

Five Things to Consider When Purchasing Mobile Data Computers



Trusted Provider of Mission-Ready Technology for Fire & EMS Mobile data computers (MDCs) are a critical component of any public safety system created to respond to emergency calls. The MDC is typically mounted in a vehicle (i.e. fire apparatus, police car, etc.) and receives highly accurate and reliable information directly from the dispatch center. The MDC provides the responder with critical details regarding the incident, shaving life-saving seconds off the incident response time. The MDC also provides responders with a powerful tool to communicate with the dispatch center on all matters related to the incident in real time. MDC design is rapidly evolving in response to the needs of the agencies who use them as well as new technology innovations. With so many MDC manufacturers providing a variety of equipment, how is one to choose? Here's a short list of the considerations that may prove helpful when selecting the right MDC for your agency.

1. Location, Location, Location

An obvious, yet perhaps overlooked, consideration when evaluating MDCs is where the MDC will be used. For most emergency vehicles, a durable design is a must. MDCs need to be built to withstand the rigors of emergency service duty including vibration, heat, dust, moisture and smoke. Sharpness and clarity of the screen is also paramount. IPS technology allows responders to view the screen from a variety of angles. Look for an MDC built with rugged, long-lasting components and a high-bright screen for maximum visibility regardless of the surrounding conditions.

In addition, to preserve vision, ensure the device has an easy-to-use audio/video 'kill' button that allows the screen to be instantaneously turned off or on in case of sudden outside lighting changes.





Last but not least, since not all vehicles are the same, an MDC that offers different mounting options will give you the flexibility you will need to optimize the installation based on your needs and the configuration of each apparatus. A modular design allows a single MDC to support multiple screens, so engineers don't have to take their eyes off the road to see information, for example. Also, a touch screen monitor will save valuable space within the vehicle's cabin or wherever the MDC is mounted.

Secondary touch screen displays also enable incident commanders the flexibility to work in and around the vehicle while continuing to operate the primary computer.



2. Gray Matters

Hardware is one thing; however, the software that runs your MDC deserves equal consideration. The MDC software is at the core or brain of the MDC operation, handling such important functions as incident notification, vehicle routing, and two-way communication with dispatch. The MDC should also include access to the relevant emergency records management system (RMS) providing visibility into critical data responders need such as building pre-plans, standard operating guidelines, checklists, local benchmarks, hazard predictions & modeling, and weather data.

Look for MDC software that is designed specifically for your needs with an easyto-read and easy-to-navigate touch screen interface that will get your first responders to the data they need quickly.



In-vehicle mapping is another essential feature for getting responders to the incident location as quickly as possible. Your MDC should be able to display additional map layers and details dynamically without the need to download new resources or software saving both time and bandwidth. Look for MDC software that is designed and customized specifically for your needs with an easy-to-use, read, and navigate touch screen interface that will get your responders to the data they need quickly.







3. Play Nice with Others

Keep in mind that your MDC won't be operating in a vacuum. Your MDC is likely just one part of an emergency response system that includes many components such as the CAD, AVL, and fire station (FSA) systems. Ideally, your MDC will work seamlessly with your legacy systems as well as any new systems you plan to implement. The ability to integrate with third party software such as pre-incident planning and community engagement is another highly desirable feature, giving responders easy access to all the data they need without having to switch between devices.

Also, be sure your MDC will integrate with the mapping/GIS solution of your choice and run on multiple operating systems. For example, you may prefer an MDC that is Windows-based while having the option to run the same software on an iOS-based tablet or phone. Ideally, your responders will have the same user experience on any device.





4. Connectivity is Everything

So, you've identified an MDC that meets your hardware, software, and integration wish list. Congratulations! But what will happen if it can't connect? Does the MDC support a wide variety of communication protocols? The ideal MDC solution will automatically locate the most appropriate network to relay critical data as quickly as possible at the lowest cost. Connectivity should include LTE, LMR and two-way satellite, both public and private. Look for an MDC that is a proven platform with a history of performance in your environment.

And, for those occasions where you can't connect, be sure to have an MDC with enough storage capacity to store all the most important information on the device so responders can complete their mission.



5. The Road Less Traveled

Finally, when replacing MDCs that have outlived their usefulness, it may be tempting to take the path of least resistance and just go with the same supplier. Keep in mind that technology changes rapidly, so it's worth taking the extra time needed to look at alternative providers and their latest offerings.

The extra time you spend now may mean the difference in saving a life in the future.









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