



How to Choose the Best Mobile Response Software for Your Fire & EMS Agency

Fire Service and Emergency Management professionals understand the importance of reliable communications when responding to emergencies. Dispatch operators, ECCs, EOCs, ICPs, and others need to know the location and availability of resources including mobile units. Mobile units need access to up-to-the-minute dispatch details as well as other data including maps, current fire boundaries, fire history, pre-plans, and medical records. Mobile units are typically

outfitted with mobile devices such as mobile data computers (MDCs) or tablets providing the necessary link to dispatch operators and incident command. Before you make a decision on which device to deploy in your mobile units, you should give careful consideration to the software that will be running on those devices. Selecting the right mobile response software for the job can be critical to ensuring speedy response times and saving lives.

1. Does the software support your agency's needs and objectives?

The first step in choosing the right mobile response software for your agency is having a clear understanding of what you want the software to accomplish. Is your top priority getting emergency personnel to the data they need quickly? If so, you may be willing to sacrifice on ease-of-use or training requirements. Is your number one priority to maintain “always on” communications with your mobile resources? If so, you may need to consider multiple alternative and concurrent wireless networks. If your top concern is managing costs, then you may want to consider the hardware and maintenance required to run the software.



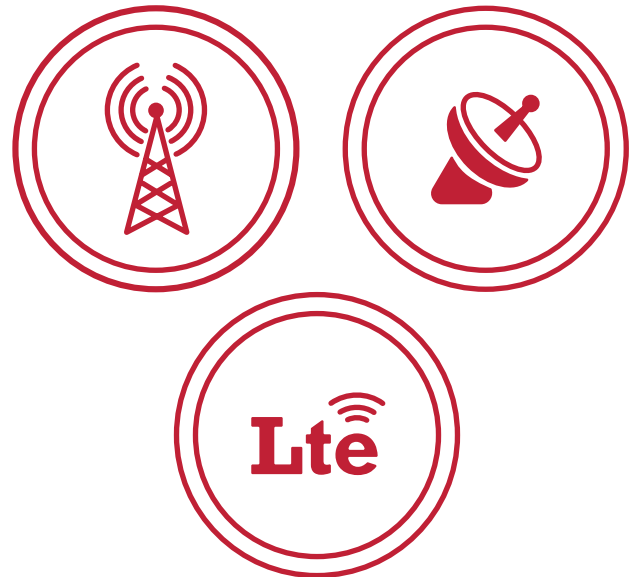
2. Does the software get you to the data you need quickly?

For most agencies, getting responders and managers to the information they need as quickly as possible is a high priority. Fewer clicks mean faster response times. Data stored locally is typically retrieved faster than data downloaded from the cloud. Therefore, for optimum speed and reliability, the software should include the ability to access data stored locally as well as “in the cloud”. Also, the software should display data such as map layers and details dynamically without the need to download new resources or software, saving both time and bandwidth.

So, if **SPEED OF ACCESS** is your top priority, look for mobile response software that will get users to the most important data with as few clicks as possible regardless of where the data is stored and whether or not they are connected to the internet.

3. Is the software easy to use and easy to learn?

A separate but speed-related issue is the software's ease-of-use. An intuitive, user-friendly interface will help get emergency personnel to the information they need as quickly as possible while also minimizing time spent out of service in training. In addition, if the software can run on multiple operating systems (e.g., Windows and iOS), users can easily switch from one device to another without having to learn an entirely new software program. If **EASE-OF-USE** is your top priority, look for mobile response software that runs on multiple platforms with an easy-to-use, read, and navigate touch screen interface that will get your responders to the data they need quickly regardless of which device they are using.



4. Does the software ensure connectivity between everyone?

Another top priority for most agencies is maintaining connectivity between the dispatch center, incident command and mobile units. Mobile units frequently operate in areas where wireless coverage is limited or constrained. Maintaining connectivity is paramount to situational awareness for all parties involved in the response. If **CONNECTIVITY** is your top priority, look for mobile response software that is intelligent enough to route communications over a variety of wireless pathways including LTE, RF, and satellite. The software should automatically choose the optimal path based on the type of data being communicated, thereby ensuring speed as well as reliability.

5. Does the software support interoperability?

No single software application can provide all the functions necessary for a successful emergency response. So, it's paramount that the mobile response software you choose is able to seamlessly integrate with other applications. The software should maintain two-way communication with your agency's CAD system providing real time updates to and from mobile units. Also, be sure the software can access and operate alongside other emergency response systems such as records

management, data visualization , resource tracking , and case management software, to name a few. Last but not least, if you are frequently called upon to coordinate your response with other agencies, your software will need to be able to effectively communicate with their systems as well. If **INTEROPERABILITY** is a top priority for your agency, look for mobile response software that can integrate with multiple CAD systems at once and operate seamlessly beside your other emergency response systems.




6. Does the software fit your agency's standard operating procedures?

Mobile response software can be a great tool for shortening response times and improving situational awareness. Unfortunately, not all software available in the market today was designed with the specific needs of fire rescue and response in mind. As such, the software may not support your agency's SOPs and, as a result, could actually *increase* response times. If **DECREASING RESPONSE TIMES** is a priority for your agency, look for mobile response software that is purpose-built for fire rescue. In addition, the software should allow administrators to turn off unnecessary features in order to simplify tasks. Another key feature to look for is the ability to customize available resources such as preplans and map layers, so users have access to exactly the information and only the information that they need. Finally, since operating procedures, goals and mandated standards are subject to change, look for software that can be easily customized to meet the needs of your agency, both now and in the future.



7. How and where will the software be deployed?

All software requires an operating system to run which means that understanding what type of hardware your mobile response software will operate on is vital. You may have a choice of operating systems such as Windows, Apple's iOS, and Android on which to run your software. Depending on the devices you plan to operate your mobile response software from, you may need a software that will support multiple operating systems. For example, you may choose to run your software on mobile data computers installed in commanders' vehicles as well as more portable devices such as tablets. In that case, you will want to choose software that can run on multiple devices and operating systems.



In addition, your software will likely depend on some type of backend server to interface with the CAD as well as other management systems, track and store AVL data, and manage communication network operations. This server which is responsible for maintaining secure communications and processing thousands of transactions per second can be located either “on premises” or hosted “in the cloud.” An on-premises option may be better suited for larger agencies with access to IT resources. The hosted solution may be preferred by agencies who prioritize speed of deployment and lower up-front costs. So, if having **FLEXIBLE DEPLOYMENT** options is a priority for your agency, look for a mobile response software that operates equally well on multiple devices and operating systems and offers a choice of data server hosting options.

8. What is the software’s total cost of ownership?

While cost should not be the top priority when evaluating mobile response software, it is nonetheless an important consideration. Most agencies work with limited budgets and any funds that are not put toward the purchase of software can be put towards other high priority budget items.

That said, it is important to look beyond the simple per user or per installation fee when calculating the cost of your mobile response software. As mentioned earlier, an intuitive design can result in a shorter learning curve and lower training costs. Be sure to include the cost of any customizations that may be required to make the software function as you need it to. You may also need to choose between owning or subscribing to the software. Owning the software typically includes some type of annual maintenance fee whereas that cost is typically built into the cost of the software subscription. Also, a software subscription typically comes with lower upfront costs which you may be able to cover with your operating budget, making it easier to budget. Regardless of which option you choose, you will also need to include the cost to deploy and maintain the hardware and software for the backend database server as well as any software required. So, if **MANAGING COST** is a high priority for your agency, look for a mobile response software with flexible purchase and deployment options that meet your agency’s highest priority objectives while providing the lowest overall total cost of ownership.

Conclusion

Evaluating software especially for mission critical situations can be a daunting task. A clear understanding of your agency's needs and objectives combined with asking the right questions will go a long way towards finding the right solution.



About RadioMobile

RadioMobile creates customizable hardware and software tools that help Fire and EMS agencies save lives by operating more safely and effectively. RadioMobile builds fully customized, end-to-end information tools that seamlessly integrate with legacy systems, extending resilient coverage to urban, suburban and rural environments. RadioMobile's extensive product line spans mobile data computers, mobile data networking, CAD and AVL software, and fire station alerting systems as well as integration and installation services.

**To learn more about mobile response software
and options for your agency, contact us.**

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