Washington Goes Mobile
Tax Rate Lookup App

Simplifying how businesses collect and track sales tax

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Department of Revenue

Washington Goes Mobile

The Tax Rate Lookup App

Allows businesses to look up the sales tax rate and code for any location in Washington

•iPhone app in July 2012

•Android app in January 2013

Dramatically simplifies how a Washington business collects and tracks sales tax when they make deliveries or provide services in multiple locations across the state.

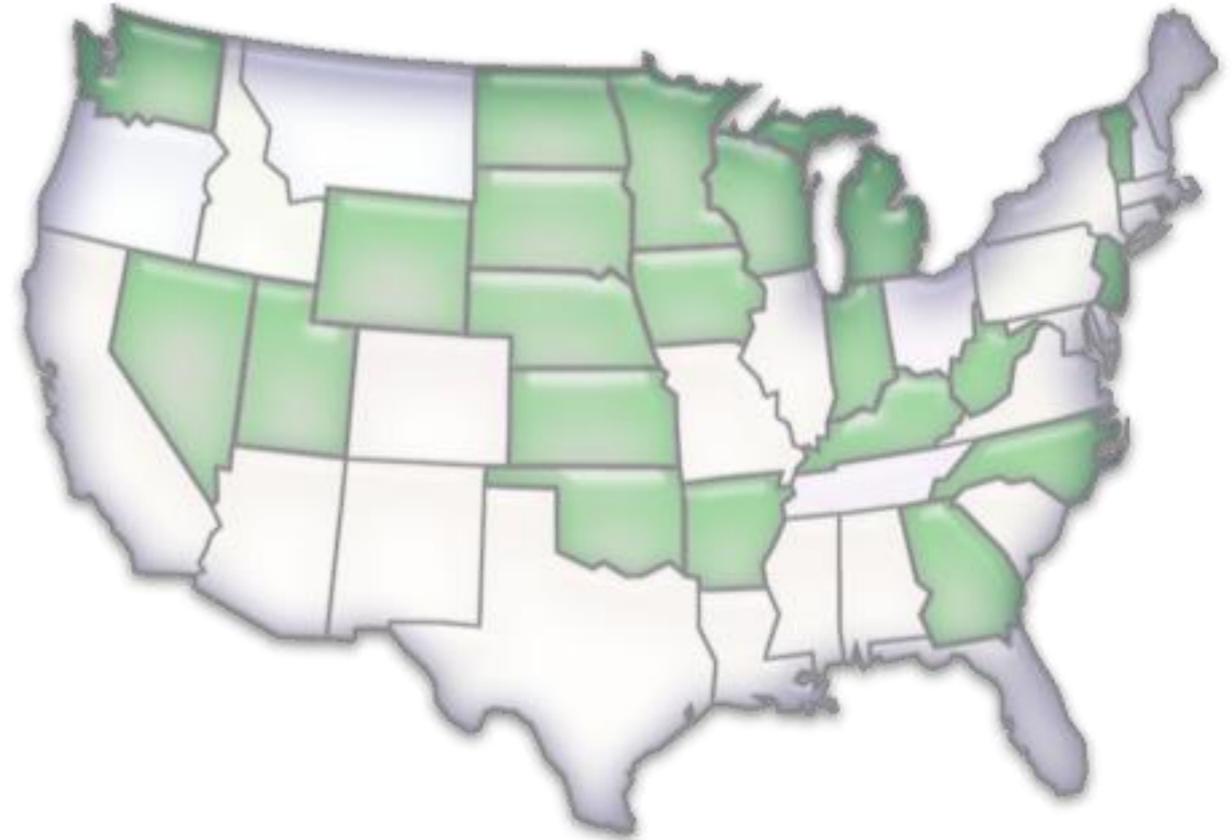*Makes compliance easy and efficient.*

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The Problem

In 2008, Washington State joined the national Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement (SSUTA)

•Washington changed from an origin-based sales tax to destination-based

•Businesses making deliveries went *from charging one sales tax rate, coded to one location, to facing a multitude of rates and codes* to keep track of

•Washington has more than 350 sales and use tax jurisdictions

Streamlined Sales Tax

www.streamlinedsalestax.org

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The Problem

The Department offered many different tools for businesses to use to figure out the correct rates and codes for their customers.

Still, there was no way to determine the correct rate and code right there, at the moment of making a delivery.

The process was separated into two distinct stages:

•Determining the rate and code happened in an office somewhere

•Delivery and exchange with the customer happened at a completely different time, "out in the field"

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The Problem

During the three years after Washington joined SSUTA, the technology landscape was evolving rapidly and would offer fertile ground from which an ideal solution could emerge…

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A Solution

The 1990s marked a dramatic cultural shift to the web

•People expected to be able to find comprehensive information on company and government websites

•Then, they expected to be able to complete transactions on the web, like filing and paying taxes

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A Solution

We are currently in the midst of another cultural-technological shift that many say parallels that of the web in the 90s: ***the shift to mobile computing.***

According to The White House Digital Government Strategy:

•In 2011, global smart phone shipments exceeded personal computer shipments for the first time in history

•By 2015, it's predicted that more Americans will access the Internet from mobile devices than desktop PCs
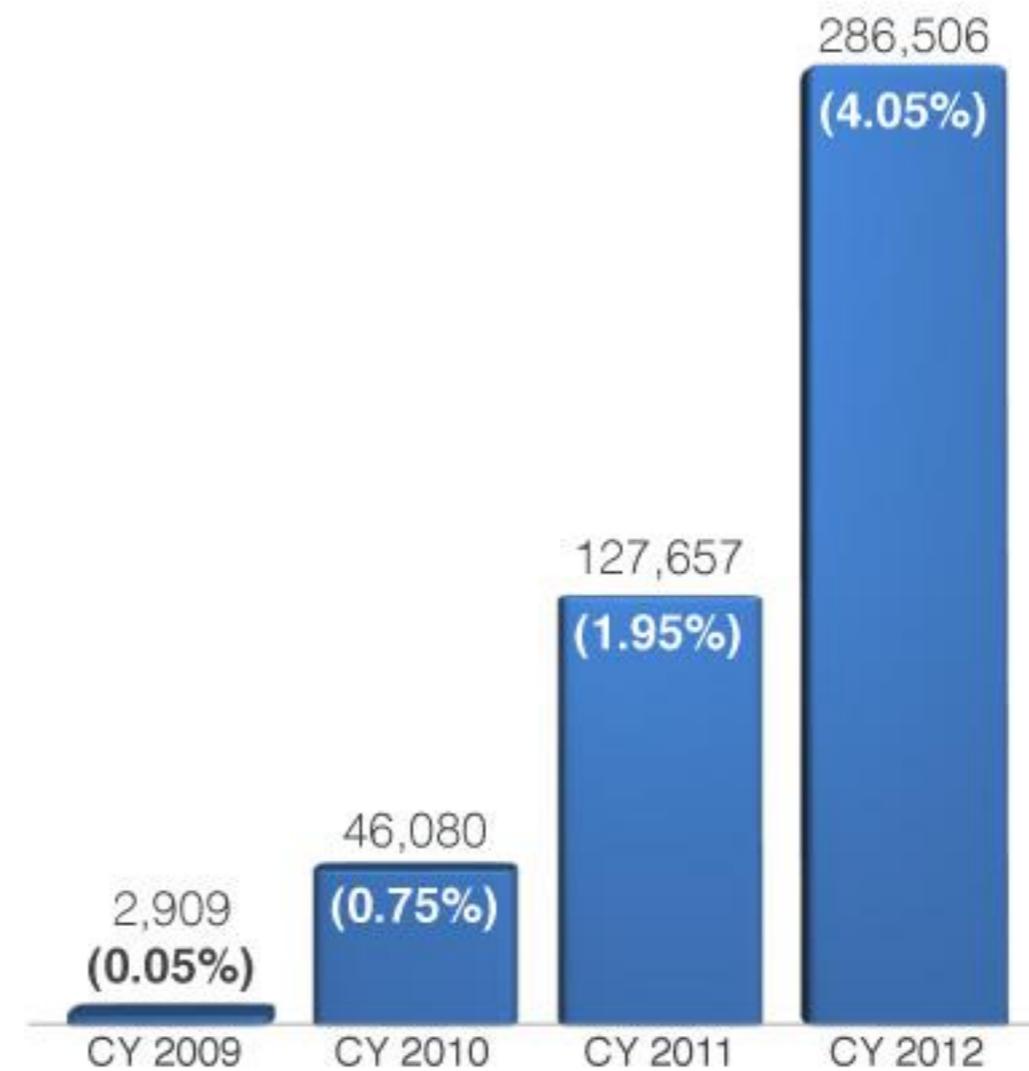
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A Solution

Using Google Analytics, from 2009 to 2012 we saw:

•Visits to our website from mobile devices skyrocket

•In those three years, mobile visits increased 9,749%

While mobile visits are still only about 4% of overall site visits, the growth rate mirrors the national trend and is consistent with general industry growth predictions.

Mobile visits to dor.wa.gov

Bar chart showing mobile visits to dor.wa.gov:
- CY 2009: 2,909 (0.05%)
- CY 2010: 46,080 (0.75%)
- CY 2011: 127,657 (1.95%)
- CY 2012: 286,506 (4.05%)

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A Solution

With the burgeoning mobile trend on the societal level, and armed with specific knowledge about our own users, we integrated mobile app development into our strategic business plan.

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A Solution

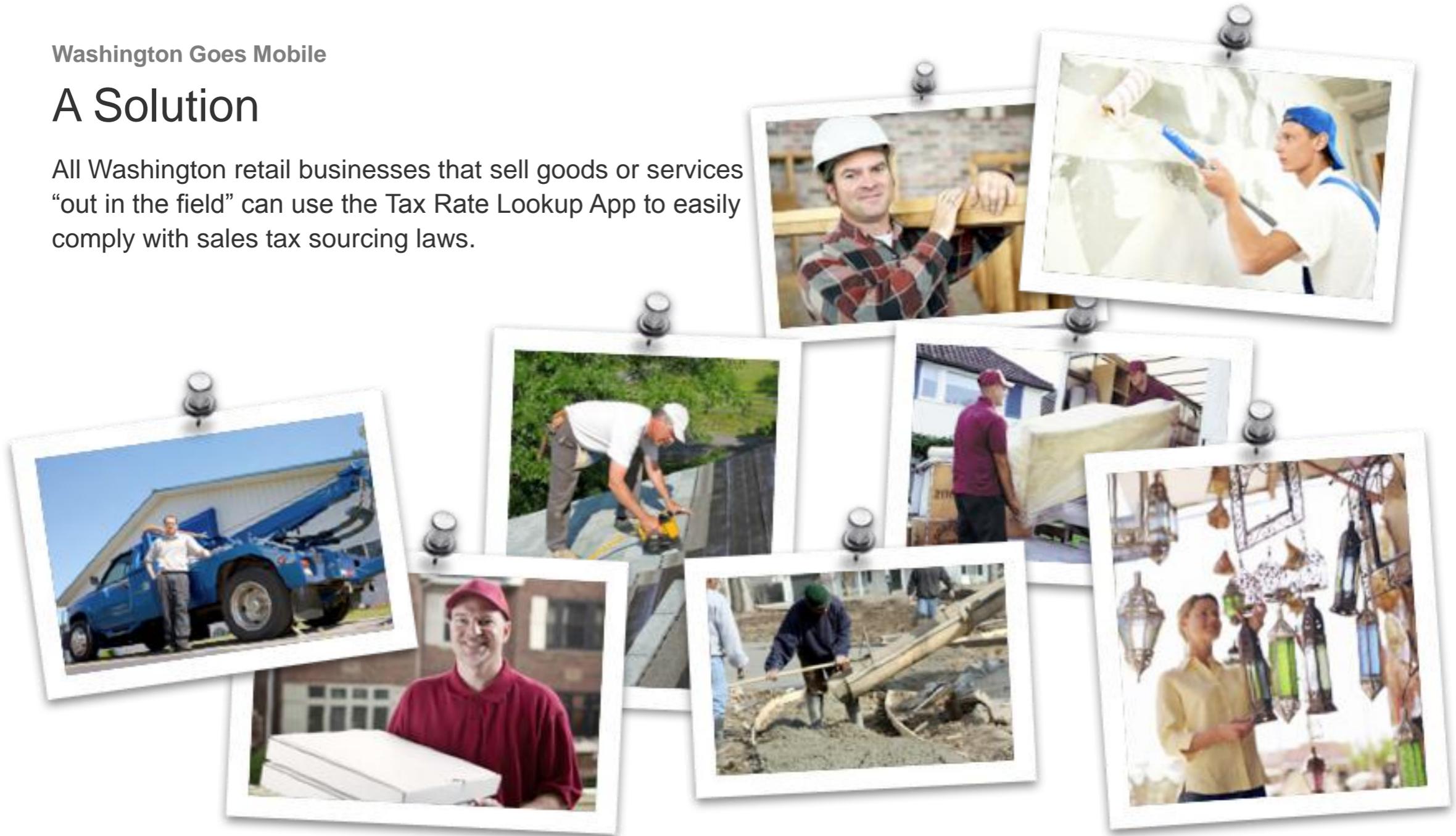The Tax Rate Lookup App does two things our web-based tool doesn't:

•The app bridges those two distinct stages in the delivery process—**now a business can find the correct rate right at the point of delivery**

•The app also leverages one of mobile's unique offerings: GPS

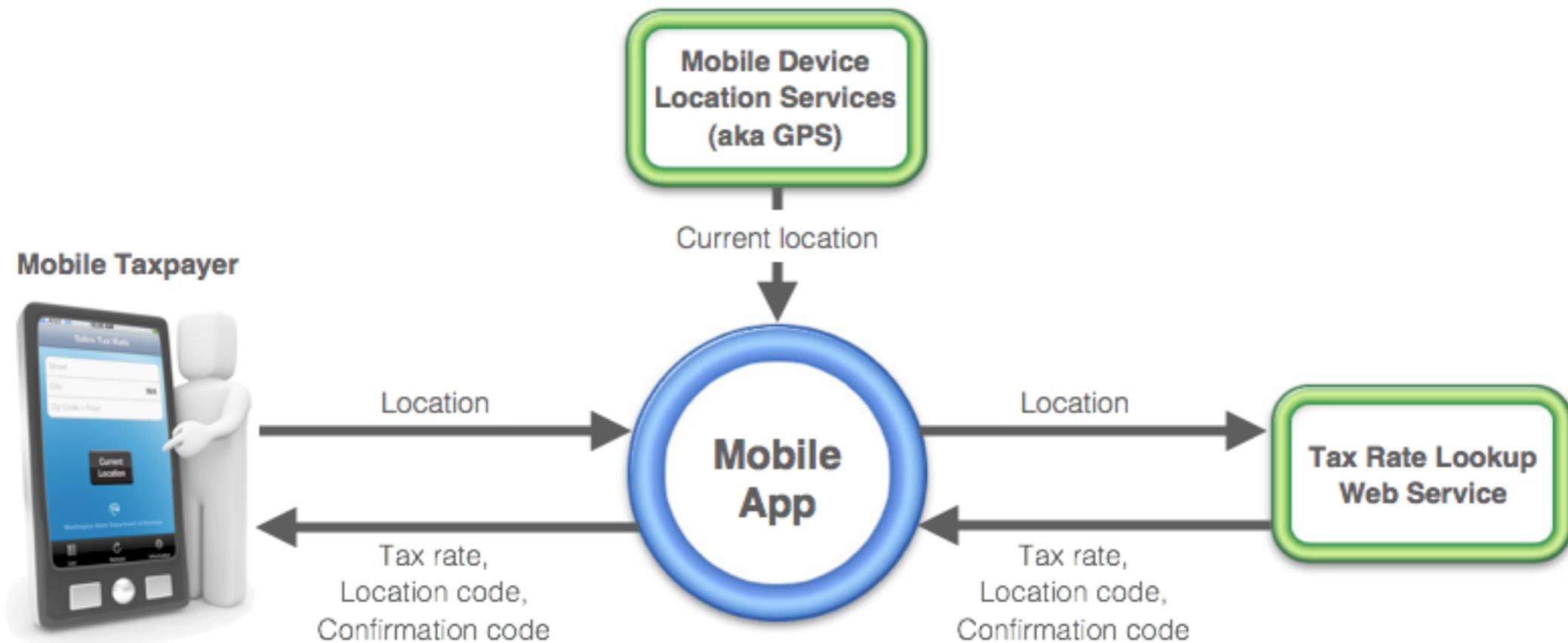**Washington Goes Mobile**

A Solution

All Washington retail businesses that sell goods or services "out in the field" can use the Tax Rate Lookup App to easily comply with sales tax sourcing laws.

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A Solution

Here are the basic mechanics of how the app looks up a rate and code:

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A Solution

Other features of the app that help record and track the sales tax for that transaction:

•Key in sales price and the app automatically calculates total amount due based on the location's rate

•Save to a list; all the information to report and remit sales tax for those deliveries or services is in one place

•Send that information to an email address—for example, from the field to the business office

•A confirmation code is provided with each lookup that links to the original results
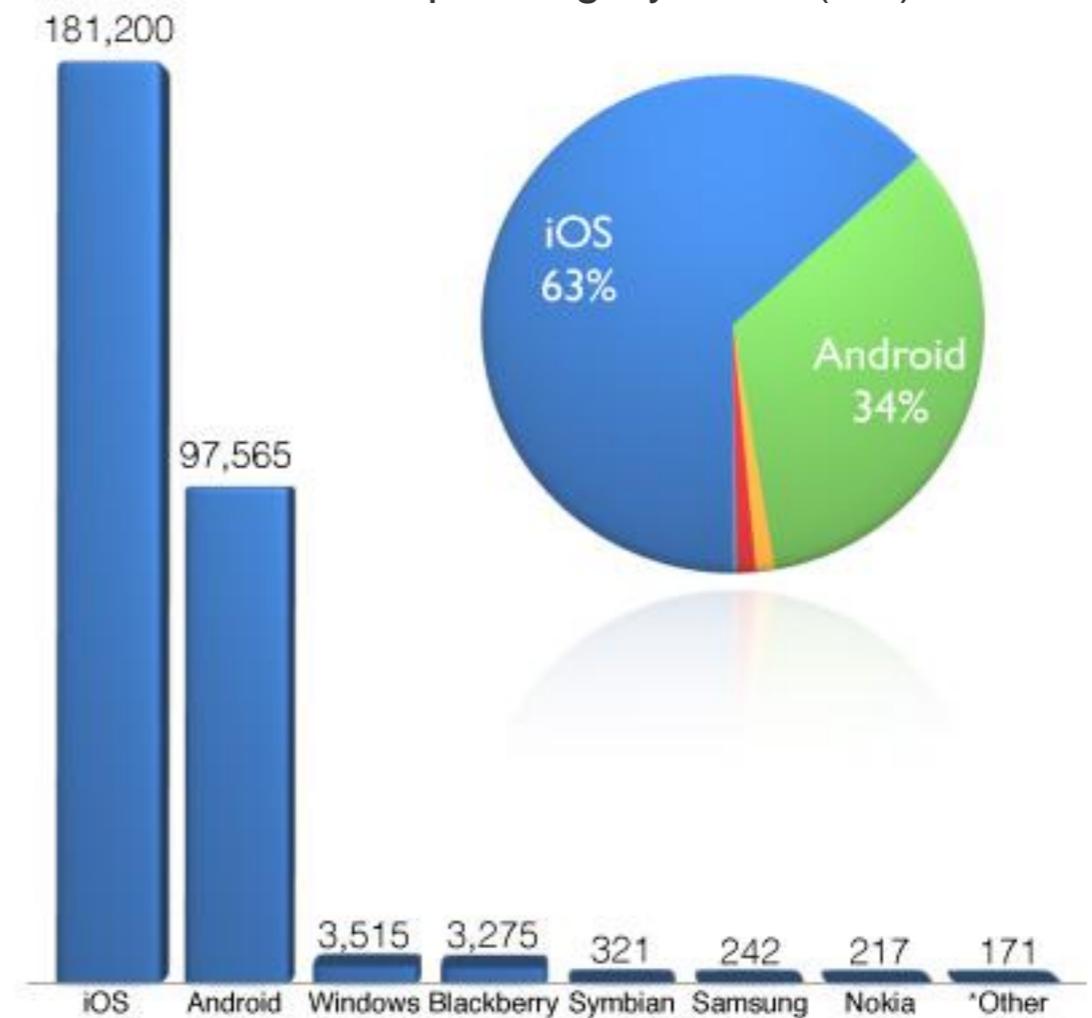
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A Solution

We first developed the app for iOS—the operating system for Apple mobile devices like iPhones, iPads, and iPods—because more taxpayers were visiting our site with those devices.

The Android operating system—which is run on a variety of smart phones and tablets—was used by the second largest number of taxpayers.

We are about to release an HTML5 version.

Mobile visits to dor.wa.gov (CY 2012)
Mobile Operating Systems (OS)

iOS 63%

Android 34%

iOS	Android	Windows	Blackberry	Symbian	Samsung	Nokia	*Other
181,200	97,565	3,515	3,275	321	242	217	171

286,506 = Total mobile visits

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Results

How many people are using the app?

•iOS released July 2012 -- 5,470 downloads

•Android released January 2013 -- 1,940 downloads

•Both averaging about 100 downloads a week

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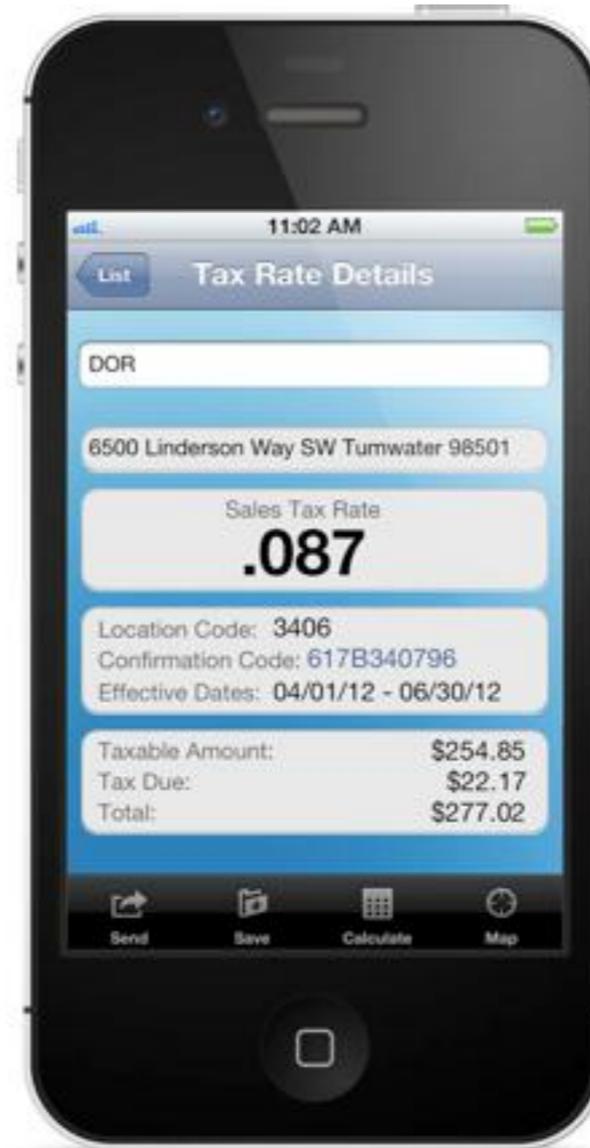
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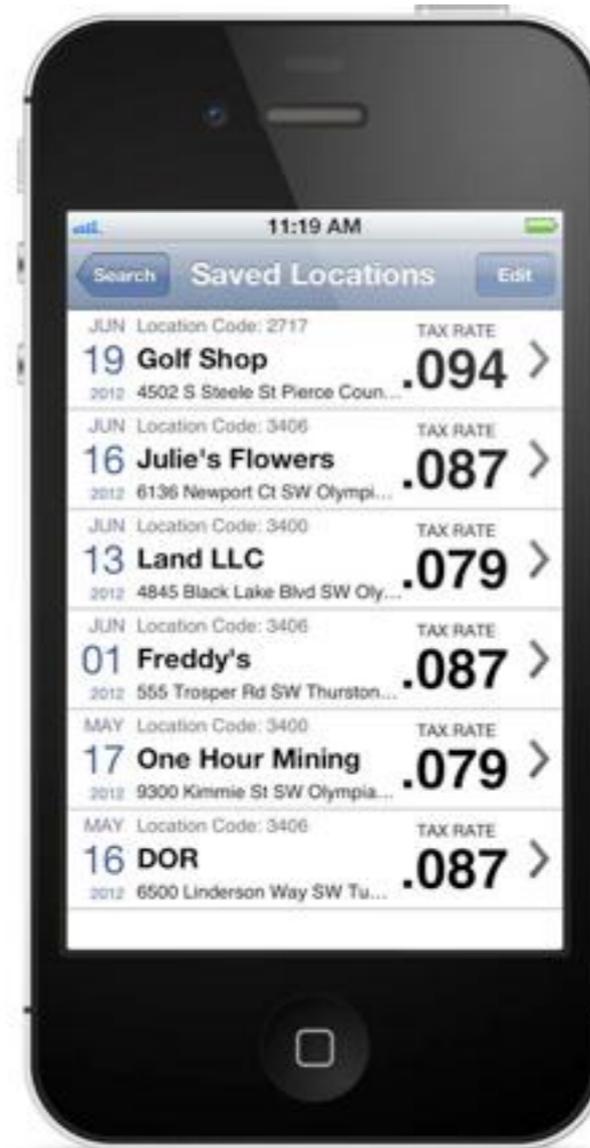# The Tax Rate Lookup App

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Some words of advice

App development is not just a product of your IT department

•Put people on your team who drive the user side

•Understand what your users need, how to apply user-centered design, and how to test with real users

•User side is the starting point for your app

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Some words of advice

Do your research and use data

- The data tells your user-side team members what an app should do -- and what it shouldn't do

- Good data ensures you are aligning your products with your users' actual needs

- Google Analytics; Broad look across organization to identify stumbling blocks and gaps in service

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The Tax Rate Lookup App

Mobile is a game changer.

Businesses all over the country are adopting mobile devices as their go-to technology for running a business—in the office and on the go.

According to 2012 survey by Harris Interactive:

- 2/3 of small businesses surveyed said mobile is important to the current success of their business

- Nearly 3/4 think it will be important to the future success of their business.

When we're in touch with the way they do business, we make it seamless to do tax "business" with us. **We believe this is key to ongoing voluntary compliance in an ever-changing technology landscape.**

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Questions?