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Small Firms That Run Almost Entirely on Mobile Gadgets

Forget Desktops And Laptops. These Firms Use Tablets And Smartphones As Their Backbone.

By CHUCK GREEN

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Yoon Cannon leans on her phone and tablet when she's on the go. *Keegan Cannon*

Can you run an entire business from the palm of your hand?

Some entrepreneurs are giving it a shot.

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For these early adopters, mobile gadgets like smartphones and tablets don't just *help* them do their work—they're the backbone of the business. Entrepreneurs use them to do everything from ringing up sales to creating pitches and promotional videos to coordinating far-flung employees.

Of course, that kind of extensive setup won't work for every small business. But looking at how these mobile pioneers do it can give any entrepreneur some ideas about ways they can bring mobile technology into their everyday operations.

Here's a look at some early adopters and how they're using mobile devices.

iPads in the Aisles

Montreal-based LXR & Co. sells vintage luxury products—like purses, bags, belts and wallets—from outlets in Beverly Hills, New York and, soon, Toronto. Staffers also go to clients' homes or

hotels to complete deals.

That need for mobility is why the company decided to run its operation with iPhones and iPads. Using a tablet loaded with a cloud-based point-of-sale system from LightSpeed Retail, a member of the sales staff can meet with a customer one on one and "swipe a transaction," says Fred

Mannella, founder and chief executive.

"When we go to clients' hotel or home and process a \$15,000 transaction, it goes fast," he says. "These people don't like to wait; when they want it, they want it right away."

In stores, meanwhile, staffers can use mobile gadgets to complete sales wherever customers happen to be. Managers can also order items for customers that are in the warehouse but not in the store.

Moreover, Mr. Mannella can remotely track sales at his stores. "We get to know—at any given point in the day—when a transaction went through and the volume of sales. It's made our life so much easier," Mr. Mannella says.

Downtime? Not Anymore

Yoon Cannon, who runs Paramount Business Coach, in Doylestown, Pa., stores company records on her laptop and prefers to use it when she has a lot to type. But when she's on the road—which is some 40% of the time—she relies on an [iPhone](#) and iPad.

"I'm in the car a lot for both work and family," Ms. Cannon says. "I have voice-activated apps that read me info I need to review from websites. Voice-activated apps like Dragon Dictate or Siri will also convert my speaking voice to [email] if I need to get out some urgent responses."

The gadgets also help her manage her five to eight remote employees. A collection of apps like Podio let her organize their email correspondence, oversee projects and give them feedback.

Likewise, she can stay in touch with clients. For instance, she can use Skype to videoconference with them over her phone and let them see what's on her screen so she can show them information quickly, among other things. She can also record and edit videos from her phone and put together presentations and proposals.

Still, the setup isn't perfect. Once, an alert reminder went off while she was in the middle of a client call—and kept beeping every few seconds for the rest of the lengthy call. "The other person on the call can't hear the beeps, but it was really distracting and I couldn't deactivate" it, she says.

Content on the Run

For Holly Shore, mobile technology makes her business possible.

She writes the bulk of the content for Integrative Mom, her nutrition and lifestyle site for mothers, on her smartphone, as well as taking pictures and uploading them to the site.

"I always have my phone with me and am able to work in any bits of spare time I have throughout the day. I am a very busy home-schooling mom, and do not have the time to sit at a desktop computer for any length of time," says Ms. Shore, of Austin, Texas. "If it weren't for my smartphone, I'm not sure my website or blog would exist."

Using her smartphone, "I can write whenever I'm inspired—which can include at the playground, at the grocery store, or while I'm waiting in my parked car for the napping baby in the back seat to wake up," Ms. Shore explains.

Of course, "there have been times writing on a desktop or laptop would have been quicker, or maybe a photo could have been placed a little better," Ms. Shore says. But "if I was confined to a desktop or even a laptop, I would be writing and posting a lot less often."

Mr. Green is a writer in Chicago. He can be reached at reports@wsj.com.

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