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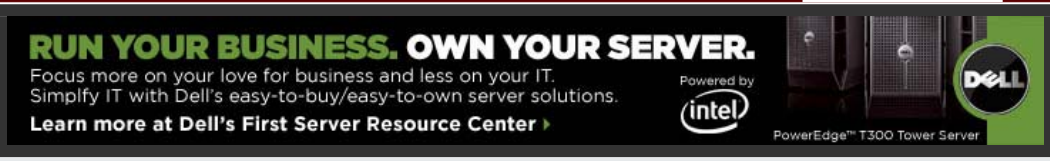

Camera Phones and GPS Are for SMBs Too, Says Startup

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Mikael Ricknäs, IDG News Service

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Small enterprises too can take advantage of cameras and GPS (Global Positioning System) built into mobile phones, according to Swedish startup Two Story Software. The company is developing a Web-based work order management service, and a first beta was announced last week.

About a year ago the three founders -- Jens Lundström, Thommy Eklöf and Johan Liseborn -- started to discuss why there are so few collaboration tools for mobile phones, especially ones that also take advantage of built-in cameras and GPS.

"There are a lot that focuses on consumers, but nothing for smaller enterprises and the like," said Lundström, who is the company CEO.

The discussion led to the formation of Two Story Software, and the creation of Work 7x24, a service that is being developed for companies with between three and 50 employees, including workers out in the field.

"Usually handymen, including electricians, plumbers, and installers, have a mobile phone and a notepad, and that is their back office support. When they head out in the field they have work orders written on a note," said Lundström.

Work 7x24 makes it possible for managers at small companies to sit at any computer and add work orders directly into a browser-based user interface. Notifications are then sent to employees out in the field using either SMS (Short Message Service) or e-mail.

The notification includes a link to another web site where the handyman can keep track of all ongoing activities. Here they can find geographical location, budget and information about the customer.

Images and instructions that can help can also be attached. The employee can also put such information back into the system, so a salesperson can, for example, take some geo-tagged photographs that later on can help the installer. Images can also be used to document what has been done.

Favorite spots can also be added to the system, so it can show the way from the office to where the next job is located.

There are two versions of the user interface; one that has been developed for mobile phones with smaller screens and one for regular PCs or smart phones with larger screens. Users can switch between the two, according to Lundström.

"Our goal is to make it simpler for small companies to work together and document what they have done, and do it faster with less paperwork," said Lundström.

Two Story is currently working with a handful of beta testers, but is looking for more. "We want to work closely with beta testers to see which direction the service should take. The plan is then to go from a beta version to a real service in the middle of next year," said Lundström.

Pricing hasn't been decided yet, he said.

Two Story isn't the first time Lundström, Eklöf and Liseborn have started a company together; in 2006 their last venture, Hotsip, which developed a system for messaging and IP telephony, was sold to Oracle for an undisclosed sum.

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The process of being acquired by an American company was a very educational and intensive journey, and there where some funny incidents on the way, according to Lundström.

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"I remember meeting with Oracle Training Academy to tell them about our course material, and they asked if we had our own printing shop. I said that we just print it out ourselves. Then they asked how many courses we had organized, and I said that we have maybe organized five. Oh, you mean 5,000. No, I mean five. There was an enormous difference in scale," said Lundström.

In the end he worked for Oracle for a little more than two years, and it was a good experience. "Both the team and the product ended up in the right place, but when you see a new opportunity you want to pursue it," said Lundström.

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