

## THE MOBILITY REVOLUTION: How churches can catch the wave

By Russ McGuire

When the Internet wave hit congregational shores in 1995, half the church technology world said *Oh wow!* and half said *Oh no!* That bifurcated reaction is typical of technology trends that disrupt how business gets done. The same emotional responses erupted in the mid-1980s when computing power burst out of corporate data centers and onto church office desktops.

Strong positive and negative responses are totally justified as disruptive forces release both power and danger that radically impact how organizations work. In fact, in both the above cases, the impact lasted over a decade, with the attention of those of us supporting the technology needs of our churches dominated by capturing the power and managing the danger of the PC from the mid-1980s and capturing the power and managing the danger of the Internet from the mid-1990s to today.

Whenever technology disrupts normal business patterns, the organizations that catch the *power wave* and avoid the *danger reefs* create tremendous value for their members and ultimately for the glory of God. Obviously, seeing the wave coming makes a huge difference.

Amazingly, although most organizations chose to ignore them, there were clear indicators well in advance of both the PC and Internet revolutions. Moore's Law observed the financial reality that anticipated the economic benefit of moving computing power from the data center to the desktop. Similarly, Metcalfe's Law modeled the chain reaction of network value creation that drove sudden rapid adoption of the Internet. Church leaders and technologists are obliged to scan the horizon for the indicators of the next technology wave that can either crush them or carry them to new heights of success. McGuire's Law of Mobility raises the flag on the impending deluge of power and danger unleashed in the emerging Mobility Revolution.

In 1965, five years before the invention of the microprocessor, Gordon Moore who soon would be one of the founders of Intel, observed that roughly every year or so integrated chip density (roughly equivalent to processing power) doubled while the cost was cut in half. That observation has held true for more than four decades, resulting in the cost of computing falling to the point where virtually every product with a power source manufactured today has at least one microprocessor built into it. Given this reality, in the early 1980s, it was a financial inevitability that the power of computing would move onto the desks of church secretaries and into the homes of our parishioners.

In the early 1980s, Bob Metcalfe, the inventor of Ethernet, similarly made an observation about communications networks. He observed that the value of any network increased exponentially with the number of devices or users connected to the network. Initially he was talking about Fax machines and telephones, but later the observation applied to networks like America Online and then the Internet. What some of us realized in the early 1990s as the Internet grew was that Metcalfe's law pointed to a day when the Internet would be so valuable that every person and every organization would feel compelled to be connected to it. That day arrived in 1995.

As I've observed the impact of mobility on products, business processes, and services, I've realized that there is a similar value-creating dynamic at play. Some have dubbed my observation McGuire's Law of Mobility – that the value of any product or service increases with its mobility – as the product or service is available more of the time, or as the product or service adapts itself to be more relevant given the context in which it is being used.

As we've worked with different organizations, we have seen and helped customers take seven steps to successfully capture the power of mobility. In short, the seven steps are:

1. Digitize to capture the power unleashed by Moore's Law
2. Connect to capture the power unleashed by Metcalfe's Law
3. Evaluate how McGuire's Law can unleash new mobility power for your organization
4. Limit the ways in which you mobilize to ensure the greatest impact
5. Position for success in your selection of target activities and applications
6. Protect your organization by managing the danger of mobility
7. Learn from your members as they adopt mobility

The impact your church is having is ultimately at God's good pleasure, but I believe God does not shy away from our using technology as part of His plan. If the past is any indication, the impact your church is having may depend on your ability to envision the power of mobility in your ministry, and to implement the steps required to turn vision into reality. What in your ministry today is fixed that, if it were mobile, would create tremendous value for those you serve? What steps must you take to deliver that value to the glory of God?

To better explain what I mean, let me give two brief examples of companies that have understood McGuire's Law of Mobility – that mobility dramatically increases the value of any product or service – and that have leveraged that reality to create new value for their customers.

Consider the car rental experience. A decade ago, returning a rental car meant writing down your mileage, going to the fixed location office, standing in line, completing the check-out process, and hopefully still catching your flight. Avis recognized that, by mobilizing that process, they could create tremendous new value for their customers and so they introduced Roaming Rapid Returns. By doing so, they changed the requirements for competition in the car rental industry and strengthened their position with customers. Today, virtually all car rental companies have followed Avis' lead in mobilizing the return process. An agent comes to where you have stopped the car. Even as you unload your luggage, he is recording your mileage and printing your final receipt. In no time you are off to catch your flight.

Now consider the household storage experience. If you're like me, if you've ever rented storage space, your experience involved borrowing and loading a friend's pickup truck, driving across town to where real estate costs were the cheapest, and throwing that unused exercise equipment into the space already occupied by the big box of eight-track tapes and the bachelor era furniture your spouse never quite embraced, then pulling down the garage-style door and hurrying to return the borrowed truck. PODS (Portable On-Demand Storage) realized that tremendous new customer value could be created by

mobilizing that experience. Now they bring the storage to you and leave it in your driveway as long as you need. No more borrowing a truck. No more driving across town. And no more rushing to get the job done. PODS is re-defining the entire storage and moving industry by applying McGuire's Law.

Over the coming months in this column, I will explore the ways that churches can apply mobile technologies to serve the body and advance God's Kingdom.

Catch the wave!

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