

case study



Zebra Partners with B2M Solutions for Mobile Analytical Data Vision



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- Joe White, vice president and general manager of Enterprise Mobile Computing



Actionable Analytics
for Mission-Critical
Enterprise Mobile Devices

Background

Joe White says much has changed over the past 10 years in the world of mobile computing.

The Zebra Technologies Corporation's vice president and general manager of Enterprise Mobile Computing recalls when customers would buy a mobile computer and operate it as a single-purpose, single-use case device. Handheld computers would often only run a terminal emulation client. Few people would use the devices. "A retail operation might buy 20 units, even though a staff of 60 may have worked at a store," he says.

It is a different world today. White says it is not uncommon for one of Zebra's products to have more than 100 different applications and many use cases running on it. And those units are in the hands of more people than ever before -- there are millions in the field at any one time. With 41 percent market share, the company is the worldwide enterprise technology leader.

“There are a lot of productivity gains being driven around the application. As a result, the complexity of supporting our customers and really looking into how they're using the devices and how that enterprise experience is being delivered have become critically important to us.”

Founded 40 years ago and based in Lincolnshire, Ill., Zebra is a visionary when it comes to enterprise asset intelligence, designing and marketing specialty printers, mobile computing, data capture, radio frequency identification products and real-time locating systems. The company's products are used for barcode scanning and labeling, personal identification, location solutions, wireless networks and specialty printing solutions principally in the manufacturing supply chain, retail, transportation and logistics, field mobility, warehouse, healthcare and government sectors.

Vision for Success

When White joined the company in 2010 (Motorola Solutions Enterprise was acquired by Zebra in 2014) he knew the key to maintaining Zebra's leadership position was to get more visibility into use cases. How and when were customers using the devices? What applications were running on them and what problems were they experiencing?

On top of this, he saw the value of getting this data and proactively addressing issues before the customer had the need to engage the help desk and escalate the issue.

"As an equipment OEM, it wasn't unusual for us to only hear through Managed Service Providers (MSP) how our equipment was performing in the field," White says. "For example, when I joined the business we had a quality problem on a product line that had 200,000 devices in the field. It could take over a year for some problems to get back to us.



"That was really a catalyst for us to be more predictive in our ability to support our customers and be responsive to issues they see in the field," White continues. "Our partner community plays an important role of fulfilling the end customer's overall needs, but given the added touch points, they also slowed and hindered the information feed back to our engineering and operational teams. We could no longer rely on the layers of partners and support elements between us and the end customer."

The issue was not the ability to gather enormous amounts of data, but to gather the key data that would drive insights to improve device performance and boost return on investment.

"Data's somewhat like a needle in a haystack," White says. "You can't expect to build a bigger haystack and make it easier to find a needle. It is how you mine the data and drive intelligent, actionable results."

Actionable Intelligence

In 2012 B2M began collaborating with Zebra (via Motorola Solutions) to develop its cloud hosted analytics solution called Elemez™. The software would give Zebra's enterprise customers a way to optimize their mobile deployments by applying real time, focused analytics and delivering actionable information.

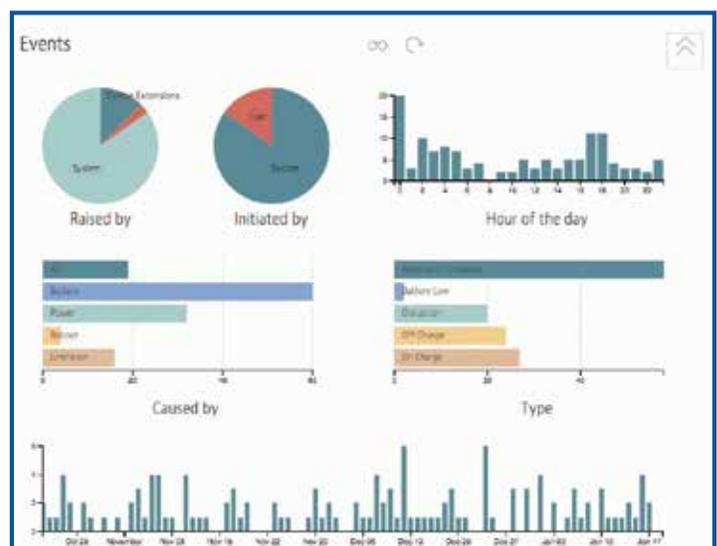
Zebra Engineer Robert Biggs says the company first launched the software on its rugged Android TC55 Touch Computer product line, a flagship Zebra device with integrated data capture capabilities and built for tough industrial environments.

"We saw Elemez as a complete end to end solution and we definitely wanted a platform that was not MDM dependent," Biggs says. "Everything was done from data collection on the client's side and transported to the cloud. It included analytics processing and visualization and we consumed everything from a web client or, in some cases, a small machine interface."

Software Put to the Test

Not long after the Elemez software was deployed on the entire line of tens of thousands of Android TC55 Touch Computers, the software was put to the test.

"We have a customer in South America that deploys our devices," Biggs says. "One day, all of a sudden, we got an alert from Elemez generated by its analytics engine telling us, 'Hey, there are a large number of disruptions going on and you may want to take a look at it.' We could see that the users were having problems in the field because of a third party MDM product and the devices were rebooting. We were able to proactively call the customer and let him know. He didn't know that there was a problem. He hadn't had one call or complaint about the product."



The solution was a simple software update that was developed and released to the fleet. The fix immediately eliminated an estimated 80 hours of reboot-related downtime each week. That equates to recovering approximately \$160,000 of non-productive labor costs per year.

"Zebra is the market leader in industrial use mobility," says B2M's Founder and President Julie Purves. "It's an absolute endorsement of the growing importance of analytics and the ability to provide insight to Zebra's customers and partners. And this is just the beginning. The potential of how Zebra will exploit this is enormous."



White adds, "We were able to also call the third party MDM vendor in parallel and find out that they released a brand new code that morning. That MDM vendor was able to find the bug, correct it and get it deployed by later that afternoon. Because of Elemex, we were able to provide a better customer experience. In fact, the customer said 'Hey, let me know when you see a problem in my devices again.'"

Since the Elemex deployment on the TC55 line, Zebra has been able to proactively fix bugs it didn't know it had. The company has approached partners who had written applications that may not perform effectively and tell them they are using too much battery life or there is a flaw in the code. "That has changed the interaction and the dynamics we've had with both our customers and our partners," White says.

Mark Kirstein runs Zebra's enterprise software business. He is responsible for approximately 20 products that add value and differentiate Zebra's the hardware and software. He says most Zebra customers, like the South American example, buy through the channel. He adds that the responsibility to fix problems traditionally has fallen on these partners.

However, Kirstein says the B2M analytics is putting Zebra in a position to deal with those issues much sooner and faster, ultimately adding value to its partners.

“First, it gives us a better understanding internally of our products. How do they get used? How do they perform? We deliver a product to the field that we say will meet certain quality expectations. Is it meeting those expectations? Our ability to measure data around those expectations is important, said Purves.”

"Second, measuring this data enables our customers to view how the devices are being used and when they are being used," Kirstein continues. "We want to manage that end to end mobility lifecycle with the customers themselves. They invest a lot of money in their mobile enterprises and providing that insight truly differentiates us."

New Opportunities for Excellence

Today, B2M is working closely with Zebra on new go to market models with the vision of delivering visibility solutions to help companies improve productivity and deliver better experiences. White says Zebra is driving this vision into the enterprise underneath an umbrella it calls Enterprise Asset Intelligence (EAI), broken out into Sense, Analyze and Act segments.

While many companies have offerings in each of these segments, Zebra is the only company with a broad, end-to-end portfolio that can deliver a holistic solution that addresses the full Sense, Analyze and Act cycle, he adds.

"In the mobile computing world, sensing is about everything that happens at the edge," White says. "There are powerful computing devices today where I can sense audio. I can sense how many steps an employee takes. I can sense how many times they pulled the trigger and scanned or how many times they pulled the trigger and didn't scan.

The intelligence and device metrics I gain from this platform are significant. We are driving more intelligence and making the data we're collecting more actionable. That's where we're going with this, White continues.

This actionable data is available on a wide variety of reports generated by the Elemz software that give real time visibility into deployments to better manage devices. Compatible with any mobile device management (MDM) software, Elemz automatically provides holistic, intelligent views of key attributes including device disruptions, network connectivity, battery status and application utilization.



Zebra Standardizes on ElemEZ

As a result of the successful TC55 rollout, Zebra plans to install ElemEZ on all of its new field devices as they become available.

"We have a collaborative partnership," says White. "The insights and intelligence we've gained from the TC55 rollout really went well beyond our expectations and we plan to install ElemEZ on all of our new devices as they roll out. Without the ElemEZ technology, there's no way we could understand all these different use cases and apps. It allows us to get more predictive in our ability to support those customers and be responsive to issues that they see in the field."



Purves agrees that Zebra and B2M share a mutually benefit relationship.

Zebra is an incredibly visionary company that is completely customer focused. To find and work with partners like B2M who really are at the forefront gives enormous benefits. We were certainly were able to demonstrate that to Zebra. As a small and innovative company we are very agile and able to pivot to new requirements quickly, Purves said.

Biggs sums up the partnership: "B2M worked well with us in getting a high quality software product done in time for our release," says Biggs. "My expectation moving forward is this is a huge, huge space. Personally, I've effectively moved my entire career path right now onto analytics and data collection. So that's a pretty big step."