

# FULL-SERVICE SUPPORT AND OPERATOR FAMILIARITY – TOP RUGGED IT TRENDS IN THE LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

Guest Blog by Eric Miller, CEO, [JLT Mobile Computers](#)



With technology evolving at a constant rate, customers in harsh logistics and warehousing environments are looking to their rugged IT suppliers to help them keep pace with modern industry demands. New innovations in automated logistics solutions and operator-interface technology are certainly at the forefront, but leading the change is the need for full-service capabilities from industry suppliers. We list the three biggest trends that we are seeing based on our global interactions.

## Growing demand for full-service support

The ability to offer a full service is now a defining factor in many purchasing decisions for logistics solutions. This full-service offering encompasses everything from system design and specification, through installation and training up to ongoing support and spares. The primary drivers behind this need are maximum uptime and rapid support within a defined and predictable cost. This gives users heightened peace of mind in terms of budget, service delivery and solution performance.

From a specification standpoint, a single supplier can deliver a suite of products that are specifically designed to interconnect as efficiently and effectively as possible. Its engineers will not only know these systems intimately but also how they interact with each other and what the optimum operational parameters are – insights that would simply not be possible from a mix-and-match infrastructure.

From the service side of things, the onus is on the supplier to repair or replace unserviceable components within agreed timescales and with negligible impact on the customer's ongoing operations. This type of approach is in line with a broader trend towards "renting functionality" as part of procurement models like Hardware as a Service (HaaS) or Wireless as a Service (WaaS).

## Touchscreens as responsive as smartphones, but virtually unbreakable

Modern mobile computers and human-machine interfaces (HMIs) have to exhibit the ruggedness required for the applications they are serving. The ability to deliver fit-for-purpose hardware is, therefore, another defining trend in the selection of suitable suppliers.

Broken touch screens represent by far the largest reason behind industrial computers being out of service for any length of time. The issue is that older, resistive type screens are covered with a soft PET layer that is wholly unsuitable for regular use in harsh environments due to its sensitivity to wear and tear. These screens also lack the user friendliness of the consumer devices that the operators are used to.

The solution is projected capacitive touch (PCT), a tougher touch screen technology that allows the touch sensor to be placed behind thick toughened glass. As well as meeting the demanding requirements of harsh industrial environments, these screens are scratch proof and practically unbreakable, vastly improving uptime.

PCT also delivers smartphone-and-tablet-like performance. It works with simple, light finger touches and can be made to interpret familiar multi-touch gestures, such as pinch to zoom. Specialized implementations of PCT also works with gloves, as well as in humid or wet conditions.

## Rising popularity of Android

With an 85% market share and claims of over 2 billion users, Android has become the world's most pervasive operating systems for mobile devices; and it is already making serious inroads in industrial applications. It is currently more commonly used in rugged handheld devices, whereas Windows still predominates in vehicle-mount terminals (VMT), but these lines are becoming blurred as the operating space evolves and customer preferences and familiarity start to play a larger role.

Suppliers of logistics technology have to take this into account in order to deliver a tailored offering within their full-service packages. Operators want familiarity as they move from one terminal type to another and, from a business perspective, it makes sense in terms of training, platform interactions and data efficiency. For these reasons, operating system agnosticism is becoming more and more common

Many of our VMT customers are asking for Android, for the simple reason that they want to use the same OS across all their rugged VMT and handheld devices. Having the same OS across all devices makes life easier, increases efficiency, productivity and profitability and, with the possibility of dual-OS capabilities, makes systems far more flexible.