

How to Choose a Modern Communicator for Field Instrumentation

2026 Buyers Guide

The Landscape Has Changed

For years, bulky, proprietary handheld communicators were the standard in process industries. But as technology has evolved—and as the next generation of technicians enters the workforce—so have expectations. Today's best communicators are mobile, cost-effective, and safer to use in the field.

This guide will help you evaluate modern options for HART and Foundation Fieldbus (FF) communication—whether you're replacing aging devices like the Trex, expanding your toolkit, or preparing for the transition to Ethernet-APL.

Know Your Options: Communicator Types

Communicator Type	Pros	Cons
Proprietary Handhelds	Rugged, known reliability	Expensive, heavy, costly updates
PC-Based Software	Powerful interface, good for advanced config	Tethered to desktop or laptop
Mobile App-Based (e.g., DevCom)	Lightweight, modern UI, Bluetooth-ready	External modem required

What's Emerging:

Mobile communicator apps paired with Bluetooth modems are rapidly becoming the go-to solution for modern techs—lightweight, versatile, and intuitive.



Key Features to Look For

DD-Based Communication

Ensure the communicator uses official Device Descriptions (DDs) for full compatibility with your HART and FF devices.

Universal Support

The best tools support all registered DDs from FieldComm Group—not just specific models.

Bluetooth Compatibility

Wireless is a game-changer. Look for support for Bluetooth HART or FF modems to reduce risk and boost flexibility in the field.

Modern UI

Technicians expect intuitive, modern interfaces. Tools like DevCom offer familiar app-style workflows on smartphones, tablets, and laptops.

Optional Update Plans

Updates are important, but they shouldn't hold your data hostage. Choose a tool that lets you manually add DDs or opt into updates, rather than forcing expensive annual plans.



Evaluating Total Cost of Ownership

Factor	Legacy Handheld	Modern Mobile Solution
Initial Hardware Cost	\$7,000–\$10,000	\$500–\$2,000
Annual Update Fees	\$800–\$1,200	Optional (or free)
Weight	~6–10 lbs	Less than 1 lb
Licensing Model	Per Device	Per App / Device / Site-wide

Value Tip:

Add up hardware, licensing, update fees, and productivity gains. Modern solutions often pay for themselves in months—not years.

Be Ready for Ethernet-APL

Modern communicators should work within both current and emerging Ethernet-APL infrastructures. Tools like the HART-APL-ADAPTER let you access legacy devices through next-gen APL networks, preserving your investment while future-proofing operations.

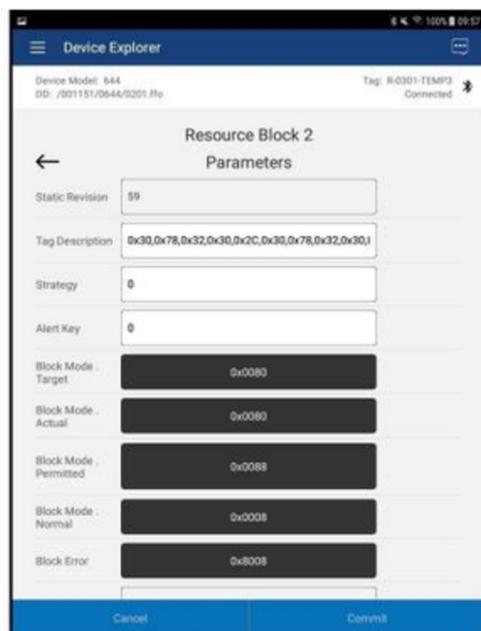
Recommended Setup:

DevCom + MobiLink Modem

DevCom App (Android, Windows, iOS): Turns your phone, tablet, or PC into a full-featured communicator.

Bluetooth Modem (MobiLink, HM-BT-BAT-ER, etc.): Enables wireless communication, perfect for confined spaces or elevated installations.

Optional: APL-SW-3 and HART-APL-ADAPTER to prepare for Ethernet-APL.



Ready to modernize your communicator?

Contact ProComSol Today

Phone: 216.221.1550
Toll free: 877.221.1551
sales@procomsol.com



procomsol.com



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