



## SMB and big data: what is in it for me?

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In an environment where every retailer, brick-and-mortar or e-commerce, is competing for every wallet, how does an SMB level the playing field when larger stores have deeper pockets to invest in tools to optimize their business? The answer may lie in the big data arena.

Don't assume that your customers don't have the resources to make big data work for them. There are many ways to access effective data to optimize your customer's business practices. You have to know what your goals are and have the ability to analyze and turn that knowledge into sound business decisions.

VARs who provide effective data analysis may uncover a new potential revenue stream. It's up to management to turn data into action, but relevant, actionable data will whet a customer's appetite for more. Demonstrating the possibilities presents the opportunity to upsell more of your services.

### The Secret Sauce

The answer isn't big data as much as it is finding smart data, the data that can facilitate measuring and prescribing a course of action to effect the desired change. To arrive at smart data requires creating a process to properly sort big data. Therein lies the secret sauce and, as we know, "where there is mystery, there is margin."

### The Tools of the Data Trade

A great place to start is with a CRM system. You can gather a great deal of customer information from a well-maintained and purposeful CRM system. Find one that can scale and grow with your client's business, but remember it's only as good as the information entered.

One invaluable tool is available at no cost: Google Analytics Tools. Sign up and track your customer's website and social networks and analyze what aspects of their social media presence is working and what is not. Google's reports on keywords, traffic, visitors, behaviors, searches, top content and e-commerce can yield directed statistics for the decision maker.

Your payment processing partner may offer the ability to access online reporting and analytics: consumer buying habits, industry trends, location/terminal performance. It's very common for them to offer a loyalty card and/or gift card that is labeled with your customer's brand that provides a great deal of specific data about a customer's buying behaviors, creating a detailed customer profile. Payment processors may also help facilitate a mobile POS strategy and allow for analysis of response/receptiveness to mobile purchasing behavior.



There are several vendor manufacturer partners who have introduced hardware designed to capture data and help VARs deliver value-added cloud services, such as delivering personalized customer experiences without making changes to the POS software. Data analytics, coupons, rewards, promo marketing and digital receipts are all delivered by the Epson OmniLink TM-T88V-I. Star Thermal printers with the AllReceipts customer app send transactions to the cloud and allow VARs to send promo info, images and alerts to customer phones. Customers can choose digital receipts and opt for device management. These features differentiate their product and offer potential revenue streams as well as business data needed in order to provide analysis.

Strategically placed sensors can track shopper traffic within the walls of a store. These sensors can provide a wealth of intelligence concerning customer behavior. A solution could offer a cloud-based, managed-wireless infrastructure that could track customer traffic patterns by monitoring the MAC address on smart phones. This does not create personal information security concerns because there is no app to have to opt into. So, out of the box, the Meraki Cloud provides location analytics using their APs to gather real-time information: how many visitors, how many returning visitors, visit duration, time stamps, passers-by and visitor patterns inside store.

Regardless of the resources available to a retail/hospitality location, there are tools to accelerate adoption of a smart data strategy. By using low cost and no cost tools to help mine for information, a value-added VAR can quickly become the provider of figures that could change the course of a customer's business and possibly determine an outcome of success. The availability of and practicality of providing big data isn't coming, it's here.

# DEVICE MANAGEMENT AND ANALYTICS

In addition to providing smart data for the retailer to understand the customer better, an area that is gaining a lot of IT traction is mobile device management (MDM) and analytics. One of the toughest challenges a retail enterprise faces is configuration, deployment and maintenance, especially on larger deployments of untethered or mobile devices. This pain point provides yet another perfect opportunity for VARs to leverage the same sorts of technology (Wi-Fi device tracking and device monitoring).

Many of these solutions have grown out of local network monitoring and control packages and have become large companies such as AirWatch-VMware, SOTI, Symantec, MobileIron, B2M, and ProxToMe, to name a few. These companies are working with many different hardware manufacturers to embed various levels of remote management capabilities into future generations of devices, including basic diagnostic features such as battery condition, usage statistics, firmware version control, network configuration, consumables information, etc. The actual monitoring and managing of this information remains an opportunity for VARs.

Some of these MDM companies, like SOTI and B2M allow VARs to take on the role of offering the service of monitoring and managing these devices for a fee to the retailer. As an example, VARs can operate their own SOTI network operations center, with dedicated staff to take care of their most important customers. This drives incremental recurring revenue, which also cements a closer working relationship with the IT customer. VARs then are more than just a hardware provider, they are a trusted IT partner, working as a team to make the deployment and management of mobile devices go more



smoothly, ensuring faster ROI to the retailer. Better still, it opens the door to the notion of hardware as a service (HaaS).

If a retailer wants to ensure that the investment in the technologies is being used, the same MDM platforms can track how (and if) employees are using the technology. The same Wi-Fi location services that you can use to monitor customer traffic can help retailers do a better job with their own in-house mobile technology. VARs can play a crucial role in managing these devices as a service to their customers, providing customers with the smart data they need to get the most out of their IT investment.

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*Velda's passions are reflected in her track record for "connecting the dots". Velda thrives on recognizing trends and capitalizing on them in order to insure the health and relevancy of VARs and distribution in the channel.*