Kenneth Arthur
chief commercial officer
with VisionID

ERA OF RUGGEDISED ANDROID DEVICES IS JUST BEGINNING

Jess Kelly talks to VisionID's Kenneth Arthur about mobile computers designed for a robust environment

VisionID has been catering for multinational businesses out of its Clonmel headquarters since 1992. It provides devices and solutions for those in the pharmaceutical, manufacturing and retail spaces. The focus of the business has changed over the last few decades.

"As mobile technology has become more pervasive in the industries, we have grown into different sectors with it," said chief commercial officer Kenneth Arthur. "Our history was always with manufacturing and pharma, but now retail and healthcare have become very strong for us."

Ruggedised devices are a speciality for VisionID, and a clear evolution has taken place in terms of the technological requirements for those appliances. This stems from the demand coming from multiple industries for rugged mobile solutions.

"Ruggedised devices are essentially computers which are used in the warehouse environment. They are used on the manufacturing floor. Both from a mobility perspective and if you are on a manufacturing floor where there are corrosives etc, you may want to use these devices. Heavy duty tablets are used in warehouses for picking and sending in retail or if they want to call a shop assistant. Supplying those working in logistics – delivery drivers, guys on the road – is an area of massive growth. Our predominant focus would be those with field services."

More and more of us have what is called 'liquid expectation': we expect to have in work what we have in our personal lives.

This is very true in terms of technology and performance expectation.

"A number of our devices are very much designed with the customer in mind," said Arthur. "A few years ago, Windows would have been the predominant OS, but they are going end of life with Windows CE Mobile over the next two years, so we have had a heavy focus on Android. That is the biggest thing for us this year; the migration of hundreds of thousands of devices in the field on Windows and companies looking to move to Android."

While this will be a cumbersome process, it will make the development of software and apps much easier. There is the added benefit of customers being familiar with the Android OS in their personal lives too. The end of Windows OS on these devices will see a massive overhaul in terms of products being used by businesses over the coming years.

"Because of the nature of these ruggedised devices, they could be out in the field for the last eight or nine years, there isn't that ability to change OS. This will be a significant year," said Arthur.

"Now that it is becoming more real that Windows is going end of life, people are talking about it. They are concerned from a security perspective, as more and more devices are mobilised, as more and more are trying to get rid of paper. The requirements they are looking for are much more complex."

Future of retail

Looking ahead, VisionID is able to adapt to new trends and the requirements of customers. Arthur says the company learns from its customers and their requirements as time goes by.

"We have such a diverse range of customers, we are getting a lot of different experiences out there and can draw on that as customer requirements change.

"From a software perspective, it's all about that managed service, there is no one size fits all. There is no killer off-the-shelf software package that every customer takes. Our ability to cater to different requirements is what we believe makes us unique. Our ability to offer managed services is critical for us and we do that both in Ireland and across Europe.

"Today for a major car rental company we manage 800 mobile devices in Britain, a mixture of printers, consumer devices, their ruggedised PDAs. We are based in Clonmel, but nearly 30 per cent of our revenue comes from multinationals who are a based abroad."

While retail customers make up a significant amount of VisionID's client base, the company is seeing growth in the health-

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care sector. "Healthcare is huge, if you look at what the government is doing from an e-health perspective and key initiatives, such as the ability for everybody to scan in samples at source for doctors, nurses, GPs to have a consistency. We have seen significant growth in mobility. There is potential there to have consistency in tracking and tracing for samples, blood types and the ability for every clinician to scan in these samples is significant. We are well able to cater for the growth in both sectors."

As many businesses know, GDPR will come into effect in May this year. Does that affect the build or design of the VisionID ruggedised devices?

"GDPR – from my perspective, coming from sales and marketing – is more about who we are talking to, making sure we have everyone opted in," said Arthur.

"We haven't really seen a requirement for devices around the field from a GDPR area. Encryption is critical. The key themes this year for us are around migration to Android and security and what we want to do is provide the managed services that take people on that journey because more and more devices are becoming mobilised.

"There is a complex mix and what we want to say is: let's plot out a journey here and provide an end to end managed service, not only a hardware supplier, but software support, development and sim card connectivity. We are agnostic about which carrier the customer uses. We want to find the best fit for the customer. We will work with customers to find the best solution for them as a mobility system integrator and that is where we're seeing a lot of our success and growth."

Jess Kelly is Newstalk's technology correspondent