

MOBILE COMPUTER BUYER'S GUIDE



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Where do
I start?

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU CHOOSE A MOBILE COMPUTER

Mobile computers are one of the most complex parts of any inventory or asset control system. They come in many varieties, with many different options to choose from. Since they can be so expensive, it's important to make sure that you're choosing the right mobile computer for your business. By working through this list you can ensure that your business buys the right mobile computer the first time.

1 *What are you using the computer for?*

Different applications require different mobile computer choices. Are you planning on using the mobile computer for asset tracking or inventory control? Will it be used alone, or will you have several different mobile computers available?

2 *What environment will the mobile computer be used in?*

Are you planning on using the mobile computer in an office? In a warehouse? Will it be used outside? How important is durability for your mobile computer?

3 *What operating system and software will you need to run on it?*

Mobile computers are most commonly found using Windows Mobile or Windows CE operating systems, but you can purchase alternatives that use Palm OS or a proprietary system as well, if you so choose.

4 *What kind of connectivity will you require?*

Mobile computers offer wireless connectivity but they also give you other options, including Bluetooth and some proprietary networks as well. Make sure you're choosing the right functionality, and make sure that you're getting what you need from your investment.

TYPES OF MOBILE COMPUTER

Mobile computers come in six major varieties. Each offers advantages and disadvantages connected to its size and functionality. Choosing the right one will make your employees more productive and maximize ROI for your business.



Basic mobile computers are simple, entry-level mobile devices. They do not typically offer Wi-Fi or cellular capabilities, so they instead record data in a basic text file which is uploaded when you dock the mobile computer to a PC to batch upload the files. While you can purchase ruggedized basic computers, for the most part basic mobile computers are not designed for heavy duty use. These units are ideal for simple inventory and asset recording applications but don't provide the advanced functionality necessary to run an instantly-updated inventory system.



Phone sized mobile computers provide high quality, consumer grade smartphone access combined with a powerful barcode scanning tool and increased durability over consumer devices. With a phone sized mobile computer, you'll get Wi-Fi, cellular, Bluetooth, and even GPS connectivity options. Thanks to their small size and rugged frame, these mobile computers are perfect for in-the-field employees such as delivery drivers or site managers. Get full functionality outside the four walls with a phone sized mobile computer.



Full-sized mobile computers offer several advantages over phone sized mobile computers. They offer the same wireless connectivity options, including cellular wireless, but they come in a much more rugged package and offer more accessory options, such as a full keypad and many different scan engine options. Full-sized mobile computers can be found in many places, but they're especially common in warehouse and distribution center environments, where the high speed, high accuracy, and rugged design are most useful.



Gun-grip mobile computers work well with Wi-Fi networks and give your employees the tools they need to accurately record inventory and assets in hard to reach or unwieldy spaces. Usually, gun-grip mobile computers do not offer cellular connectivity, but you can typically use them in batch mode when outside wireless range. Another common feature of gun-grip mobile computers is the long range scanning engine: some can reach over 30ft away. These devices are ideal for warehouse and retail activities.



Wearable mobile computers are often wrist mounted. The scanner will attach to your finger, allowing you to get all of the functionality of a mobile computer while keeping both hands free to work. Often, wearable mobile computers offer voice-command software as well, to make interacting with them with your hands full even easier.



Fixed/Vehicle Mount mobile computers are high powered mobile computers that are designed to be mounted on forklifts or in vehicles. They don't have scanners embedded in them, but they're designed to pair up with ruggedized scanners. Some vehicle mounted computers can even run Linux or Windows XP for added functionality.

WIRELESS OPTIONS

With mobile computers, you have access to an amazing variety of wireless options. Wi-Fi, WAN (cellular), and Bluetooth are all viable options for your mobile computing needs. Below, we discuss each of the options and give you the tools to choose what you need.



Wi-Fi is the most common form of wireless communication for mobile computers. Simply by connecting to your company's wireless network, you can give your scanner access to the network, ensuring immediate data transfer and guaranteeing that your business will know immediately when items are scanned in and out of stock. Mobile computers typically support many different types of wireless network, to help make certain that your business will be able to work with them without having to change your network settings. Wi-Fi is perfect for businesses with a fixed site, such as a warehouse, hospital, retail store, or any other business based around a central location.



WAN connectivity works identically to the cellular technology you find in phones. Mobile computers can utilize WAN to provide wireless access anywhere you get cellphone reception – they can even make phone calls! WAN access means that your devices are no longer limited to within the four walls of your business: Empower your employees to communicate anywhere, any time with your company. With WAN connectivity, you do have some things you need to consider, though. You'll need to partner with a cellular service provider, and not all mobile computers are compatible with all service providers, so it's important to make sure you buy a computer that works on the network you'd like to be a part of. You also need to remember that your WAN connectivity is only as good as the service provider's coverage, so you need to make sure you choose the right provider for your area.



Bluetooth connectivity does not require network hardware to function. It simply creates a link directly between two Bluetooth devices, such as a printer and a scanner. As long as both devices have Bluetooth, they can connect wirelessly up to around 33 feet away from one another. Mobile computers often offer Bluetooth capabilities in addition to other wireless connection options to provide a backup solution in case of technical difficulties, or to make it easier to pair your mobile computer to another device.

SCANNER TYPES

With mobile computers, you have the choice of three scanner types. Each offers advantages, and choosing the right one will make your employee's work easier and save your company money.

Laser scan engines are the most typical. They're the simple red laser scanners that you're used to seeing in retail stores everywhere. They are only able to scan 1D barcodes, but they are reliable, cost effective, and easy to use.



Long Range Laser

scan engines offer similar functionality to laser scan engines but at a much longer range, sometimes able to read barcodes at up to 30 feet or more. If you need to

scan items from a distance, purchasing a high quality long range laser is the right answer for your company.

2D Imagers offer an alternative scan engine for companies which need to be able to read QR codes and other 2D barcodes. With a 2D Imager, you can read 1D and 2D barcodes easily. 2D Imagers offer you a flexible solution.

WHAT IF IT DOES BREAK?

Almost all mobile computers come with standard *manufacturer warranties*, but these warranties usually cover only manufacturer fault. Many brands also offer *extended*

warranties, usually to 3 or 5 years, for an additional charge. But different brands and models have different warranties, so it's important to choose the right brand to fit your needs.

It's important to consider the value added by an **extended warranty**. Mobile computers are expensive, and repairs often require a specialist. While the warranty adds a small additional up front cost, in the long run it will reduce the total cost of ownership over the life of the scanner.

As an example, let's take a look at the Honeywell Dolphin 99EX. It has a list price of \$1,855, and it comes with a 1 year **manufacturer warranty**, covering defects in workmanship and materials. However, if the Dolphin 99EX is damaged during use (by dropping it, for example), the warranty will not cover that, and the unit will need to be replaced.

Alternatively, you could purchase a 5 year **extended warranty** when you buy the unit. This would increase the total cost of the unit to \$2,350 but would protect you from wear and tear or accidental damage as well.

Below we've charted out the total cost of ownership, based on how often equipment might get damaged in your workplace.

As you can see, warranties pay for themselves the second a unit is damaged, or even if it

simply wears out after 3 or 4 years of use. Replacing a unit yourself is always far more expensive than the warranty would have been.



At EMS Barcode, we pride ourselves on being the “low risk provider” and it’s important to us to actually give you options that mitigate the risk of purchasing expensive barcoding equipment. No matter how careful you are, mobile computers can break. Flooding, disgruntled employees, or even just an unlucky fall can all result in damage to mobile computers. Even if you’re lucky enough to avoid any kind of direct damage, wear and tear can degrade mobile computer performance or even result in the unit simply being worn out. With an extended warranty, you’re protected from the costs of buying the same equipment two or even three times over the life of your inventory control system.

	TCO after 1 years	TCO after 3 years	TCO when warranty ends
Mfg Warranty (never breaks)	\$1,855	\$1,855	\$1,855
Mfg Warranty (breaks once per two years)	\$1,855	\$3,710	\$5,565
Extended Warranty (no matter how many breaks)	\$2,350	\$2,350	\$2,350

At EMS Barcode, we’re also able to offer warranties on units that have been discontinued by the manufacturer, or units which the manufacturer no longer provides warranties on. We are also able to work with you if you want a more specific warranty for a mobile computer, or to provide a longer warranty if you don’t feel like the manufacturer warranty will last long enough. Finally, we can do warranty pools and on-site warranties as well if you would like.

Investing in a warranty is usually the right call. Scanners are handled a lot, and they see a lot of use every day in most companies. Any piece of technology that gets handled by half a dozen or more employees on a daily basis is likely to eventually get damaged or just worn out. With a good warranty, you're protected from the costs of an expensive piece of equipment which you rely on breaking suddenly. Even if the cost isn't a major issue, having a warranty removes most of the hassle of ordering a replacement scanner. Instead of having to issue new purchase orders and waiting for permission to access funds, you're just a phone call away from a solution.

MAKING THE RIGHT CALL

At EMS Barcode our motto is "Service is Standard", and this guide is part of our ongoing commitment to our customers: we're a full service barcoding company. We don't just sell you a barcoding system, we also help you set it up, implement it and import data into it. We'll help you choose the right printing media, and if you're having trouble, we do tech support and repairs as well. Working with EMS Barcode means you have a partner to help you resolve any problems you have with your new system.

At the end of the day, the most important thing to us is helping you make the right choice for your business. Our job



is to make your project successful by saving you time, money and effort. We do this by providing you with all of the information to make the best decision. We believe that great results come from well informed choices.

We want to make sure that every project we're a part of is successful. If you're having problems, we'll help with repairs and replacements. The process is simple, fast, and painless. We work with you to diagnose the issue (often for free!) and then we suggest the best ways to repair the equipment. If the equipment can't be repaired, we will work with you to find the least expensive way to replace it. If the problems are with software, rather than hardware, we offer training packages, phone support, and remote set up. Our involvement doesn't end until you are happy with the system we've built together.

When you work with EMS Barcode, you're never on your own. Building a barcoding system from the ground up can seem intimidating, especially when it means tearing down the old way of doing things. That's why every EMS Barcode customer works closely with a barcode consultant whose primary job is to make sure that you're getting exactly the right system to fit your needs. They stand by the same principle that everyone else at EMS does: We don't forget you after you buy. If you have problems getting things set up or if you need additional training on the software and equipment, EMS will be there for you.



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