. This intelligent aspect of Ramco ERP saves your time to focus more on growing new businesses rather than running the business," Mr Singh said.

"The Equipment Rental sector is a traditional one and many organisations, particularly family-owned ones, still aren't taking up enough bold steps. We believe that the equipment rental industry will face disruptive innovation, sooner rather than later." **IRN**

Available on Windows 10 And Android, Baseplan's Field Service Mobility application has been enhanced. As well as processing all aspects of service and repairs in the field, users can also take photos of equipment, capture signatures, scan barcodes, view service history and much more.

Price optimisation

Zilliant Chief marketing officer Eric Hills

Zilliant last year launched MarginMax Ramp – a version of its original MarginMax package targeting smaller rental companies.
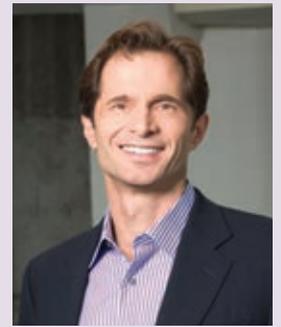
Chief marketing officer Eric Hills said, "We've seen significant interest in both MarginMax Ramp and MarginMax in the equipment rental market, adding a handful of new equipment rental customers in the past year. The market appears to be at a tipping point where other equipment rental companies are taking notice of the successes realized by United Rentals and Cramo, and asking how they can improve pricing."

Price optimisation software can be a tough sell to some rental companies, which may be wary of what they perceive as handing over control of a crucial part of their business. However, Mr Hills stressed, "Companies still own their pricing strategy; Zilliant simply becomes the means by which to more effectively execute it in the market.

"The configuration of our solution is customised to each company, and built collaboratively with the customer, so it's not a "black box," as many people mistakenly assume. Pricing managers are extremely familiar with the model itself, and are able to see why the optimisation engine generated a specific price by comparing historical transactions to the price guidance, before they ever put new prices into market. In fact, it provides significantly greater precision and control over pricing strategies and in turn, financial results."

Mr Hills said the software improved transparency in the market. "Price optimisation provides visibility for both the sales rep and the customer into how the customer can get a better price. At the time of the rental decision, both the customer and the sales rep understand how rental duration, total spend and spend growth factor into the quote. Customers know they are getting a fair and logical rate. It's really a win-win for both parties."

And the company plans to add new capabilities to MarginMax on two fronts, said Mr Holls. "First, we will further enhance pricing managers' ability to use price as a lever to execute company strategy through our MarginMax Strategy Interface. Second, we're focused on empowering sales reps with more actionable guidance and contextual analytics for each customer to help them make the best quoting and sales decisions."

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Breaking news

Rental software giant Wynne Systems has acquired Result Group, expanding its customer base to include specialist rental and construction companies. The acquisition includes the rentalresult system, which helps to manage the back office of rental companies by streamlining sales, purchasing, asset management, point-of-sale for rental, all the way through to complex accounting.

Result Group's UK office will remain open, as will its US-based headquarters, confirmed Wynne, which is also based in the US. However, Result's managing director Derek Robson has decided to step down and will play no further role in the business.