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Company offers wireless business data exchange for cell phones

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MIAMI --

The university maintenance worker finishes installing new mirrors in dormitory rooms, and instead of returning to the office, he just grabs his cell phone.

The worker presses a few buttons to input information on ready-made forms that were sent to his phone. The description of his next job and its location are all on the screen, while the data on when he started and finished is sent to a central computer.

This paperless data exchange among field workers and their offices is not new. But JumpStart Wireless is bringing the technology to regular cell phones, hoping it will grow due to its software's widespread compatibility and become an attractive takeover target for more established competitors like Motorola.

Using artificial intelligence, the Delray Beach-based company's application fits most business software, and works on any cell phone brand. Users say it saves businesses time and money on paperwork, data entry, labor costs and auditing.

"Any phone you can play a game on, you can run our software on," said Jeff Bonar, who started JumpStart in 2000.

Bonar used his doctorate in artificial intelligence from the University of Massachusetts and a \$500,000 initial investment to found JumpStart. His goal was to come up with mass market solutions for moving corporate data on devices such as cell phones or BlackBerrys.

"One of the problems in the wireless world for business software is that everything is incompatible," Bonar said. "At no point in the future will Motorola phones be compatible with Nokia phones."

For Bonar, writing custom software for each company was not an option because of the abundance of available business software applications. That's where artificial intelligence comes in.

"We let the computer itself configure the software to meet the needs of particular customer," Bonar said.

Companies customize forms that organize the information they want sent to a field worker. The data then bounces from the office to JumpStart's servers to the worker's phone.

The data moves from JumpStart to a computer system, eliminating paperwork and reducing the need for employees who perform data entry for client billing and in-house accounting. It can help speed up billing, add extra service calls, and track staff productivity.

JumpStart can be used for researchers to monitor participants in medical trials, delivery drivers to record drop-offs, even let college kids order pizza, Bonar said.

Bonar said the typical customer pays about \$35 per user, per month. JumpStart is currently processing more than 350,000 transactions per month. He declined to discuss

specifics about the company's financials, only saying it should turn a profit this year.

Several companies provide real-time business communication and processing services using a variety of available wireless and mobile devices that look like minicomputers.

Jacksonville-based ICS Inc. provides RF-Smart, a real-time wireless data collection application used in manufacturing distribution and logistics, such as tracking warehouse inventory, said marketing director Pete Palazzolo.

ICS uses hand-held devices, offered by a handful of companies such as Symbol Technologies Inc., that often include mini-keyboards, bar code scanners and radios. They are generally larger and bulkier than cell phones, but also lend themselves to more complicated tasks with larger visual screens, easier-to-use keyboards and a more rugged build.

Wireless giant Motorola Inc., which bought Symbol in January, currently offers a system that can collect and transmit data through specialized mobile computers and allow workers to talk using walkie-talkie style communication or over a cellular network.

One user of JumpStart is Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. The technology is saving the school about \$300 per month for 95 maintenance workers, said Russ Woodard, maintenance project manager.

"The thing that really sold our school is that it virtually eliminates mistakes on time cards," Woodard said. "To be able to have everything, all in one unit, is so handy."

Such interest makes the market a candidate for growth. According to estimates by the Yankee Group, an independent technology research firm, about \$5.9 billion of software for work-related options for mobile devices such as cell phones will be sold in 2009, a 47.5 percent increase from \$4 billion in 2006.

Jim Kelleher, a senior analyst with Argus Research Corp., said any young company such as JumpStart would want to identify a niche to be successful.

"You need to find a narrow niche, identify a need, build a need and sit back to either get squashed by the big guys or get bought by the big guys," he said "... To me, it's intuitive that this would be a good product."

However, Kelleher did point out that JumpStart is not alone in thinking that the idea can work.

Bonar agreed, but said JumpStart's core technology down the road will be protected because it has three patents pending.

Still, "we fully expect to get acquired at some point by a big company that wants what we have," Bonar said.