

# Made for Mobility

BY CHRIS O'BRIEN

## Using portable software technology to your advantage in the warehouse and the field



smartphone, portable digital assistant (PDA), or handheld scanner, or an application that runs alone on a mobile device.

### Getting Out of the Office

🔑 The flexibility of taking your business with you and accessing information that used to be confined to an office filing cabinet or computer presents tremendous advantages for produce professionals. “A sales guy no longer needs to be tied to his desk,” says Bob Brown, chief executive officer of Grand Rapids Computer Services. “He can get shipping lists from anywhere, get live inventory counts, and get out and see his customers at the same time.”

Mobile technology has provided tremendous efficiency in many markets, particularly sectors that deal with inventory, and the produce industry is no exception. New mobile technologies are helping growers, packers, distributors, suppliers, and brokers increase business efficiency, better navigate supply and demand, and manage costs with greater clarity.

Get into a debate with a techie and you're bound to hear differing distinctions regarding mobile applications. “I would define a mobile application as one that was specifically designed and deployed to utilize the technology of a smartphone or a remote handheld device,” says Don Walborn, director of sales and business development with ProWare Services, LLC.

For the purposes of this article, mobile applications are either extensions of office-based applications that run on a mobile device such as an iPhone, BlackBerry

Over the years, the produce industry has gradually put down the pad of paper and adopted the computer for many facets of its business. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems have been created to track on the computer everything produce-related. Inventory, accounts payable and receivable, payroll, customer management, chemical applications, and suppliers are all entered into complex software programs, and the information is accessed through computers.

Most mobile applications take pieces of ERP systems and make them easy to access remotely by displaying pages or charts from them on handhelds or cell phones via wireless means or the Internet. “In the warehouse itself, we have the ability to do physical inventory using a handheld,” says Henri Morris, president of Edible Software, a division of Solid Software Solutions, LLC. “The handheld contains the current count, and that is transmitted via Wi-Fi back to the

## Key Elements

Mobile applications can be a big advantage to those produce businesses employing them. Here are a few reasons why:

- Added flexibility for information access while traveling.
  - Time efficiency and accuracy.
  - Increased communication and lowered costs.
- To learn more about each key element, look for the ➤ throughout the article.

servers, updating in real time."

➤ Morris says that in addition to the time efficiency of such a system, accuracy is increased. If a warehouse employee is counting, say, 500 pallets of produce by hand, even if he actually gets the count right he then has to go back to the office and enter the data into a computer. And each time data is manually entered into a system, human error is possible.

## Selecting Software

Choosing a mobile application to better manage your produce business may not be as simple as picking one of the top three software applications and buying some cell phones, since different applications support different aspects of the produce business. The best first step is to identify your mobile needs, and then look at what providers and programs are available to meet those needs. "The first place to look for a mobile application is with your current software vendor," says Walborn. "Go to the vendor and ask about what types of user interfaces they can offer that will allow you to take advantage of the Internet or mobile technology.

"If these interfaces are already developed, find out if they capture the information that you are going to need," says Walborn. "If not, you will need to look at what specific functions of your ERP you need in a mobile interface and explore where you are going to get the best return on investment developing these."

If your ERP software supplier has a mobile application for inventory that perfectly suits your business, you're in luck. If not, you will first need to determine what parts of your business will provide you with increased efficiency and profitability if they are 'mobilized,' and then find some-

one to help you build the mobile interface. Following are some of the established vendors in the industry:

**Agrian, Inc.**

([www.agrian.com](http://www.agrian.com))

This company offers Web-based agri-data tracking and reporting designed for the entire supply chain. Working in tandem with the tracking and reporting applications is Agrian Mobile, an application that allows those who use it to enter data while in the field and then integrate it with an existing Agrian account. It works with Windows Mobile-based pocket PCs and smartphones, and can even be used without an immediate Internet connection.

"We saw that one of the big challenges in produce is that growers, packers, shippers, handlers, and processors all have separate data sets," says Nishan Majarian, chief executive officer at Agrian. "Throughout the growing season, each one of those entities documents their practices, and at the end of the season, to have a comprehensive view of the information, you would have to gather it all together. So we developed a series of applications for each field-level user to collect and compile the data."

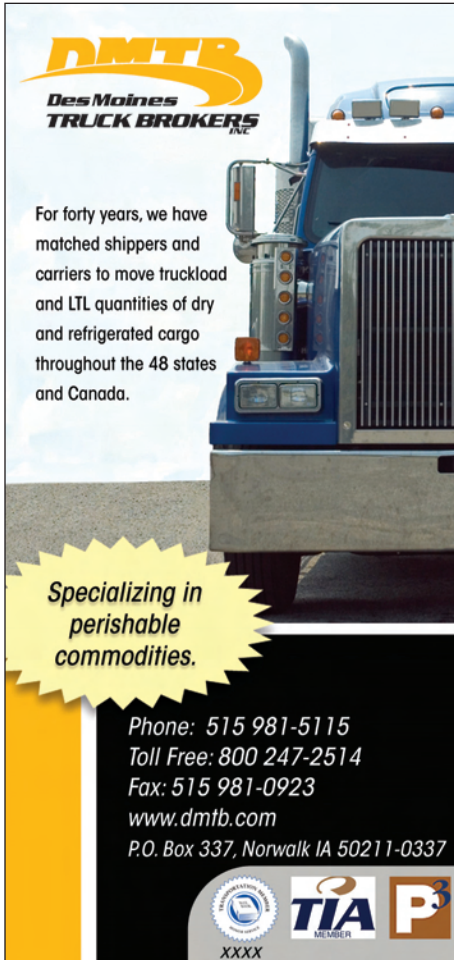
**RedLine Solutions, Inc.**

([www.redlinesolutions.com](http://www.redlinesolutions.com))

RedLine specializes in managing inventory in cold storage. Using handheld scanners, everything about the inventory is stored and available in real time. "RedLine Cooler manages inventory from the moment it is received and tracks date, location, and other characteristics," says Todd Baggett, chief executive officer at RedLine. "Most of our users use the first-in-first-out (FIFO) feature for order fulfillment to ship older produce first, keep rotation accurate, and not lose product due to spoilage."

One company making the most of this technology is Anthony Vineyards, Inc. "We are using RedLine Cooler at our facilities in Coachella [CA] and Bakersfield [CA]," says Justin McGowan, manager of administration at Anthony Vineyards. McGowan says their base program is the produce industry-specific software Famous, and then RedLine Cooler plugs into that. Whenever products come in, they enter the information into Famous, which prints out barcode tags that they attach to pallets.

After the information is entered and the



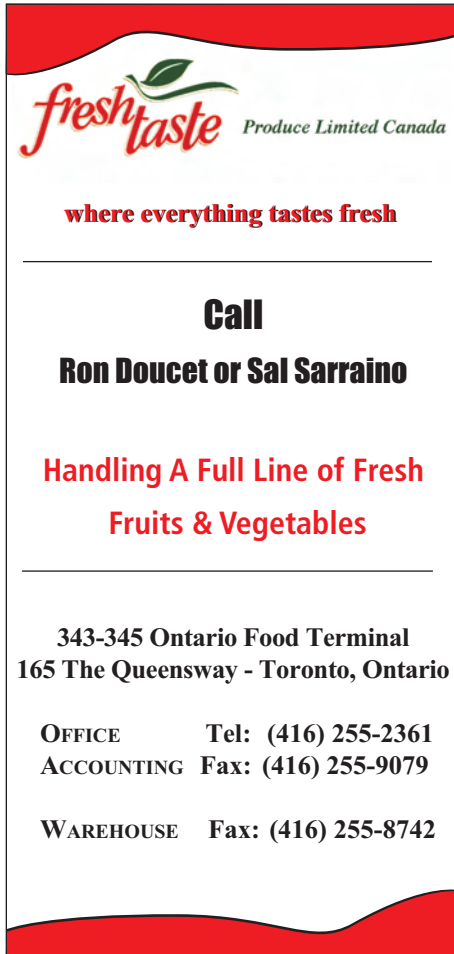
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tags are printed, RedLine Cooler takes over. "We scan the tag, which assigns the product a location in pre-cooling and then in the warehouse," says McGowan. "The forklift drivers have all the information on their scanguns. With the gun, you can find or place product immediately anywhere in our storage, which has seven rooms, each with forty-eight rows."

This process, says McGowan, is much improved over the original. "The old way would have been the shipping department printing out an inventory list and our handlers searching through the rooms for product," he says. "The scanguns are very user-friendly. They have touchscreens, work in English and Spanish, and show a list of what to get in the warehouse. Orders can be generated by a specific grower if a buyer wants that, or first in first out. Also, we have wireless in the warehouse, so there's no need to cradle the gun, and it

updates in real-time."

RedLine is piloting software this year with certain lettuce growers to track product from the field all the way to the cooler. This mobile application will support the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) by allowing traceability at the case level beginning in the field and including harvester, transport truck, field truck, and processing center information.

**Solid Software Solutions, LLC**  
([www.ediblesoftware.com](http://www.ediblesoftware.com))

This company produces Edible Software, a wholesale food distribution package with mobile access that works on handheld PDAs. "When our clients generate a purchase order, that automatically generates labels based on the number of pallets in an order," says Morris. "When the pallets arrive, they attach the labels, which give them the ability to do physical inventory counts at any point. This eliminates the time needed to enter all of the data manually, immediately populates the physical inventory spreadsheet, and compiles counts from different areas of the warehouse into totals, which also saves time and prevents errors."

Solid Software also offers Edible Pick and Load (PAL), an optional module that verifies that the correct quantities of each product are pulled from inventory and loaded for delivery. The program, which is loaded onto a PDA wirelessly connected to Edible Software, stores and tracks the picked or delivered item lot number which identifies the originating vendor, ensuring compliance with the Federal Department of Agriculture's Bio-Terrorism Act.

**WaudWare Incorporated**  
([www.waudware.com](http://www.waudware.com))

WaudWare offers Produce Inventory Control System (PICS) and WebPICS, their mobile version of the core components of this business management system. The software includes modules for buying, selling, brokerage, accounting, inventory, production, and security, and focuses on providing complete traceability of a product. "The software is Web-based and can be used on [BlackBerry smartphones], iPhones, and PDAs," says F. Charles Waud, president of WaudWare. "We have been doing a lot of work with growers and packers over the past few years, helping them improve traceability as well as track costs and profitability of multiple lots or pro-

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duce coming from different fields.”

Chiovitti Banana Co. Ltd. is making use of WaudWare software at the Ontario Food Terminal. “All of our invoicing used to be manually done,” says Rick Chisholme, chief financial officer at Chiovitti. “But we moved to the mobile application to get more accuracy, get counts and statistics faster, and for ease of use.”

Chiovitti contracted with WaudWare for their own software package that they run on Symbol units. “We originally started with Palms that we had to cradle and synch with our servers,” says Chisholme, “but as wireless technology has improved, we have switched to the independent wireless handhelds.”

**YottaMark**

([www.harvestmark.com](http://www.harvestmark.com))

This company has a mobile Authentication Platform that can validate a product at any point in the supply chain using a handheld scanner or a camera phone. Using the phone's camera, the user can instantly trace a product or item marked with a HarvestMark traceability code. These HarvestMark codes are on both individual items and cases labeled with a PTI standard label.

### Ripe or not?

While mobile applications offer tremendous efficiency and tracking advantages over paper and even office-based systems, the produce industry is still coming into its own technologically. Some professionals are harvesting the mobile opportunity, while others are still doing things the traditional way. “There are quite a few people in the industry hanging back on the mobile technology,” says Brown. “But as more young people come in who are used to using technology, they want it because they know it will work for them.”

Many who use these applications have seen the payoff come relatively quickly. “As far as return on investment, it's hard to tell,” says Chisholme. “There could have been manual mistakes that we never picked up on—all it takes is one big mistake. But I would say the system easily paid for itself within a year.”


➤ Inevitably, companies will increasingly embrace a more technological approach to doing business. “I think in the

years to come you will see more and more utilization of technology to deploy user interfaces to remote devices as accessibility and costs come down,” says Walborn.

**ONLINE**

For information on related topics, reference the following articles in the Blue Book Online Services Learning Center:  
 “Enterprise Resource Planning Systems” — October 2008  
 “Perspectives on Changing Paradigms” — January 2009

[www.producebluebook.com](http://www.producebluebook.com)



But, like all change, a full integration will take time. “It will be several years before it's as common as the toaster or fridge,” says Waud. **BP**

Chris O'Brien is a freelance writer and researcher based in Boulder, CO. He specializes in business trends with a focus on sustainable industries, including natural products, organics, health and wellness, and the environment.

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