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How innovative field service organizations are planning for the future today

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The field service management (FSM) story is a continually morphing one that bridges many complex human interactions, evolving user needs, and shifting technology paradigms. It has weathered repeated generational changes in terms of who the key players serving the industry are (e.g., on both the supply and demand sides); what the prevailing usage patterns are in terms of technology deployments and trends; and what FSM functionality is preferred today vs. what will likely be preferred tomorrow – and beyond.

It has survived all of the various iterations and acronyms that have been used to define the current and emerging state of services management, and it continually deals with the onslaught of new solution providers, users, and functionalities that are constantly redefining the industry. But, most importantly, FSM tools continue to support a growing base of global field services organizations and their customers who are continually raising the bar with respect to expecting an optimal customer experience.

This ever-evolving journey can be explored through a series of carefully laid out chapters and sub-chapters focusing on key areas such as:

The current state of field service operations – including:

- The people who support field service today
- Current organizational practices
- Current focus on customer service.

The future state of field service organizations (FSOs) – including:

- How to prepare your team for the future of field service
- Emerging organizational practices
- From customer service to customer experience.

How innovative companies are planning for the future today – including:

- How to encourage buy-in across the organization
- Planning for the right new hires and training methods
- Ensuring that sales and marketing understand the advantages of having the field technician in front of the customer.

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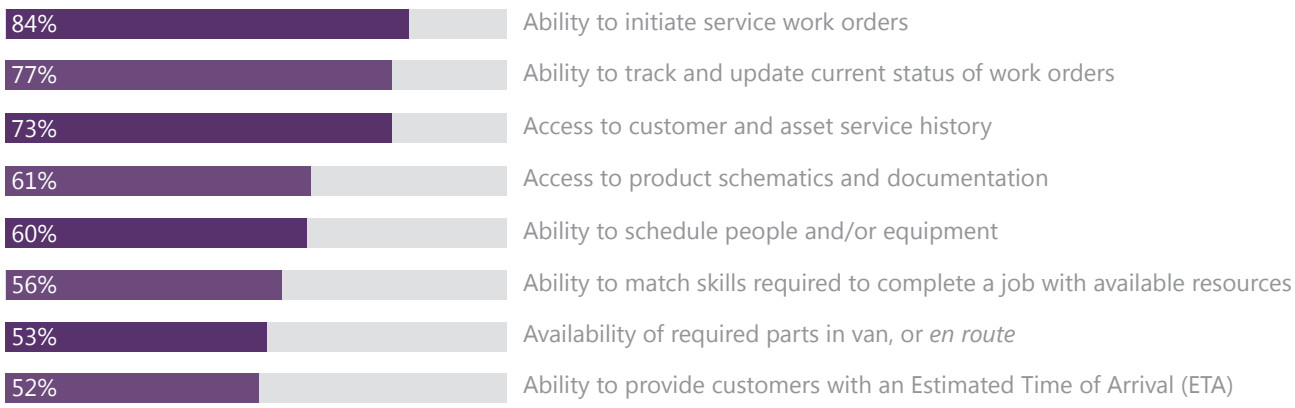
The current state of field service organizations

The people who support field service today

The people who support field service today are significantly more empowered than their predecessors. Continuing advances in technology, primarily emanating from the proliferation of the Internet of Things (IoT), have resulted in the most qualified, best trained, and best managed field technicians that the industry has ever seen. Perhaps the most obvious example is how the IoT has facilitated the ability of field technicians to collect, receive, and transmit data in real time; generate invoices and capture signatures at the customer site; and benefit from the use of new, innovative, IoT-based technologies such as augmented reality (AR).

While most services organizations may still, in fact, categorize their field force with the historical titles of dispatcher, scheduler, and field technician, the responsibilities of these roles have also started to blur as the service organization workforce becomes more collaborative. This phenomenon is largely attributed to the steps taken by a majority of services organizations to let their customers enter into the mix through the use of customer portals or other Internet-based points of self-service entry, thereby performing some of the service call-related tasks that the field technicians had previously managed.

As a result of these trends in combination with the proliferation of Internet-powered resources developed in support of field technicians, today's service techs are much more "cool, calm and connected" than ever before. For example, data from a recent industry study *2016/17* Field Service Management (FSM) Benchmark Tracking Survey (conducted in Q4, 2016) reveals that a majority of FSOs currently provide their field technicians with the following "basic" set of eight essential online capabilities:



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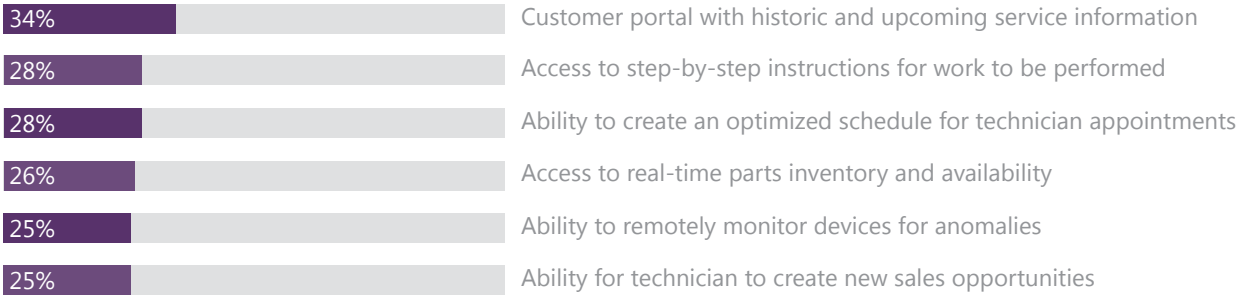
The list of online resources planned for implementation in the next 12 months assures the continuing expansion of the capabilities of the field force with at least one-quarter (25%) of FSOs also planning to offer:



In the foreseeable future, FSOs will continue to benefit from the growing list of online resources, allowing them to deliver an enhanced customer experience to their users.

Among the first steps being taken toward building for tomorrow, according to a senior service executive from a billion-dollar national building services firm, is a "build out of functional infrastructure to support our resource desk. We plan to do a pilot in late 2017, with an anticipated launch in 2018." The example he gives is the field technician on the rooftop being able to use a mobile app to access information on the service history, review product specs, schematics and installation or repair guidelines – and get the information needed instantly without having to leave the rooftop.

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Current organizational practices

Over the past decade, most FSOs have completed an evolution and now successfully run as a profit center. In 2014, 66% of FSOs were managing service as a profit center; however, this percent has increased to 70% in only two years – the first time that this particular metric has topped 70% (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Overall, service is managed predominantly by FSOs as a profit center
(Percent response)

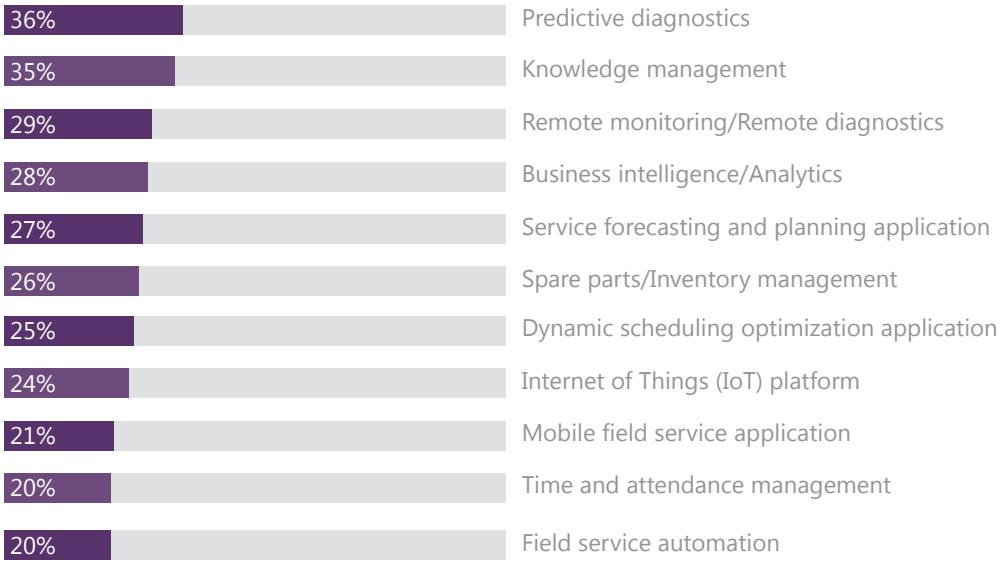
The preferred types of FSM solutions used by FSOs have also changed over the years, although the market seems to prefer deploying an off-the-shelf solution, with some customization. For example, in 2016, roughly half of the global FSO community cited their current usage of off-the-shelf FSM solutions to run their respective services operations at 47% with some customization, and only 3% with no customization.

Still, one out of seven companies is running its services operations through a series of manual processes (e.g. typically piggy-backing onto a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or Sales Management application, augmented by the use of Excel spreadsheets and Post-It Notes). While this percent is down somewhat from 18% only two years earlier, it still suggests that there is a relatively large base of potential FSM users that have either not yet recognized or implemented a formal FSM solution to run their services operations.

However, there are five tech applications that nearly half (i.e., between 41% and 47%) of FSOs use to run not just service operations, but business as a whole, including: workforce management systems (WMS) (47%), field service automation (45%), remote monitoring/remote diagnostics (45%), service forecasting and planning (42%), and enterprise resource planning (ERP) service module (41%). As such, the planned use of these applications may best reflect the future of the field service management segment.

Looking at all of these technology applications, as a whole, the 2016 global FSO base is currently using as many technology applications as their best counterparts used only two years earlier! This is another strong indicator of the growing acceptance, implementation, and use of emerging technologies in support of field service management.

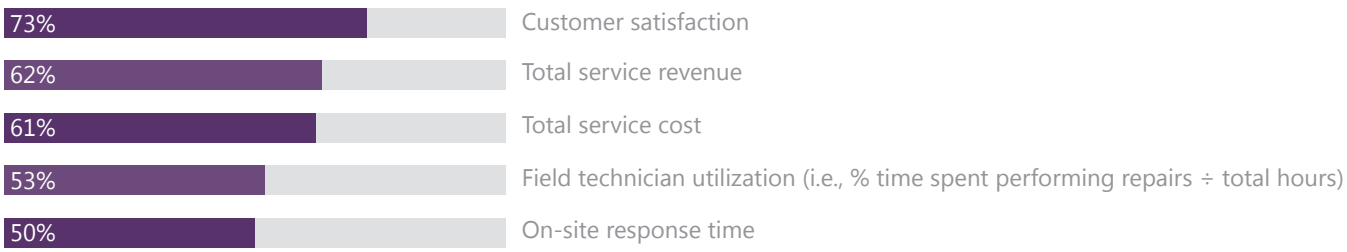
However, the embracing and adoption of new technology is not diminishing in the FSM market. In fact, additional evidence generated from the most recent benchmark survey supports the acceptance of technology in that there are another eleven technology applications that at least 20% of the global services community is planning to implement in the next twelve months, including:



These planned technology implementations consist both of existing technology users looking to bolster, upgrade, and/or expand current capabilities, as well as those FSOs looking to implement these technologies for the first time. Either way, the forecasted numbers point toward a global services community that is looking to expand its technological horizons through the adoption of more state-of-the-art platforms, applications, and functionalities – mostly powered by the IoT.

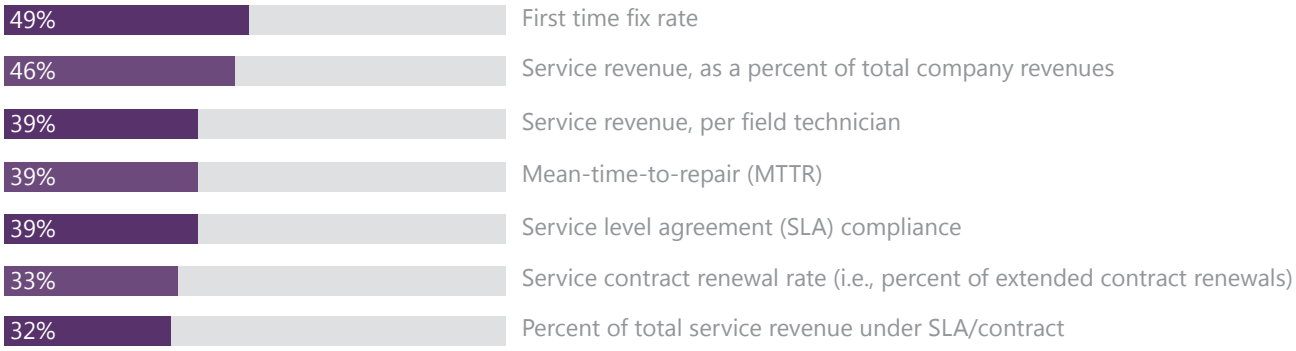
But, there is much more to the equation than simply adopting new technologies – FSOs also need to measure the impact of these new technologies on services operations. This requires the use of a formal key performance indicator (KPI) program that is designed to measure the performance of the organization before – and after – the implementation of these new technologies.

The current, primary KPIs as cited by a majority of FSOs can be divided into three main categories: customer-focused, revenue/cost-focused and performance-focused, as follows:



The customer-focused KPIs generally revolve around metrics such as customer satisfaction and on-site response time; the revenue/cost KPIs typically relate to total service revenue and total service cost; and the performance-related KPIs begin with the use of a field technician utilization measure.

However, there are still another seven KPIs that are bubbling just under the 50% line that are widely used to measure service delivery performance – particularly among best practices FSOs. For the purposes of categorization, best practices FSOs were determined on the basis of meeting two distinct performance parameters; that is, achieving at least 90% customer satisfaction, plus realizing at least 30% services profitability – the logic being that these FSOs have proven that they can satisfy their customers while still attaining industry-leading profit margins. These KPIs include:



Spruiell, VP of Group Operations at NAVCO, claims that his company "does a lot of data mining in order to support our KPI program. We use an efficiency rating and are looking at 70%; and our first time fix rate is 95%. We use KPIs up the wazoo! At least eleven KPIs that I need to measure, and another twenty-five for our CFO."

The latest research has shown that the most successful FSOs will likely be those that are:

- Organized as profit centers with their own P&L accountability.
- Using the most current, state-of-the-art FSM software solutions.
- Adopting – and applying – the use of related services-focused technology applications and functionality.
- Using a formal KPI program to measure, monitor, and track their performance over time.

The marketplace has clearly spoken – and a majority of FSOs have already taken steps to undertake these KPI-related activities within their organizations. However, the gap will continue to widen between those organizations that have – and have not yet – adopted best practices. In fact, it will become increasingly difficult to deliver the overall experience that customers require without active adoption of these parameters.

Current focus on customer service

Following the global economic downturn of 2008, the focus on customer service was largely replaced by a shift toward cost cutting, growth of service revenues and, for some, simply trying to keep the business afloat. However, as most companies have now adjusted to the "new" global economy, the main focus has returned to customer service.

Most FSOs have already chosen to execute on this "back to the basics" focus by:

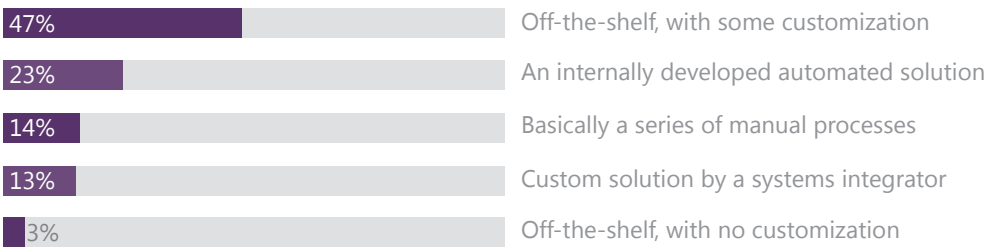
1. Taking specific steps to improve their internal services-related processes, policies, and procedures.
2. Going directly to their customers to attain feedback and comments and gain a better understanding of their needs and requirements, preferences, and expectations for service (e.g. through customer surveys, company feedback channels).
3. Investing in new technologies to make their service performance more effective, more accurate and comprehensive, faster, and more on-point (i.e., from the customer's perspective).

What role do FSM solutions play in these areas?

Customer service is generally measured in terms of how easily the software itself is able to assist them in supporting both their routine and complex field service activities. Modern business processes need to be formalized, conducted in real-time, and delivered on a pervasive basis throughout the entire business. To this end, the most commonly deployed FSM solution today is typically one that is available off-the-shelf, but with some customization to better align with the FSOs' service goals. Presently, roughly half (i.e., 50%) of the field services community is using an off-the-shelf solution, including 47% deploying the solution with some customization, and only 3% deploying the solution on an as is basis (Figure 2).

What particularly impresses Spruiell of NAVCO is the "pure configurability of the system" with "no customization required [other than] just a few tweaks [or] adding a few fields."

Figure 2
Most FSM solutions are used off-the-shelf, with some customization
(Percent response)



The future state of field service organizations (FSOs)

The future state of field service organizations (FSOs) will depend largely on what strategic actions they plan to take in the next twelve months and beyond. These strategies are directly linked to the specific drivers that influence the global services community on a virtual day-to-day basis.

The top drivers influencing FSOs today may be categorized into three main areas:

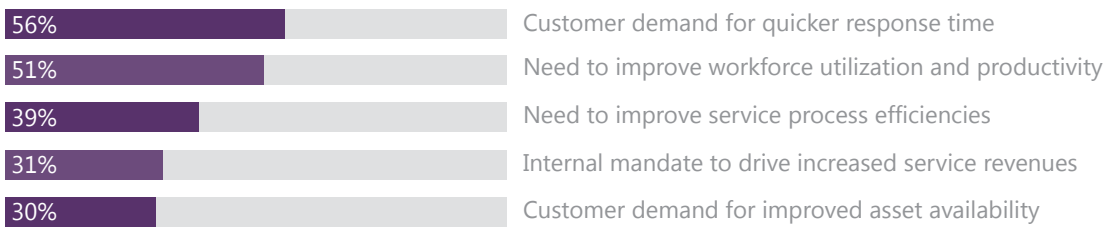
1. Customer demand and/or preferences
2. Need to improve service workforce utilization, productivity, and efficiencies
3. Internal mandate to drive increased service revenues

When asked to cite the top three drivers currently influencing their ability to effectively manage their respective field services operations, 56% of respondents cite customer demand for quicker response time, and nearly one-third cite customer demand for improved asset availability.

Justin Garabed, formerly a service manager at Qiagen, a global provider of sample and assay technologies, wants to "deliver best-in-class service to all of its customers by minimizing customer interactions and device downtime. The customer doesn't want to call the call center and talk to person A, then B, then C. In fact, they don't want to even pick up the phone; they just want the issue resolved. We want to minimize these interactions. Talking them through troubleshooting over the phone won't do it. That may be pretty standard at this time, but it won't work. We need to deliver best practices service in a simpler, more streamlined way."

The need to improve workforce utilization and productivity is cited by 51% as a top driver, followed by the need to improve service process efficiencies by 39% of respondents. An internal mandate to drive increased service revenues is cited by 31% of respondents as one of their top drivers (Figure 3).

Figure 3
The principal drivers influencing the global services community are...
(Percent response)



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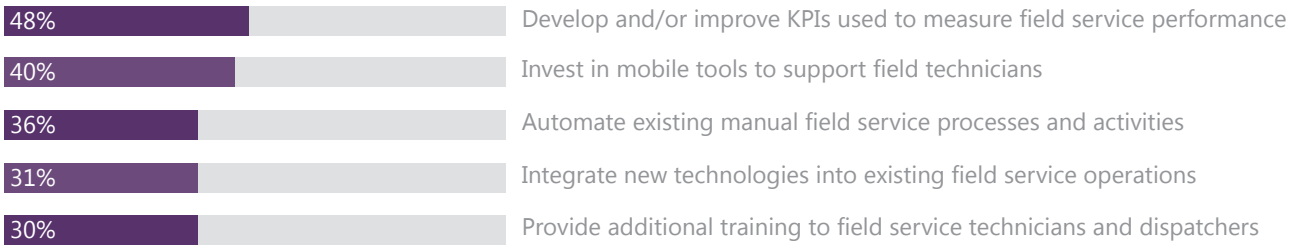
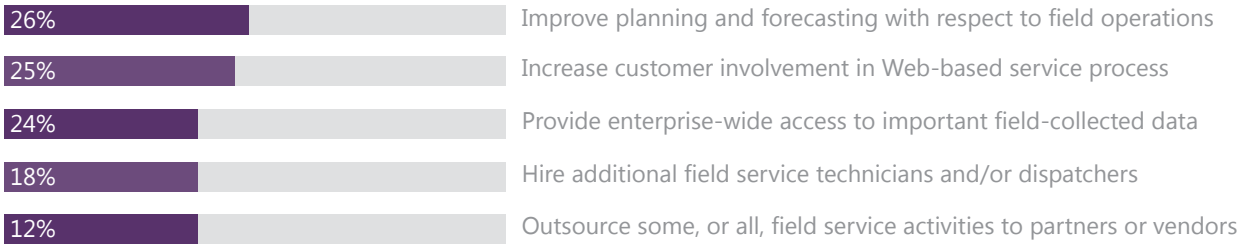
However, these are not the only drivers that impact the global services market today. Just under 25% of respondents also cite competitive pressures and the need to differentiate their services as a top driver, and another 22% cite customer demand for more accurate service call scheduling as one of their top drivers. While generally rated a bit higher during the most recent period of economic downturn, escalating field service operations' costs are also cited by about one-in-six respondents, or roughly 17%.

The most commonly implemented strategic actions, currently, are:



Other commonly implemented strategic actions also include:



This data strongly suggests that there is a pattern of synergy between the top four strategic actions (i.e., develop and/or improve KPIs used to measure field service performance; invest in mobile tools to support field technicians; automate existing manual field service processes and activities; and integrate new technologies into existing field service operations) that builds a foundation for all other actions that will be taken by the organization; that is, that nearly half of the FSOs comprising the global services community already recognize the need to build and/or improve their KPI measurement program – this is essential!

Along with the development and/or improvement of a KPI program, nearly as many organizations recognize that the need to invest in state-of-the-art mobile tools to support their technicians in the field, while concurrently automating their existing manual field service processes and activities to provide an enterprise-wide foundation for collecting data and information, and disseminating it to field technicians (and, in many cases, to their customers) on an as-needed basis. Finally, about one-third of FSOs recognize the need to integrate new technologies into existing field service operations to make it all come together.

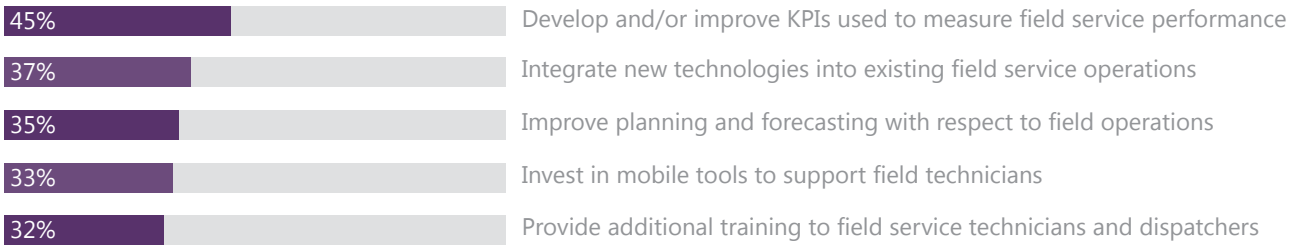
According to the head of service of a global precision instrument leader, "Our goals are to (1) take the data down to a more granular level; (2) develop more well-defined KPIs – new KPIs for the IoT; (3) make all our systems work together; (4) manage the resultant Big Data; and (5) use the IoT to help with our first resolution fix rate."

As mentioned, the synergy is built on, first, ensuring that there is an effective KPI measurement program, and using that program to establish a benchmark, or baseline, for the organization's current field service performance. Second, there needs to be a comprehensive internal effort to bring the technical aspects of the services operations into the current (and future) timeframe – this can be done mainly by investing in an effective package of mobile tools to support the field force.

Finally, it will be the integration of these new technologies (e.g., mobility applications, the IoT, wearables) into the overall mix of resources and tools deployed by FSOs that will empower the field force do their jobs more productively and efficiently. The desired results, of course, would be the improvement of service delivery performance and the resultant improvements in the levels of customer satisfaction (and retention).

"We would like to see more from the FSM solution vendors," confesses Frank Bunge, global director after sales service at Leica Microsystems. "For example, (1) business intelligence; (2) virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), although these new solutions are not yet integrated; and (3) deep learning, using Big Data and artificial intelligence (AI) to help our customers achieve their goals."

The most commonly cited planned strategic actions to be taken over the next twelve months are similar to those currently being implemented, but with a couple of significant shifts in pattern, as follows:



Overall, the global field services community is one that can ultimately be characterized by its drive to run its services operations as a profit center (i.e., approximately 70%), and with their own field force (i.e., approximately 87%).

How to prepare your team for the future of field service

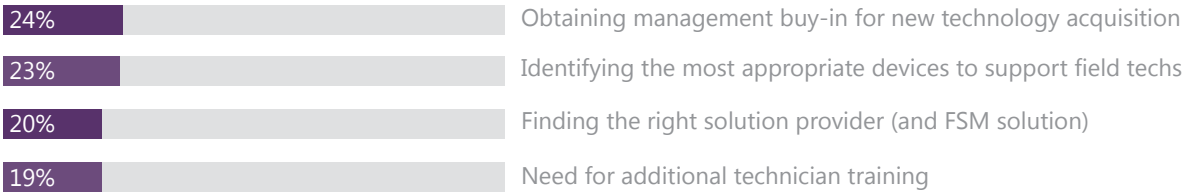
Properly preparing your team for the future of field service will be a critical, and sometimes daunting, effort on the part of the organization. The most commonly cited areas that are likely to represent challenges to the organization will typically be manifested in terms associated with technology acquisition and application; employee hiring and ongoing management; cost containment.

With respect to technology, the most commonly cited challenges are typically related to the financial aspects of technology acquisition, selecting the proper functionality and choosing the right vendor (and solution) (Figure 4).

Figure 4
The top future challenges relating to acquiring/interacting technology
(Percent response)

While the return on investment (ROI) on the acquisition of new technology (40%) is cited as the top challenge, the cost of the technology is also highly cited (32%). However, right behind these two important challenges are the issues of identification and integration – that is, the identification of ALL the required functionality that meets the organization's needs (and wants) (27%), and the integration of that new technology into the organization's existing FSM solution platform (25%). Selecting the most effective FSM solution – and from the right vendor (in terms of ongoing maintenance, scalability, and support) – is also a top challenge for roughly one-quarter (24%) of FSOs.

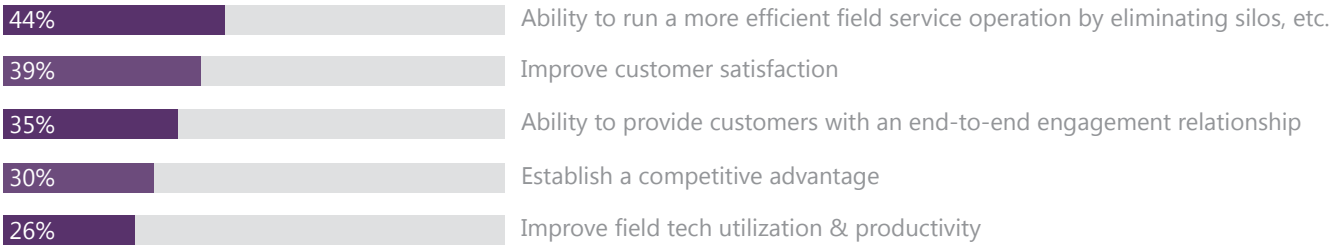
However, there are still other future challenges that one-in-five, or more, FSOs also face with respect to technology, including:



Each of these additional challenges may also weigh heavily on up to one-quarter of FSOs and, as such, will also need to be addressed head-on as part of each organization's technology acquisition process.

However, for every challenge, there is probably an offsetting opportunity or benefit that can also serve the organization well. These typically are cited as more efficient field service operations; improved customer satisfaction; the ability to establish both an end-to-end engagement with customers, providing a competitive advantage; and benefiting from improved field technician utilization and productivity (Figure 5).

Figure 5
The top opportunities/benefits of acquiring/integrating new technology
(Percent response)



The introduction of millennials into the field services workforce presents a new set of challenges for human resources (HR). Most millennials are already proficient with today's (and tomorrow's) technology and are poised to fully utilize state-of-the-art augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and the Internet of Things (IoT) to assist them in doing their jobs. However, if the organization they work for does not also utilize a commensurate level of technology as an integral part of their service delivery model, the millennial technicians may find themselves effectively disengaged.

Emerging organizational practices

The concept of "servitization" was coined in 1988 by professors Sandra Vandermerwe and Juan Rada in their European Management Journal article entitled, "Servitization of Business: Adding Value by Adding Services." They defined it as a "transformation process in which a manufacturer changes from selling products to selling integrated packages of products and services that are tailored to the specific needs of customers. "However, fast forward to today, the term has evolved to encapsulate to the "transformation process in which a manufacturer shifts from a product-based business model to a *services-based* business model."

Servitization could not exist in its present form without the power of the IoT behind it, serving as a platform for future capabilities, functionalities, scalability and expansion. In fact, it may be argued that there would be no servitization without the IoT!

There are many other things that an IoT-powered servitization model also brings to the table; for example, it:

- Provides a much more tangible value proposition to the customer, in terms of information accessibility, data sharing and exchange; and the immediacy of service alerts, problem identification, and remote/predictive maintenance.
- Fosters the connectivity between and among the systems, equipment and devices, technologies, processes, and the people who run the business operations.
- Promotes the foundation for a culture of customer-centricity by empowering field technicians, technical support and customer support personnel with all of the data, information – and knowledge – they need to address problems quickly, provide customers with what they require, and develop internal accountability and measurement systems for managing everything they need to do in support of their customers.

The benefits of servitization are also significant, including:

- Providing a competitive advantage with respect to the organization's ability to offer a state-of-the-art, differentiated services offering that may also be "branded," thereby providing an additional means for marketing and promoting its services to a hungry-for-technology services marketplace.

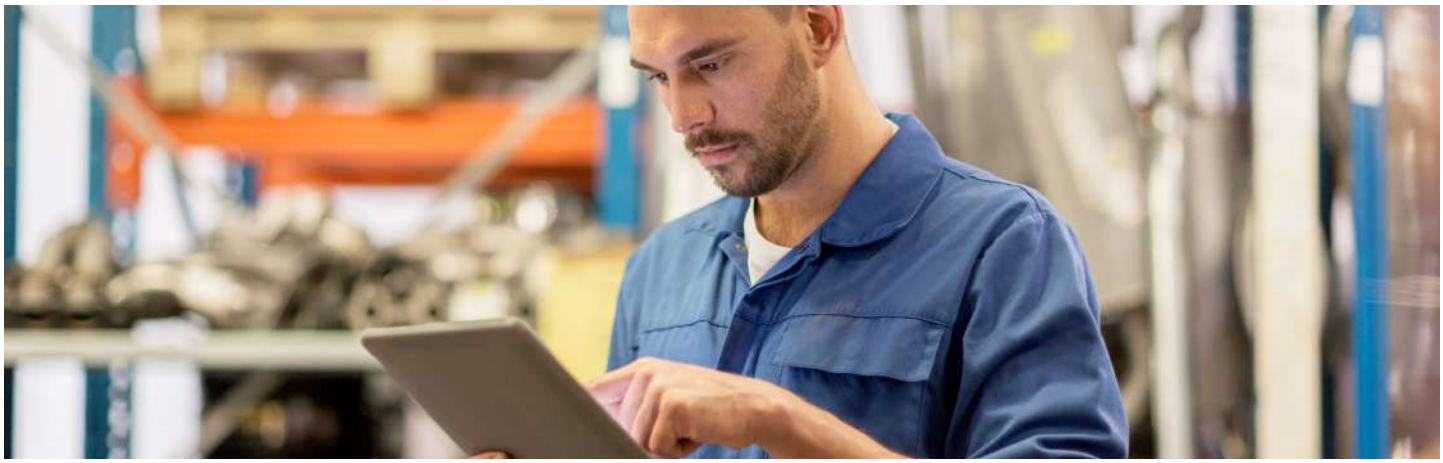
- Yielding increased margins for the services organization, resulting both from improvements made on the supply side (e.g., by cutting the costs of delivering services through remote means) and the demand side (e.g., the ability to charge a premium price for premium services); etc.

- Providing the ability to more evenly forecast, predict, and realize revenue streams through the implementation of remote diagnostics and predictive modeling.

- Fostering more meaningful partner relationships with customers through the sharing of equipment service data/information and allowing customers to be more proactive in the ultimate service and support of their installed base of equipment (e.g., initiating service calls, ordering parts, tracking problem resolution).

Another offshoot of the adoption of servitization within the global business ecosystem is the need for the advent of "new" KPIs, or metrics, for measuring the performance of "new" modes of service delivery. For example, through the implementation of an IoT-based FSM or service lifecycle management (SLM) solution, there will be "new" types of data and information collected, and these "new" data will then need to be measured in terms of their ability to assess the success (or lack thereof) of the organization.

Some examples of these "new" metrics may include first time fix rates with – and without – the use of augmented reality (AR) tools; total service cost with – and without – the use of remote diagnostics; field technician utilization (i.e., percent of time spent performing repairs, divided by total hours) with – and without – the use of wearable technologies (e.g., on-person sensors or monitors); etc. The list of examples can go on and on, but will only begin to "flesh out" when these "new" technologies become more pervasive in the marketplace.



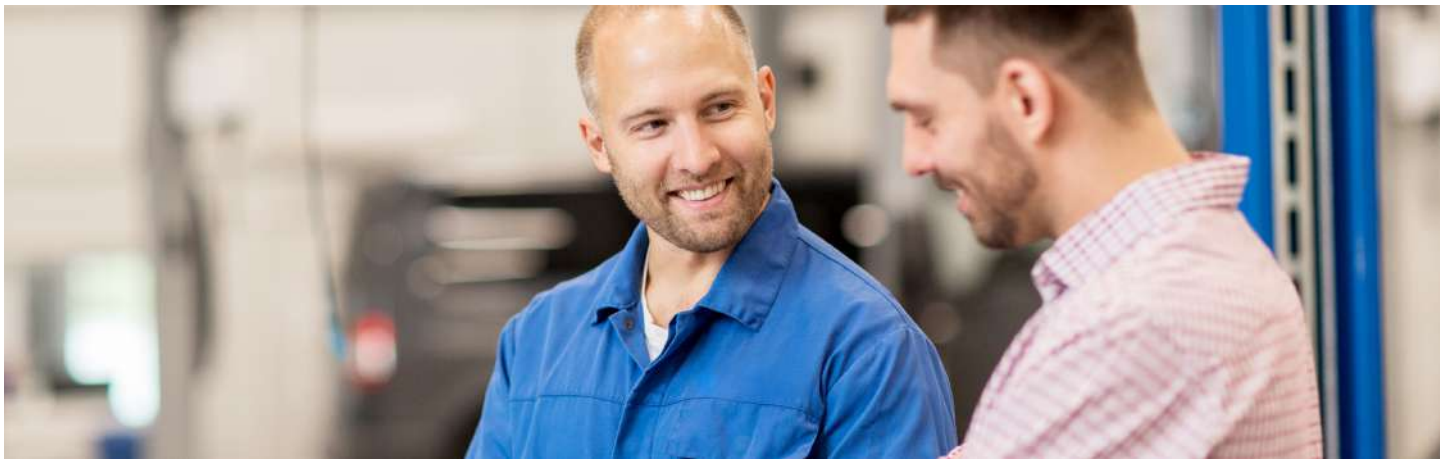
From customer service to customer experience

"Customer service" may be best defined as "the provision of services to customers before, during and after a purchase." The success of an organization's customer service initiative will rely directly on its ability – and the ability of its field technicians – to satisfactorily address the needs, requirements, preferences and expectations of its customers. However, "customer experience" is more properly defined as "the product of a series of interactions between an organization and its customers over the duration of their relationship" – as such, the accumulated experiences resulting from all of the past customer service "touches."

All of the "new" technologies and evolving ways of delivering service will undoubtedly have an enormous impact on the global services community – and, all, generally, for the better! However, bridging the gap between supporting customer service and supporting the overall customer experience will take as much – or more – of an effort as services organizations have ever seen in the past.

Simply improving the speed, accuracy, and comprehensiveness of customer service will not necessarily lead to an improvement in the customer experience. Performing service more accurately, more concisely, and more cost-efficiently will, again, not necessarily translate directly to improvements in the overall customer experience.

According to Justin Garabed, a former service manager at Qiagen, the company's "top three needs from technology are: to (1) exceed customer expectations by delivering service that maximizes customer satisfaction; (2) achieve service process optimization using technology that is scalable so it can allow our field technicians to grow to a full field force; and (3) leverage technology to make my department [i.e., field service] a key revenue contributor."



The real test for measuring the success in providing an exceptional customer experience will be in the establishment of a true partnership between the services provider and the customer. What this will require, among other things, is the ability to:

- Collect, monitor and assess equipment performance, and disseminate the analyzed data and information to all relevant parties, all in real time.
- Share the collected and analyzed data with both field technicians and customers on an as-needed basis.
- Make services-related decisions on the basis of the collected and disseminated data and information.
- Monitor and track service performance over time, using the appropriate KPIs, and establishing proper paths of problem resolution, escalation, and troubleshooting all along the way.

In 2016, NAVCO launched its new customer portal which provides both its customers and field technicians with added functionalities. For example, customers now have the ability to check the status of service tickets and installations, open service tickets, generate custom charts and graphs, and many others. Spruiell believes "that the ability of the customer to open service tickets, in particular, has significantly cut down the time it would normally take to open tickets using our old system."

In the past, the service chain did not include very much transparency to the customer. This was the "traditional" way of performing service. However, in today's world, the customer is an active participant in the overall service process. The establishment of customer portals now makes it possible for them to initiate service orders, order parts and consumables, and track their orders with status updates throughout the duration of the open service call. This is how the "new" customer experience is being defined – by the customer.

How innovative companies are planning for the future today

It can be argued that the most innovative companies today are also the ones that are the earliest adopters of new – and innovative – technologies. However, regardless of how innovative they actually are, they all still need to begin with the implementation and deployment of the basic technology applications and tools.

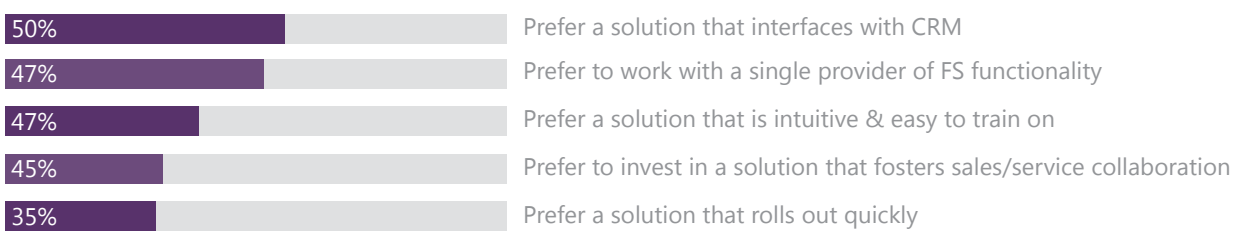
There are 10 specific technology applications currently being used by a majority (i.e., 50% or more) of FSOs, mainly focusing in applications including CRM, contract management, mobile field service, spare parts/inventory management and others. In order of magnitude, these ten technology applications eclipse the six (6) applications cited by a majority of FSOs in an earlier iteration of the same survey, conducted in 2014/15.

However, as far as future technology acquisition is concerned, roughly 20% and 30% of those FSOs that do not already have these technologies in place claim they are planning to incorporate them into their technology mix in the next twelve months or so. One such notable inclusion is the plan for adding an IoT platform in support of field service operations in the next twelve months by approximately one-quarter (24%) of FSOs. This is in addition to the 18% that have already done so.

The most innovative companies have also staked their FSM futures in the Cloud, with roughly 55% planning to implement a Cloud-based FSM solution in the next twelve months, compared to only 20% planning to go with a more traditional, premise-based FSM solution. Note, however, that as many as 25% are presently unsure which way their company will ultimately go – although most of the analyzed data points to a more than 2:1 ratio preferring Cloud over premise among those FSOs that have already made their future FSM platform decisions.

Nonetheless, FSOs will likely consider the impact of the following key attributes when deciding to acquire a specific FSM solution: functionality, ease of use, and a quick rollout. An FSM solution that fosters sales and service collaboration is also among the top preferences (Figure 6).

Figure 6
The decision to acquire a specific FSM solution is impacted mostly by:
(Percent response)



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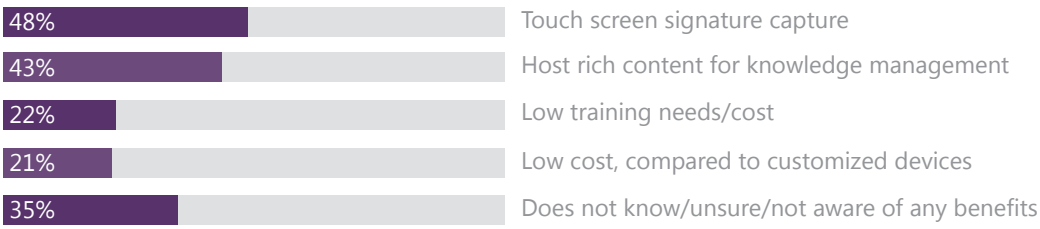
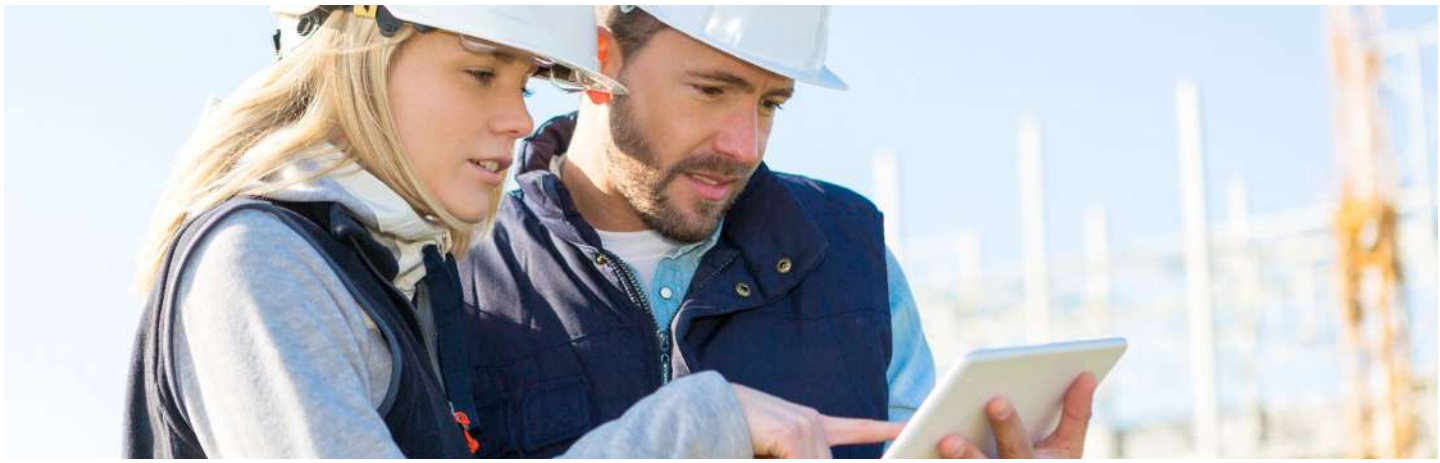
Mobility is also of crucial importance to FSOs, and there is a short list of specific attributes that the mobile devices deployed in the field need to meet.

According to Paul Spruiell, VP of Group Operations at NAVCO, "pure mobility and access to data" has resulted in "a dramatic increase in the number of calls they can complete per day, [as well as] the capability to research accounts and older orders right on their phones before arriving at the customer site." Since implementation of the solution, Spruiell says, "there have been no complaints in six months!"

The requirements – and, conversely, the key benefits – of empowering field technicians with state-of-the-art mobile devices may be characterized primarily in terms of the ability of the device to accommodate touch screen signature capture and knowledge management functionality, and resulting in lower costs associated with training (i.e., in comparison to other, more customized, devices) (Figure 7).

Figure 7
The key benefits of using a tablet or mobile device are:
(Percent response)





How to encourage buy-in across the organization

Driving future success across the organization is imperative. However, there are other components to the process that are also important, such as management buy-in, a loyal and appreciative customer base, and a clear communications-based strategy for attaining the success-related goals.

Management buy-in for taking the necessary steps forward to attain future success in delivering a connected services capability has been somewhat problematic for many FSOs. Currently, up to one-quarter (24%) of FSOs report that obtaining management buy-in for the acquisition of new technology is one of the top future challenges they expect to face. The existing customer base may be even more difficult to convince, as nearly one-third (32%) are somewhat hesitant to accept the introduction of connected field services (i.e., a solution that "allows companies to monitor equipment remotely, troubleshoot and self-heal distressed devices, and ensure repairs are made before downtime occurs.")

Internal buy-in is not solely restricted to management at the senior level, but to all management and staff levels within the organization. And, in order to gain a more pervasive top-to-bottom and side-to-side internal acceptance, the organization must overcome the obstacles of a too-often siloed organization structure within the business. Direct communication between and among all of the other departments in the organization that ultimately contribute to the overall customer experience will help ease the transition.

Ensuring that sales and marketing understand the advantages of having the field technician in front of the customer

The organization may have thousands of employees all over the world; however, as far as the customers are concerned, the field technicians are the principal individuals with whom they will have any contact once the initial sale has been completed. While they may speak with a sales associate of the company from time to time with regard to parts, consumables, upgrades, or new equipment purchases, the field technicians are probably the only ones they will actually see on a regular basis. As such, they serve as "ambassadors" to the company's customers for both the equipment and the services sides of the business.

Planning for the right new hires and training methods

Planning for the right hires and, then, training them is difficult enough under normal circumstances. Today, one must also consider the generational transformation taking place all facets of the global business community.

According to a senior executive from a billion-dollar national building services firm "there is a stratification in the workforce where currently there are more baby boomers than millennials, but this will all change. However, there is a rift there that is very pronounced. Ultimately, we will need technologies to improve the employee's condition, and the customer's condition."

In the past, the accumulated knowledge (from both a technical aspect, as well as from a customer relationship vantage point) of each individual technician was typically quite extensive. Technician training and certification programs generally routine in nature (if not boilerplate) and easy enough to replicate for the next generation of hires.

In today's world, instead of sending new hires to the same types of training classes and certification programs as their predecessors, there is a much more fragmented set of alternative training scenarios available (e.g., on-site, distance learning, and self-administered PC training). Further, with the growing use of augmented reality (AR), a growing number of organizations are likely to reduce traditional training courses since the IoT and/or AR could be used as impromptu training tools wherever the case may warrant.

Still, there will always be numerous geographic, skill set, personal interest, and training considerations that will need to be addressed as new hires are onboarded. This will not likely change over time. Although the question of chemistry will always remain – both with respect to dealing with peers, as well as with customers – a technician's proficiency for utilizing new technology will separate the "good" new hires from the "bad."

Conclusion

The end goal for every services organization is to improve the overall customer experience and to enhance the prospects not only for improved customer satisfaction but for long-term customer retention and loyalty. However, an organization cannot attain all of these goals simply through utilizing a field service management (FSM) solution – there is more to the equation.

That is why it is critical to choose an FSM solution from a vendor that offers extreme functionality in addition to high levels of consistent and comprehensive support. The solution should also be built on a robust, IoT-powered platform that assists in not only running the company's services operations but the company's business as a whole.

For these two primary reasons, the optimal FSM solution for the business should be one built on a CRM platform powered by the technology of the Internet of Things (IoT). The FSO will find it challenging to attain its desired customer experience if the solution only manages one segment of the business (i.e., service operations). While an FSM solution can be used to manage the company's services operations, the CRM will bolster the software's ability to manage the totality of its business operations.

However, finding such a solution represents the only path forward for ensuring that the services organization can establish a true partnership with its customers. With an FSM tool in place, FSOs are ultimately headed toward improved customer service, increased customer satisfaction, and long-term customer retention and loyalty. Prioritizing the components that contribute to an optimal customer experience characterizes the future of field service.

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