

## Mobile Data Collection (MDC)



Peer educator using mobile data collection at a hotspot in Maputo City, Mozambique

The reliance on paper-based data collection forms, and occasionally unstructured documents (journals, notepads, scraps of paper, etc.), creates room for errors, and omissions, which make data susceptible to compliance risks, and not to mention damage, or loss! A better option is electronic mobile data collection (MDC)

Electronic mobile data collection (MDC) — whether by smartphone apps, SMS messaging, or voice response (IVR) — is quickly becoming the preferred option for health organizations, non-profits, and corporations to collect and manage data. By moving from paper to mobile, organizations are able to leverage a robust new data collection platform that is faster, cheaper, generates higher quality data, and is easier to integrate with existing systems.

The benefits of using mobile data collection include:

**Reduced Cost** – Reducing or eliminating the reliance on paper, and thereby cutting the time needed to collect data, translates to significant cost savings. A 2011 study of mobile data collection systems found that these savings could easily be as high as 71%!

**Reduced Environmental Impact** – Paper surveys are wasteful from an environmental perspective. A simple 5,000 household survey alone can consume thousands of gallons of fuel, hundreds of thousands of gallons of water, and up to twelve trees.

**Increased Speed** – MDC reduces both field data collection time, as well as the time required to analyze and disseminate the data and reports. A powerful example of this occurred during the recent Ebola crisis in West Africa, where MDC was used to dramatically speed up reporting of suspected cases. The benefits of using MDC equally apply to reporting of stock levels, or monitoring repairs and maintenance at industrial sites.

**Improved Data Quality** – Mobile data collection not only reduces the potential for error at the point of collection, it also automates the cleaning of data down the line. Faster processing of data means that should there still be any errors in the data, they are easily identified and corrected.

**Decreased Administrative Burden** – Paper can be unwieldy, not only for field workers, but for staff responsible for managing paper forms. And if changes are made to paper forms, it can be a nightmare to prepare and distribute the updated forms — a process which often fails, resulting in data inconsistency. Mobile forms, on the other hand, can be updated and pushed to all field workers quickly and automatically at the touch of a button.

**Safer Storage and Backup** – The problem with paper is that it can be lost, destroyed, or mishandled in a number of ways, which makes it impossible to later access the data. Digital data on the other hand, can be easily and inexpensively stored, copied, backed up, and — if needed — encrypted for secure future access.