

Mobile Workforce Growing Exponentially

By Jay Wrolstad - Wireless NewsFactor - July 01, 2002

New technologies, including wireless network infrastructure and devices, are fueling the growth of the mobile workforce in the United States, according to analysts at IDC, who recently issued a report and forecast on the trend.

Researchers predicted the number of mobile workers in the U.S. will rise by 12.7 million between 2001 and 2006, from 92 million to 105 million. Also, the number of workers who are not mobile will decline by 2 million through 2006, down to 53.8 million, IDC said.

In other words, within three years, about two-thirds (66 percent) of U.S. employees will be mobile workers.

"Wireless communications enable more workers to go mobile and increase their productivity," IDC analyst Raymond Boggs told Wireless NewsFactor. "Every new generation of technology works its way into the ecosystem, and, as technology advances, the group of early adopters brings it into the mainstream," he said.

Next Wave

The new wave will include both in-office workers and out-of-office mobile workers, who are using wireless local area networks, such as Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, to stay connected and tap into files or databases from remote locations, IDC said.

Boggs cited two critical forces driving growth in the mobile workforce. First, the technology that makes mobile work possible is a growth factor. In addition, the organizational requirements that have created an association between mobility and greater effectiveness on the job is fueling the increase in mobile workers.

Zero Downtime

With portable PCs and cell phones in the 1980s and 1990s, mobile workers could stay in touch with customers and colleagues, he said.

"Now, with wireless networking and virtual private networks (VPNs), they have access to a full range of corporate data resources," Boggs said.

The September 11th terrorist attacks changed the mobile working equation, according to Boggs, with a decline in traditional business offset by an increase in telecommuting and the use of technology to support remote workers.

"Everyone is working constantly these days. When you walk through New York City, for example, everyone is talking on a cell phone or working on laptop," said Boggs. "The ultimate goal is zero downtime, working 24/7, as out-of-office work graduates to a higher level."

That said, job burnout remains a factor as the demands on mobile workers increase.

Mo Pros Rising

The IDC report forecast that the number of mobile professionals will grow from 16 million in 2001 to 21 million in 2006, driving the most technology investment of any mobile segment. The report also found that mobile nontravelers -- the workers who rarely leave town but who are often in meetings or away from their desks -- will increase by 10 percent annually, to over 13 million in 2006.

"Occasionally mobile" workers -- those who travel less than 20 percent of the time -- are actually declining in number, but a growing number of these workers are moving to the next level and joining the more committed mobile professionals, the firm said.

Open Door

IDC analyst Stephen Drake told Wireless NewsFactor the research results indicate strong prospects for more mobile workers engaging in wireless activities.

"There is a big opportunity for wireless LANs with more mobile, nontraveling workers moving from building to building, or among field workers and those at on-location businesses like car rental companies," he said.