



Your Mobile Link to Better Sales

Wireless technology helps one marketing company offer high-quality merchandising and promotion services.

By Judy Lynn Shields

Imagine your frustration as a consumer—or worse yet, as a store manager—if you scanned the shelves for an advertised product on sale, and it wasn't there. What would you do?

Enter CSI MobileLink, a software solution from San Jose, Calif.-based Casio Soft, which facilitates the two-way transmission of data using handheld computers, from an organization's database and server to marketing representatives in the field. The software is built on three key components: the handheld device, the desktop application and the database server. Administrators in the home office compile names, sites, products and questions for market research and merchandising surveys.

According to Jeff Specht, vice president of sales for Casio Soft, the company purchased the original design for MobileLink from Wright Strategies in 1998 and subsequently made many design changes. The resulting version 3.0, tentatively set for release in March 2001, will be Web-enabled and allow field representatives to access graphic images, as well as text, when viewing the questions on their handheld computers.

Field Marketing Inc. (FMI), a marketing company that provides customized in-field merchandising and promotion services to Fortune 500 and other consumer

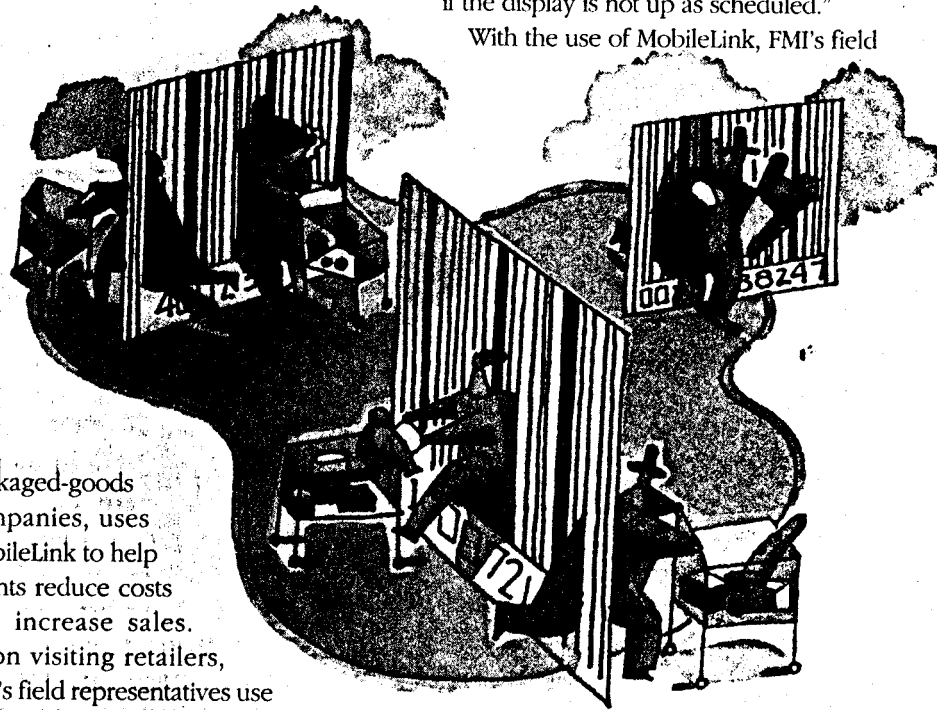
packaged-goods companies, uses MobileLink to help clients reduce costs and increase sales. Upon visiting retailers, FMI's field representatives use handheld computers and a bar code scanner to examine shelf conditions. According to Randy Douglas, senior vice president of sales for FMI, they "use the technology to track pricing, determine how many products are out of stock, how many products are still on the shelf and note if any shelf tags are missing.

"We use MobileLink to generate [product] orders," Douglas continues. "The system is designed to replace stock when inventory falls below a certain quantity. The signature capture enables us to know if the store has authorized [us] to replace the item."

Daryl Scott, president and CEO of Casio

Soft, relates the "softer" benefits of MobileLink, such as the ability to acquire data quickly: "Manual entry is expensive and slow and is much more error prone [since] handwritten replies can be illegible," he says. Using the traditional paper and pencil system of collecting data from retailers would produce data that was sometimes three months old. According to Scott, "Companies sometimes pay \$100,000 or more for 'end cap' aisle placement in stores. MobileLink enables immediate follow-up if the display is not up as scheduled."

With the use of MobileLink, FMI's field



representatives have experienced a 20 percent increase in productivity, according to Douglas. "We have picked up an additional \$15 to \$20 million in business [contracts] because of MobileLink. [As] our company will bill about \$100 million annually, this is about an additional 15 to 20 percent increase [in new business]," he says.

If FMI's success with MobileLink is any indication, businesses will rely more on wireless technology and less on handwritten reports and phone reporting systems for tracking inventory and sales figures. 