

# Wireless expert sees value in targeted apps

By Jim Rendon, SearchMobileComputing.com News Writer

LOS ANGELES -- Businesses should look for simple wireless applications that solve problems and provide a clear return on investment, said a presenter at iWireless World and Wireless Developer.

Companies are likely to gain the most from applications that are designed for specific business purposes, rather than "cookie cutter," all-in-one applications intended to perform many functions, said Alan Gould, CEO of Westlake Software Inc., a Calabasas, Calif.-based wireless integrator.

Businesses should beware of vendors that have a big sales presence but little specific knowledge of the industry their customers work in. Often, the simplest applications are the most successful, he said.

Gould pointed to some of his company's own implementations as examples of how to focus on problem solving rather than technology.

Westlake created a simple application that has helped the state of California avoid the large-scale blackouts that plagued the state in 2000 and 2001. When electricity runs low, the state's utility companies contact their 250 largest electricity users to determine how much power they can divert from them to the general population. Because energy consumption can fluctuate with little warning, this needs to be accomplished quickly, and the results must be made available as soon as they are received.

Westlake developed a messaging application that works with multiple devices -- including mobile phones and Research in Motion Ltd.'s BlackBerry handheld device -- that requires only a simple text reply. When the user receives a message arrives asking how many megawatts the company can do without, he or she simply types out the number and returns the message.

Gould estimates that this service, which is currently in use throughout California, has staved off as many as 30 blackouts, including one last month on Independence Day.

The application is simple enough that the state can use it for years -- if not decades -- to come, Gould said.

The company also produced an application for Bank of America Corp.'s courier service. The financial institution wanted its courier to be able to record every time it picked up or dropped off a Bank of America package.

The courier service has 250 drivers, each of whom conducts 30 interactions with the bank each business day. That meant recording 600,000 new pieces of information each month.

To solve the problem, Westlake created a wireless based application that drivers could use to record their activities. The key to making the application a success was enabling the drivers to input their data in as few steps as possible, Gould said. While an extra menu or two may not seem like much, he said that, with so many transactions to record, the hours of lost productivity due to extra clicking add up quickly.

Attendee Alain Picard, chief technology officer with Castor Technologies Inc., a Tampa, Fla.-based wireless application developer, said that he was glad to finally hear about wireless technology solving real business problems. Too many companies just try to sell their technology, rather than solve problems and provide return on investment, he said.