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The Smartphone Information Revolution  
Anytime—Anywhere Information Technology

# ● The Smart Information

*Anytime—Anywhere*

by Vance F. BROWN

Information Technology is experiencing a “revolution” with the introduction of smartphones—which are changing the rules of the game in the way we respond to critical information within our organizations.

Admittedly, the word “revolution” is overused, so I want to be very careful before jumping on that rhetorical bandwagon. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines “revolution” as a *sudden, radical, or complete change*. In the IT world, when talking about smartphones, such as the iPhone or BlackBerry, and their related native applications, the word *revolution* is appropriate. We are on the verge of a radical change in the delivery of mission-critical information, and more importantly, the ability to make timely mission-critical decisions on the fly because of this technology. The way we work, interact, and manage within the IT environment will never be the same.

Just today I was sitting in my Colorado office wondering, with some concern, how my eighteen-year old son was doing. The night before he departed on a one-month trip to Ghana, Africa, and I knew—from one of my many iPhone apps—that his plane had landed.

The next thing I know, my iPhone beeped and there was a text message from my son, sent only seconds before, from the other side of the world. The text message reported that the plane had landed safely, that he had found his contact in Ghana, and that everything was fine. Once in Ghana, my son merely hit the “reply” button to a message I had sent to him while he was still in Colorado. The exploding worldwide network of mobile phone coverage recognized that he was now in Ghana and it immediately routed the text message back to my cell phone in Colorado. Perhaps the most amazing part of this is how much we take instant access to information like this for granted.

The relief of knowing nearly instantaneously that my son was safe was wonderful, but it also caused me to reflect on the dramatic changes we are experiencing with mobile phone devices, and how they are radically changing our daily lives with respect to information technology. Obviously, smartphone devices have been around for a while, and by themselves there is nothing revolutionary about them. We are in the midst of an information delivery revolution because of (i) user-friendly smartphones with sophisticated third party development platforms; (ii) business-specific applications developed by IT service management software vendors for these devices; (iii) the expansion of 3G and faster networks; and (iv) lower prices to take advantage of this technology.

# rtphone Revolution

## Information Technology

**“After-the-fact” Information.** Not very long ago, IT data went into the proverbial “black hole,” and most information extracted from this dark repository was reviewed and acted upon too late—“after-the-fact.” Although many organizations were proud of their book of monthly reports, most of the information was never used nor acted upon in a timely manner. In the comedy film *Office Space*, this cultural reality of useless reporting became the brunt of jokes with “TPS Reports,” which historically were valid Quality Assurance reports, but now have become more commonly known as “Totally Pointless Stuff” reports. Information in printed reports, utilizing historical data, is often too late to make course corrections. Admittedly, reporting is still important for trending and analysis. However, with the advent of this latest mobile revolution, technicians and managers are now in the position to instantaneously receive and use data, no matter where they are, to make real-time decisions and instant course corrections.

How important is this? If you were taking a plane trip from San Francisco to New York City, but were two-degrees off the destination, how far would you be off course? While it is true that being only two-degrees off would equate to success in most organizations, in this example, you would end up nearly 90 miles from your desired destination—an unacceptable result in air travel. Accordingly, today’s planes and cars can be equipped with “revolutionary” GPS devices that can proactively warn you the moment the vehicle has veered off course. Such information saves a lot of time and money by allowing us to make the right decisions and course corrections before it is too late to meet our timely objectives.

**Anytime—Anywhere Real-time Information.** With the new generation of smartphones, real-time information in our IT business environments can be used to make course corrections along the way—anytime and anywhere. Equally important, because of how user-friendly these devices have become, they are being used by people who were previously uncomfortable with the technology, or too busy to learn it.

I recently visited a major university and was honored to meet the university president. I had been told by others that this brilliant PhD was not technically savvy and did not like to spend a lot of time on his computer. However, I noticed that he did carry an iPhone. Before long, we were in a passionate discussion comparing our iPhone applications, trying to convince each other which applications were the best. He then was quite intrigued when I told him that there are iPhone applications that could notify him of any change requests that required his approval, providing him all the

details needed to make a decision. He could then immediately approve or deny the request directly from his iPhone. Change approvals are often a bottleneck in organizations, especially when some of the approvers are frequent travelers, making it difficult to stay online.

The inefficiencies and costs caused by delayed approvals are significant in organizations, especially for approvals at the C-level. Such change approvals at the C-level typically are to approve the most expensive acquisitions—those that presumably have the most positive impact to the organization, and perhaps the most risk. Accordingly, such delays in the approval process are the most critical to the organization.

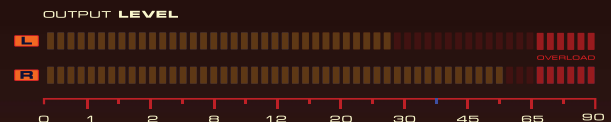
Change approval functionality is only the tip of the iceberg of possibilities. Imagine how the university president could utilize drill-down dashboards on his iPhone that would show—real time—all the key performance indicators in his university. He could be immediately notified if any of the key university metrics enter the “red zone.” For example, if alumni giving were down, he would know immediately. If there was a poor rating from an online faculty survey, he could review the survey from his iPhone within seconds of when it was sent. If there was a campus security alert, he could be immediately prompted from his mobile device with the relevant information...and the list of possibilities goes on. This type of management efficiency has often been referred to as “management by exception.” In other words, managers don’t want to be notified about information that is “normal” or in the “green” zone. Instead, they want to be immediately prompted when issues are in the “yellow” or “red” zones—when the ship is “off course.” This is the first IT generation where “dashboard prompting” and the resulting course corrections can be administered through a small smartphone device that is already part of everyone’s wardrobe.

The president of the university and his core management team are not the only benefactors of this mobile revolution. The efficiencies gained by the university’s IT staff can be enormous. For example, while a technician goes to a facility on campus to deal with an incident or related task, he or she can open an iPhone application and access all the other pending tasks at the facility. The technician can then close the incident or task, reassign it, or make notes for later follow-up—all from an iPhone. Of course, these updates are simultaneously changing the IT service management database on the central server.

The user experience is dramatically enhanced when the university president or the technician is able to utilize an iPhone “rich-client” application natively developed for the iPhone. But, if the application can be accessed only through iPhone’s Safari browser, then the user experience is slow and diminishes dramatically, and the likelihood for consistent and “passionate” use is minimal.

Twenty-five years ago, the idea that I would always carry a phone in my pocket that could communicate instantaneously with my son from anywhere in the world at any time would be “Star Trek” fiction—“beam me up, Scotty.” But it is a reality of the communication revolution. Today, the idea that that management and technicians can access from their pocket phones the necessary information to make vital course corrections—at anytime from anywhere—is truly revolutionary.

The benefits gained from the ability to make real-time change approvals and course corrections by management, together with the efficiencies gained by frontline technicians, represent radical change for our industry. Wendell Phillips once said, “Revolutions never go backwards.” Revolutionary mobile smartphone technology is available that will inevitably change the way all Information Technology is delivered. Don’t wait... join the revolution!



**Vance F. Brown** is CEO and a founder of Cherwell Software, a leading developer of IT service management software, available On-Premise or On-Demand. Formerly, Vance was president and CEO of GoldMine Software Corporation (formerly Bendata, Inc. and currently FrontRange Solutions®—the makers of HEAT® and ITSM software solutions, and GoldMine® contact manager). Vance graduated *summa cum laude* from Wake Forest University, with concentrations in economics and computer science, and received his law degree with honors from The University of North Carolina. More recently, Vance has attended executive programs at both the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University and Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. Vance is also ITIL® Foundation certified.

