

TRANSUMERS

## Say goodbye to the banker's box: Office files move to the cloud

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The banker's box once ruled at [Kindred Home Care](http://www.kindredhomecare.com/) [http://www.kindredhomecare.com/], a company in St. Stephen, N.B., that provides in-home caregiver services to more than 500 people across the province.

Kindred's field managers, who work mostly from home or on the road, relied heavily on the sturdy cardboard cases, in which they stored frequently accessed documents such as time charts and client visit notes.

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"We had a lot of paper time charts and a lot of documents going back and forth between field and office," says Kindred chief executive officer Billy English, whose father, Paul English, founded the company 28 years ago. "The amount of time it took to get information was just tremendous, and we didn't really have access to real-time information."

That all changed last November, when Kindred's managers traded in their banker's boxes for iPads loaded with apps built on Salesforce1, a cloud-based mobile services and applications platform that had just been launched by [Salesforce.com](http://salesforce.com/) [http://salesforce.com/] Inc. of San Francisco.

Earlier in the year, Kindred had taken its core business functions – from accounting to human resources – off local storage such as individual computer hard drives and put them on the cloud. Adding the Salesforce1 platform to its system allowed workers to quickly access business software from their mobile devices and brought the company to the leading edge of a largely low-tech industry, Mr. English says.

"It's amazing what technology has allowed us to do in an industry that has been traditionally slow to embrace it," he says. "We're excited to be positively disrupting the home care industry."

Through Salesforce1, almost all of Kindred's business applications in the cloud can be accessed remotely from a single interface customized to each user's role in the company. Mr. English, for instance, can use almost all of Kindred's business systems.

"I can look at outstanding receivables and check on our finance department," he says. "I can see the number of client visits that are happening right this minute, how many late arrivals there are, how many open cases we have."

This instant insight into the business allows Mr. English to react quickly to opportunities and problems, he says. For example, if he sees that the company's support centre is being bombarded by requests, he can make a quick phone call to find out what's causing the surge in requests and bring in more help if needed.

For Kindred's client managers in the field, the company's new mobile cloud technology makes it easier to support caregivers and ensure clients are getting the services they need. One way it does this is by providing managers with mobile, real-time connection to Kindred's scheduling software.

"We get notifications if our employees are late arriving, perhaps because of bad winter weather, or if they sign out late we get an alert saying there's been a late closure," says Mr. English. "We then follow up directly with the employee or client to make sure that the employee has arrived – sometimes they're there but just haven't had time to sign in – and to quickly make alternative arrangements if we need to."

Field managers also have access to Chatter, the Salesforce social media app that the company's leaders use to communicate. Instead of sending e-mail messages that can get buried in an inbox, Kindred managers post comments on Chatter, which also allows documents and other types of files to be attached to a comment. Direct messages to a particular manager can also be sent.

"For example, when we get a requisition for a new client, we can mention to the scheduler, 'Hey, this has been updated – check it out,'" explains Mr. English. "Just like Facebook, Chatter allows for a more social dynamic in the workplace. We are mobile, our managers are in different cities and towns around the province, and Chatter is the glue that holds our community together."

While mobile computing is not a novel concept, mobile cloud computing – sometimes referred to as the "third platform" – is still an emerging business technology. With mobile cloud computing, software and data all reside in the cloud, which also provides the processing power. The mobile device acts strictly as the user interface.

Piyush Bhatnagar, managing director of technology at Accenture Canada, says small businesses are particularly well positioned to take advantage of mobile cloud computing.

"They don't have all these legacy systems behind them," he says. "There's also a lot more pay-by-the-drink capability out there today, where companies don't have to buy the entire stack but can pick and choose cloud technology according to their business needs. This makes it more affordable for small businesses."

A big challenge with mobile cloud computing, says Mr. Bhatnagar, is integrating the different applications typically used in a business. Kindred's Salesforce1 platform has addressed this challenge to a large degree; about 90 per cent of the company's business software is accessible from a mobile device, according to Mr. English.

In the six months since it implemented its Salesforce platform, Kindred has experienced a 300-per-cent improvement in its response time to customer inquiries. Meanwhile, e-mail usage has dropped by 30 per cent as more employees communicate via Chatter.

Kindred, which has doubled in size over the past year and now employs about 400 workers, plans to make mobile access to its systems available to its caregivers, says Mr. English.

"We're essentially looking at creating an app on Salesforce1 that will allow our support workers to do things like request days off, see their schedule, report on the health and well-being of the client, and connect with each other and management," he says. "This will allow us to create a community for our support workers, who spend most of their day one-on-one with the client."

The company is also creating an app for clients' families. Through this app, which would be password-protected and accessible only with the client's consent, families could see a client's care schedule, general health information and even photos. For clients who are frail or have serious health problems, this offers a way to stay connected to family and friends, says Mr. English.

"Imagine being in Toronto and having visibility into your mom's care in New Brunswick," he says. "This is very powerful technology, and we're using it to deliver consistent, high-quality care to our clients."

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