Look, Mom, No Wires!

For the last 2-3 years, there has been more innovation in the area of wireless (mobile) communications and devices than in PCs. Cell phones, wireless PDAs, LANs, Wi-fi, Bluetooth – the glossy magazines would have you believe your business will be revolutionized tomorrow, or no later than next week. Are there any real business benefits to mobile technology?

While a few people may trade stocks via cell phone, applications with real value are usually mundane-seeming ideas that improve productivity or enable better customer service. A fellow working at an auto body shop bought a Palm to store addresses and phone numbers of vendors, adjusters and wreckers. He takes it to the parking lot and makes notes about the progress of cars under repair, then updates the company's web site where customers can check the status of their cars. Consider the time saved by not transcribing scribbled notes and handling phone inquiries about cars!

In this example, the idea came from a savvy employee (who spent his own money). Your employees may have similarly great ideas. The magazines have focused on applications for travelers and field service people, but the real money may be closer to home. Look for areas where mobility is an essential element of the work – hospitals, warehouses, retail, manufacturing, equipment repair, even parking lots. Any business process where information must be transcribed on its way into a computer is a candidate for streamlining. Can a mobile device eliminate a step, reduce errors or save you money?

In May, 2002, *Mobile Computing & Communications* magazine reported on five cases where mobile technology produced real business benefits. It also listed 175 software applications for handheld computers, including personal information managers, GPS navigators, e-mail, and financial and portfolio managers.

If your business has come up with a winning mobile application, let me know!

This column by Denis Williamson of MacLamor Computer Consulting aims to help businesses maximize the value of information technology. Denis can be reached at 845-357-1877 or denis@maclamor.com.