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GET SMART

The fresh role of smartphones in production operations

By Leila Hyslop

Smartphones' is the term used to characterize wireless telephones with special applications. The technological advancement of wireless phones is rapid and the phones keep getting 'smarter' if you will – from email to Internet and now, to electronic gas flow measurement. Perhaps not a function you'd initially expect from a wireless phone, but let's turn the media spotlight from the hype of wireless consumers to the business market. Specifically, upstream production operations and how oil and gas producers can also benefit from applications that are available on the one device no operator leaves home without.

Zedi Inc., a production operations company based in Alberta, has entered this new way of doing business with the launch of Zedi EFM Walk-up™. An alternative to paper charts, Zedi EFM Walk-up will allow gas companies to electronically measure gas flows at well sites and relay that information to their head office using an advanced RIM BlackBerry, one of the most popular smartphones on the market.

So what does that look like? First off, operators are the key users of the BlackBerry. When visiting their regular well site, operators can upload data from the electronic flow measurement (EFM) device at the well head by pushing a few buttons on their BlackBerry. The transfer of data occurs via Bluetooth technology from device to device. The operator can repeat this process on many wells, over one or many days, until he/she is ready to upload the information to the Internet.

Traditionally, operators visit well sites to collect and replace paper charts that record gas measurement with a pen and ink system. But tradition is being challenged by other electronic measurement systems that are displacing the charts and have been increasing in popularity over the past decade due to their efficiency.

"The Zedi EFM Walk-up is a time saver since you retrieve data from the device with just a few button clicks on the smartphone, instead of fussing around with paper," says Ron Klys, lead operator for Signalta. "It also gives you more flexibility to retrieve month end data; instead of rushing to pick up the



charts before data is overwritten, the Zedi device stores the data so you can pick it up at your convenience."

With years of experience behind him, Klys also points out that an operator's time is saved on wells that have poor access or when operators are out in adverse weather conditions. Carrying a waterproof bag to protect paper charts is replaced by popping the BlackBerry into your pocket. Estimating information off a wrinkled chart is another common operations problem solved by the push of a few buttons to get absolute electronic data.

"What's most interesting in the operator adoption of the smartphones is that the concept is being embraced by the different generations employed in the field today," says Debra Deane, vice president of marketing at Zedi. Operators with more experience under their belts are seeing the smartphone and EFM combination as a more efficient system, and so the willingness is there to go through the learning curve. The enthusiasm from operators just getting their feet wet stems from the opportunity to use the latest wireless technology as a work tool that they're already so familiar with from personal use.

Despite the field operator perks, it can be argued that benefits to end-users might play second fiddle to what happens once the operator uses the BlackBerry to upload the data. Just as simple as retrieving the well site data, a few more selections will initiate a transfer through the company's wireless provider to Zedi's secure web portal, where it is instantly available to all authorized users. That list of users can be extensive and regardless of location, can include anyone from engineers and production accountants to executives.

Production data from field to office, all in a matter of minutes on a device that's already so familiar to field personnel; now that's another way to get smart.

For more information on the Zedi EFM Walk-up solution, please visit www.zedi.ca or contact solutions@zedi.ca. ♦