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Operations in a Mobile World

How Leaders in Operations Master
the Data / People Dilemma

Purchase Order Approval

Hardware Order #6599231

Paul McKartney
Today

Invoice: 3,599.89 USD
Ordered: 2x Samsung Monitor
            S27D390HS, 3x Samsung...

3 Documents available

✕ Reject   ✓ Approve

Leave Request

2.5 Days Vacation in December 2015

Rick Kemberlain

Hub   Tasks   Apps
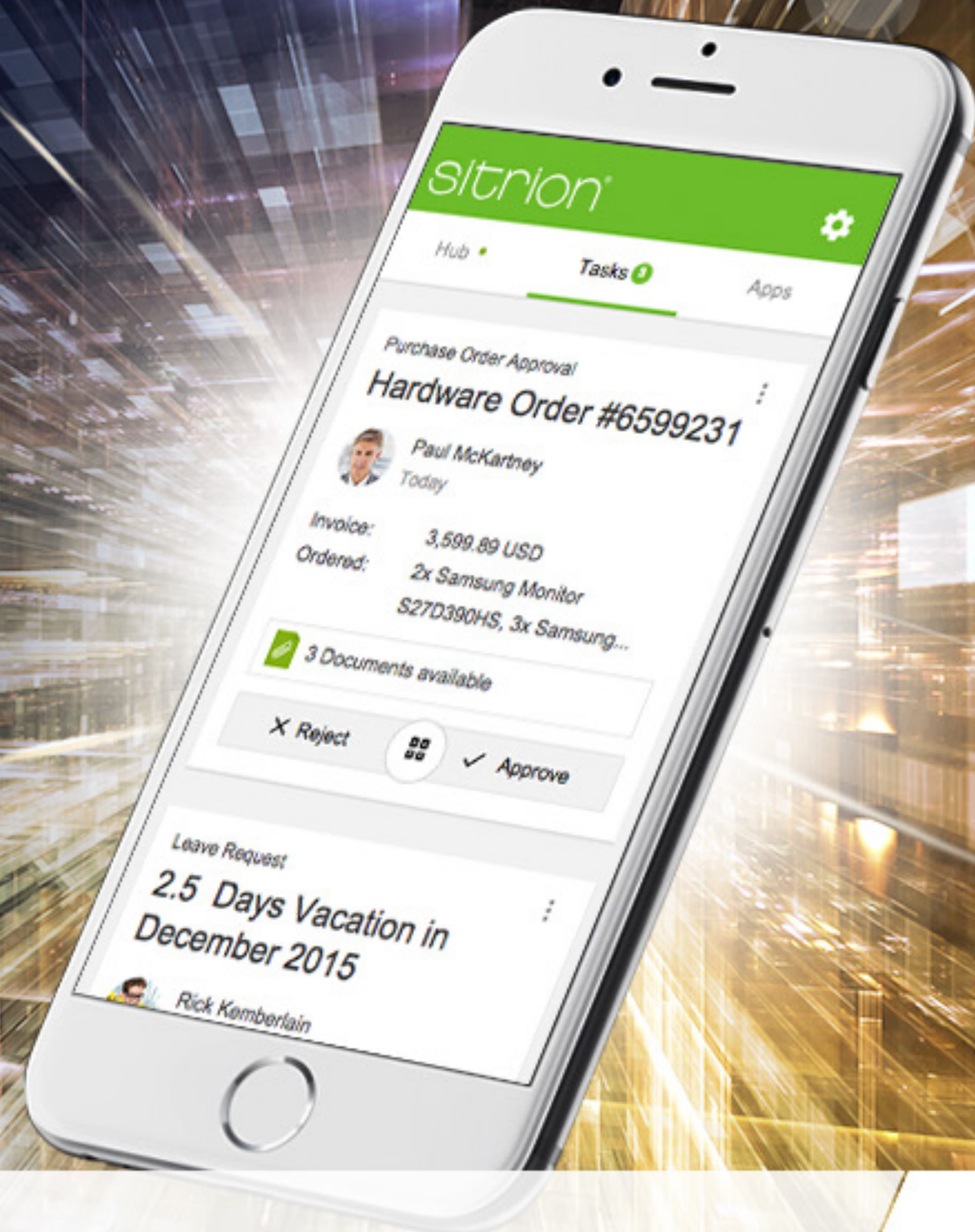
Many areas of business have gone through revolutionary changes. Social collaboration, cloud technologies and the epic rise of the mobile change the way people work today. Across the entire value chain from marketing, sales and customer service, to development and production – everything has changed.

"Despite all the tools and systems at their disposal, operations managers face extensive challenges when it comes to managing an organization's resources"

Nada R. Sanders*

According to research by Ernst & Young, top priorities for operations executives have shifted to handling greater complexity and a broader set of tasks in order to increase operational efficiency. Yet those of us in charge of operations are often just trying to get the job done, since we are accountable for "keeping the engine running."

* Nada R. Sanders, Ph.D., Professor of Supply Chain Management Northeastern University,
   "Definitive Guide to Manufacturing and Service Operations."

The Data Dilemma

In between ambitious keynotes about Industry 4.0 and the day to day work of an organization's daily productivity, it's not very glamorous. We struggle with disconnected and sometimes redundant systems, all of which have their purpose but make sharing data and completing administrative processes laborious and error-prone. It is no surprise that a recent Aberdeen study found that:

- ✖ 45% experience difficulty accessing data from across the business

- ✖ 41% report that datasets are too complex or fragmented for decision-making

- ✖ 35% say that data is not available when it's needed.

This realization is troubling. While the role of the COO has become more important, even strategic, our once great tools don't keep up with the COO's needs. We have an amazing set of data, yet find it difficult to make use of it in daily operations. Our employees are frustrated by the need to understand and access perhaps dozens of systems simply to accomplish a few discrete tasks every day.

The People Dilemma

With this, the data dilemma extends to people. Technology and data are not democratic and desk-less workers, in particular, are often cut off from the information flow. Factory workers, field workers, sales reps, drivers, technicians and warehouse employees all have their personal cell phones (BYOD). But we under-utilize those devices by not connecting them to corporate processes and systems. We have the technology but do not use it.

Those employees are not connected to the pulse of the organization and lack transparency. Information flow for those employees depends on the goodwill of their shift leaders or managers and they complete manual processes like timesheets, expenses, time off requests or manage their benefits on paper or using clunky work-arounds.

This is not just a huge waste of time, it also prohibits organization agility. More importantly, it creates cultural disengagement. Those employees experience both physical and electronic isolation. They simply are not part of the inner information circle. Cohesive and included employees are more important than ever to drive engagement, solicit new ideas, share information and facilitate best practices for operational excellence – and you can have a significant part of the workforce sitting on the outside.

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A Mobile State of Mind

To succeed, we need to make work better, not just mobilize existing processes and remain stagnant. The most important part of your mobile strategy — actually your whole business strategy — is to enter a mobile state of mind.

One of the key strengths of our operations leaders is the talent to distinguish between what is nice to have and what is really needed. We know that replacing our systems overnight is not really an option and despite challenges, we need them. Those systems have been a key reason for our success. So we don't need better systems, we need to make better use of them.

We also know that mobile technology should improve work, not simply shrink the experience to a smaller screen. That's why all the mobile offerings by our legacy vendors struggle with adoption. We don't need multiple apps, one each for our ERP, our CRM, the SCM or warehousing platform, and so on. What we really need is a mobile first approach, even a mobile state of mind.
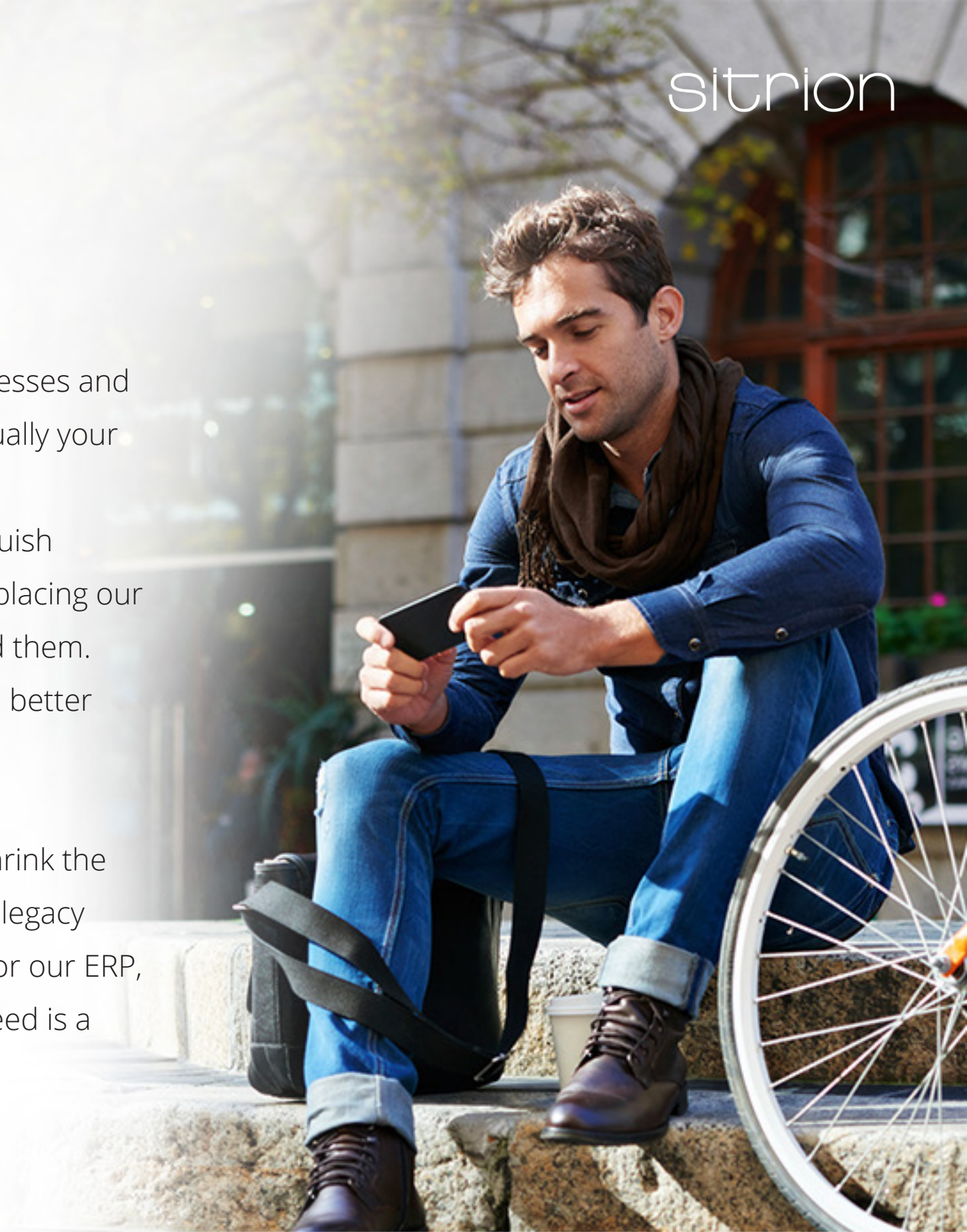
If we put your people at the center of your mobile strategy, we are not just streamlining basic workflow tasks; we are increasing productivity across the entire organization:

Focus on people not applications. We have great systems and we don't need more features. And our people have demonstrated that smartphones and tablets are the preferred form factor for many things in their life already. Therefore, we need to unify and aggregate the most important business processes on to a form factor our people know how to use, will gain immediate value from and is always up to date.

Shift from alerts to actionable insights. Just knowing that there are tasks waiting for us is not enough – operations people need to get stuff done! We need information that's contextual, relevant and tasks that can be executed in real time. Nurses need to see instructions before doing their rounds and be able to record vitals on their mobile device. Consultants want to log their time for clients within seconds. Retail employees need to see their shift changes or overtime approvals in real time.

Trust your employees: All of our people are mobile. Maybe not at work but in their personal life. Looking at consumer trends can help to improve productivity. That's not to say that our operations tools should look act like Instagram or Candy Crush, but it tells us that people are capable doing complex activities on mobile devices. If our parents can organize a BBQ for dozens of people using Facebook, then we should absolutely be able to approve a purchase order on a smartphone.

Be ready for IoT: 80% of manufacturing companies already capture machine and sensor data to improve production output and quality. We need to be ready to leverage that data in daily operations to achieve significant efficiency gains.

Small Gains That Make a Difference

We in operations have a foundational role in helping to break down internal bottlenecks that can limit productivity. We know that small gains in efficiency across our organization yield large gains in the bottom line. So let's free our people from all the unnecessary burden, and provide an environment that allows them to get the job done.

Mobile Information Efficiency: We hate meetings! Yet, our people need to know what is going on in their team, their department and in many other parts of the company. That's why we need to turn company news, training and certification requirements into easy to consume, mobile-friendly chunks and deliver it to people's mobile devices. This will drive employee participation and engagement.

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Mobile Transactional Efficiency: Whether we make pasta, develop software, or build airplanes – we face a stream of time-consuming tasks like requests, timecards, approvals, confirmations, etc. Dealing with HR self-services and finance processes is both a legal and operational requirement. So let's make those as simple and efficient as possible right on our phone.

Mobile Data Efficiency: Operations is all about data. Sharing those with our employees will allow them to make smarter decisions, act faster and improve organizational agility. Illustrating and distributing key performance indicators directly to the mobile phones of our employees will speed operational efficiency greatly.

A Big Opportunity

Operations is all about getting work done and making it a little better every day. Addressing the data dilemma, connecting information with our people and entering a mobile state of mind are key elements to transforming operations in a mobile world. It took us years to fully realize the power of the Internet. Mobile won't take nearly that long. Plus our competitors will beat us in the mobile race if we don't act fast. Mobile isn't another "tech thing that your IT team needs to address;" it should be our Number 1 priority. Mobile technology isn't simply a new option — it's the next step for achieving superior operational productivity.

It is our opportunity to leverage mobile to transform operations: saving money and time, speeding decision-making and connecting desk-less workers with the enterprise to increase productivity across the entire organization. Are you ready to take advantage of it?

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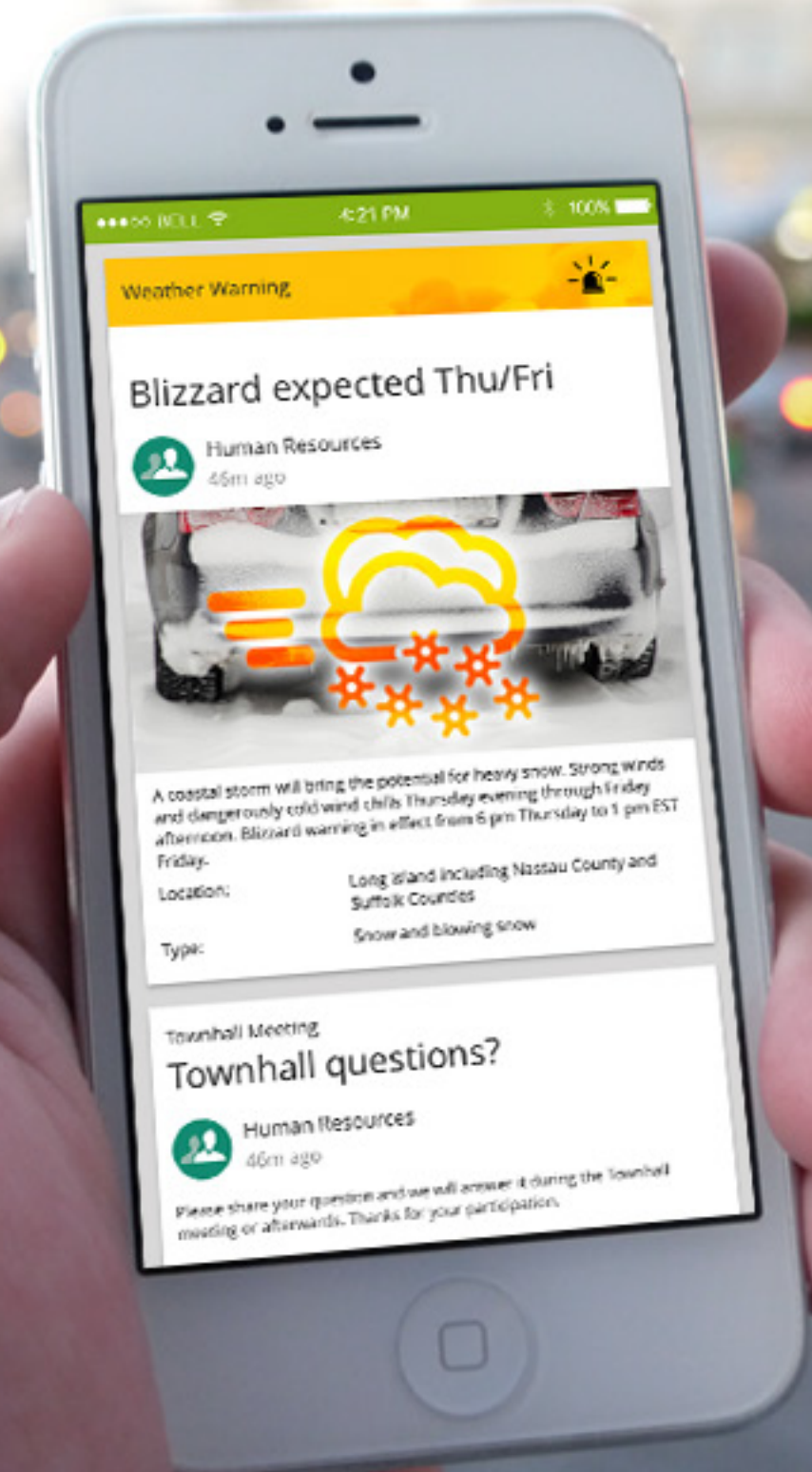
Be a mobile hero!

Providing employees with yet another app is not going to give you breakthrough employee engagement. But what if you could provide employees with a single productivity app that handles approvals, alerts and other business processes for any corporate system – and in that same app you can engage with key messages and social interactions across the business. It's possible and can happen on the employee's mobile device of choice.

We call it Sitrion ONE and it will make your life as an employee or manager much easier. Plus it's not hard for your IT department to see the value and make it a reality.
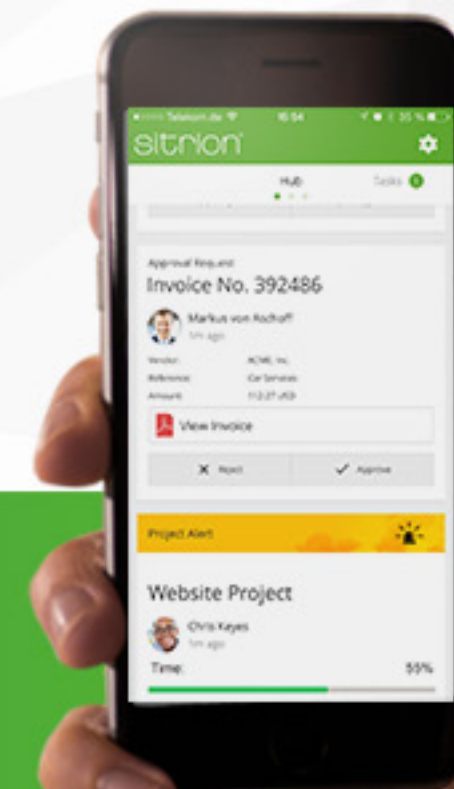
Sign up for a test drive of Sitrion ONE today.

www.sitrion.com/testdrive

About Sitrion
Sitrion makes work better by helping your employees get their jobs done better every day. In a complex business world, our software solutions enable every employee to stay engaged, make smart decisions, and be productive. Sitrion empowers millions of people with a mobile and socially-enabled workplace that is tightly integrated with all the critical backend systems of your infrastructure like SAP, Oracle, Microsoft, and Salesforce.com. Follow us on Twitter **@sitrion** and at **www.sitrion.com**