

## SOFTWARE

# Mobile messaging – staying nimble in a volatile market

**Modern IT systems create the potential for 24/7 connectivity and instant access to real-time information wherever you are – information that can be a key asset, especially in shipbroking. However, the benefits of mobile messaging depend on managing this information in such a way that it does not create extra work,**  
*writes Anthony Odegbaro of Strategic Dataworks*

**W**ith the extreme volatility currently shaking up the shipping market, mobile information management is a facility no shipbroker can afford to be without.

Mobility is the great leveller in any industry, enabling the largest firm to become nimbler, the smallest firm to be more responsive and appear bigger than it really is, and the newly-founded firm to get up and running quickly.

Mobility and 24/7 access to messages provides faster reactions to opportunities and provides a level of service that simply cannot be produced when depending solely on static, fixed-line technology.

But even such an advantage as mobility can create complexity and duplication if not managed properly.

The ability to respond quickly, appropriately and accurately to new information is the goal of mobility, and the means by which brokers can sharpen their competitive edge – but a lack of attention to detail when attempting mobility will actually slow them down, potentially with disastrous consequences.

For example, unsure whether a remote broker had seen or responded to critical messages, an office-based colleague tracking incoming messages may have duplicated effort by also replying to a principal – potentially with conflicting information.

Repeated work is hardly the sign of improved efficiency and reflects to the market an organisation in disarray, leaving a poor impression with market peers and potentially damaging hard-won relationships with principals.

### Synchronisation

As long as there are two (or more) distinct places where information is being received and managed, the consistency and efficiency of that workflow is compromised and a risk of inaccuracy is introduced.

Since the whole point of mobility is to ensure that travelling and remote workers are better informed and more responsive, anything that detracts from this goal could be very costly.

The key to dynamic, clear information exchange and informed responsiveness is 'closed-loop mobility' or 'closed-loop messaging'.

With properly synchronised systems, office-based e-mail systems will tally instantly with mobile systems, so that it is always clear which messages have been read and responded to, saving more valuable time and ensuring an enhanced service to the client, providing a seamless consistent and efficient work flow anytime and anywhere.

More than that, a well-managed mobile solution will enable a comprehensive audit trail, providing undisputable detail about who read and sent what and when.

With closed-loop mobility all messages are recorded in a secure central database where the messages are fully searchable. This offers protection to the organisation, which may later be asked to refer back to deal negotiations to pinpoint when a decision was agreed.

In a market that is already highly litigious, and which is becoming more cautious and suspicious all the time, such



*Instant access to information is important – but an avalanche of data can hide priority information*

traceability could prove priceless – even saving the business.

Filtering is crucial too. A broker between appointments does not have time to browse even 50 new emails, let alone the typical 500, in order to pinpoint three or four key messages that demand an urgent response, so it is vital that mobile broking solutions support message tagging.

Here, according to individually set up criteria on the central system, critical messages can be quickly pushed to the front of the queue so that those requiring an immediate response on known topics are separated from the remainder, but the broker is still able to scan the rest of the messages to ensure new opportunities are not being lost.

### Adding value

In a market which is intensely competitive at the best of times, closed-loop mobility means not only closing more deals satisfactorily, but providing the necessary services that a principal demands, enhancing the role played by the broker in the principal's working life.

It creates an opportunity for different departments to gain controlled, visible access to key information so that follow-on commercial decisions can be taken, so that new deals can be progressed and accounts more promptly settled.

Managed remote access, message audit trails and controlled collaboration pres-

ents a unique and rapid opportunity to add value to the service provided to the principal.

If the broker can appear constantly and consistently well informed, the client will be permanently impressed and confidence will grow – and hopefully their loyalty and revenues with it.

While shipping rates may be more slightly stable now than a month ago, these are highly turbulent times and riding the storm relies on being well informed, agile and ready.

Without question, mobility is a facility few brokers can afford to be without. But for a positive impact on business, that mobile solution must be tightly controlled and carefully set up so that it works for and not against you.

Besides, even if business is currently a little turbulent, the opportunity for progress still beckons – staff will have more time to embrace the new features which will arm them best in anticipation for the inevitable upturn.

Those tooling up appropriately now stand to soak up the best of the currently available business, riding the storm as the tide continually turns and being in the best possible position for the abundance of new business in the market recovery.

Those relying on poorly supervised solutions, or no mobile solution at all, risk finding themselves tossed up on the shore. **DS**

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