



Mobile Workforce Management

The Digital Frontier

Summary

Utter the words “mobile workforce,” and some executives picture pajama-clad employees sitting at kitchen tables surfing the Internet on the clock. But with studies demonstrating that digital labor promotes lower overhead, better recruitment and retention, and improved productivity, the reality is that mobile working is on the rise—for good reason. However, organizations that want to take advantage of this new digital frontier must overcome the unique obstacles mobile work creates: namely over-connection and disconnection. Over-connection, the plight of employees who are too “plugged in,” can increase labor and overtime costs; disconnection occurs when mobile employees suffer from a lack of communication with colleagues and the company culture. One way to combat both connectivity issues is with a tool most organizations already employ: a time and attendance system. With time tracking features and functionalities designed for the needs of mobile workers, an effective time and attendance system helps overcome over-connection and disconnection to support a successful, effective and productive mobile workforce.

Digital Labor—The New Frontier

Once, employment was confined to a specific building, office or location. Today, thanks to mobile technology, work can happen anytime, anywhere. “Work is no longer a place you go,” said Matt Kaplan, Vice President of Products at LogMeIn. “Rather, the workplace is defined by the tools you use wherever you go.”¹

A mobile workforce offers distinct advantages in today’s global marketplace. By eliminating the need for a centralized brick-and-mortar workspace, companies can significantly lower overhead, from real estate costs to IT infrastructure. Also, companies can broaden their recruiting efforts outside their immediate geographical area to find candidates that best match their needs without the headaches, delays and costs of relocation. Most of all, mobile technology promises to make employees more productive when decisions can be made quickly, efficiently, and often in the palm of their hand.²

In fact, three out of five employers report they didn’t need to be in the office everyday to be productive. Seventy-eight percent of smartphone users access their email remotely on their phone.³ And a study by Brown University identified a 12 percent increase in productivity from employees working from home—on top of increased job satisfaction and lower attrition associated with the flexibility to work from home.⁴ It’s no wonder, then, that digital labor is on the rise. The worldwide digital labor population is estimated to have increased from 29 percent of the workforce in 2008 to almost 35 percent in 2013, equaling an estimated 1.19 billion workers. The U.S. touts the highest concentration of mobile workers with 75.5 percent of the country’s total workforce identified as mobile.⁵

Lower overhead. Top prospect recruiting. Increased productivity. Better retention. It’s easy to see why digital labor is the new frontier for business. So why do so many organizations struggle with the transition?

Mobile Workforce Disadvantages

Two major disadvantages stand in the way of organizations’ attempts to support a more mobile workforce, both of which deal with connection.

- 1. *Over-connection to work.*** The ability to work anytime, anywhere means boundaries between work and personal life can blur.⁶ Beyond the work-life balance issues this creates for employees, employers need to worry about the compliance issues this raises under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The FLSA stipulates that employees need to be compensated for every minute they are “suffered or permitted” to work by their employer.⁷ Consequently, any non-exempt employee responding to an email after dinner on their smartphone likely qualifies as “hours worked” and demands compensation under FLSA. Multiply these instances by number of employees and organizations can face significant labor and overtime increases as well as potential non-compliance allegations.
- 2. *Disconnection from company culture.*** A disadvantage of digital labor is the disconnection employees can experience from coworkers and company culture.⁸ Instead of working face-to-face with colleagues and contributing to the company’s mission and values together, a mobile worker can feel out of the loop, or even out of sync with the company if communication is difficult or organizational processes emphasize, reward or demonstrate preference for employees who work onsite.



It seems counterintuitive that mobile technology, designed to connect employees across regions, countries, even continents cause two opposing connection-related problems. But the mobile workforce is the new direction of business, offering distinct competitive and personnel advantages most companies are smart to maximize. So how can an organization best harness the power, flexibility and satisfaction of a mobile workforce while avoiding these issues?

A Surprising Way to Maximize Your Mobile Workforce

A number of mobile workforce management solutions are available on the market. From systems to best practices, experts offer opinions on the most effective ways to keep arrangements flexible and employees productive. The difficulty is in finding a tool that can address the connection issues facing mobile workers. Where can organizations find a tool that encourages communication while managing time spent on the job? Does such a tool exist?

It does. And, in most cases, it's a tool most organizations already employ: a time and attendance system.

Time and attendance systems are often the most widely used applications in an organization. Every employee interacts with it, even if at different levels, and the application itself is designed to track and manage time on the job. With the right features and functionality, it's easy to see how a time and attendance system can be an effective tool to manage over-connection and thwart disconnection.

Let's look at the characteristics a time and attendance system needs to have to help these connection issues.

Mobile Workforce Time Tracking: Features & Functionality

To be most effective, a time and attendance system should help mobile workers manage their time on the clock to avoid unnecessary hours or overtime (to combat over-connection) and promote communication between supervisors or managers regarding time-related issues (to discourage disconnection). Additionally, the system should be suited to the demands of the mobile worker—that is, it should be as mobile as the employee. With this in mind, let's examine the time and attendance system characteristics best suited for today's growing mobile workforce.

Mobility & Flexibility

Two key characteristics of an effective digital labor time tracking system are mobility and flexibility. Mobile employees require a system that adapts to whatever work situation they participate in, making it easy to record and manage their time.

- **Mobile app.** The best way for mobile employees to track time is through a mobile app. Sophisticated and secure, the right time and attendance system's mobile app will be easy to use, maintenance-free, and tied directly to the parent system to ensure all data captured by the app is available through the central system for reporting and payroll needs.



Time Management (Avoiding Over-Connection)

The key to avoiding over-connection is providing mobile employees the tools to easily track and manage their hours as they accrue them. Working in conjunction with straightforward policies around working outside of scheduled hours, a time tracking mobile app helps employees avoid being too plugged in.

- **Customizable.** Different employees have different time-tracking needs. A customizable mobile app allows organizations to configure functionality to meet each employee's requirements.
- **Time card functions.** At its most basic, a time tracking mobile app will allow employees to punch in and out or enter hours in a daily format (such as through a daily worksheet) and approve their time card remotely.
- **Schedule review.** Mobile employees need to review punches, schedules, work hours, benefit balances and leave requests to ensure they are available when colleagues or customers need them.
- **Employee alerts.** Alerts let mobile workers know when they need to take action such as fix missing punches, approve time cards and read messages.
- **Additional features.** Depending on the needs of the employee, additional features customized for their work responsibilities are helpful, such as recording expenses or tracking tips.

Supervisor Communication (Avoiding Disconnection)

Disconnection is a uniquely modern and mobile problem, and a time tracking app will play an important role in keeping lines of communication open between employees and managers.

- **Manager notification and communication.** An effective mobile app will allow mobile employees to notify managers of late arrival or absence and to correspond privately regarding time-related issues. Additionally, all correspondence will be stored in the system for later review.
- **Leave requests.** Managing leave is an important part of time-tracking. The mobile app will permit employees to request partial day, full day or multiple days of leave through the system and view their supervisor's approval.
- **Workgroup transfer.** For employees working in multiple locations, teams or departments, they must be able to transfer to the correct group for accurate time logging.
- **Password management.** Because security is a vital component of successful mobile applications, employees must be able to manage and change their password as needed or required.

Conclusion

Mobile connection is the next frontier of business. But the nature of digital labor creates unique obstacles that must be overcome in order for a mobile workforce to thrive. Whether it's over-connection or disconnection, a time tracking system with the right features will encourage more successful, effective and productive mobile workers, giving companies a forward-looking advantage in today's market.



About Attendance on Demand, Inc.

Attendance on Demand supports the labor management needs of thousands of companies and more than a half million employees across North America. Launched in 2006, Attendance on Demand is a rapidly deployed, cloud-based solution that minimizes a company's risk and technology investment while providing advanced features for securely managing labor data—calculating pay rules, scheduling employees, budgeting labor, and automating recordkeeping for labor law compliance. With standard uptime over the industry average of 99.995% and above average customer retention rates, Attendance on Demand removes the worry of maintaining expensive infrastructure. An extensive North American distribution network helps organizations use Attendance on Demand to reduce labor expenses and improve decision-making.

For further information about FLSA compliance, please contact the U.S. Department of Labor at www.dol.gov or 1-866-4-USA-DOL.

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