



Case Study

Mobile Computers Help Euclid Beverage Meet Demand for More Detailed Information

At a Glance

Industry:

Direct Store Delivery

Market:

Beer

Application:

Delivery
Sales

Product:

Pen Notepad Mobile Computers
Sales Delivery & Merchandising (SDM) Software

Partners:

Data Concepts
Nextel®



E U C L I D B E V E R A G E

Distributors have a tough time these days keeping up with the demand for information. In a quest for market share gain, manufacturers have extended their product lines. More product sizes and labels have yielded more products and price discounts.

Retailers, also hoping to capture more market share, are rapidly extending their market presence with more stores. More stores means more route stops, and more times a route driver has to process all that information. Add to that the need to gather more performance information for each product, for each customer, for each location and the result can be a gigantic headache.

Mobile Computers Provide Needed Relief

Seeking relief, direct store delivery operators are using mobile computers that not only track all products by name and number, but also track customers by individual location.

These mobile computers come equipped with sophisticated software programs that deliver customer information, permit messaging between a host computer and the remote handheld, and switch easily between driver-sell and pre-sell applications.

At the end of each delivery, these units communicate with a portable printer

wirelessly to produce an invoice detailing the transaction. And, at the end of the route, the information in the mobile computer can be readily uploaded to a host computer via simple communications to a corporate accounting system.

In suburban Chicago, Miller beer distributor Euclid Beverage has seen the number of SKUs, or stock keeping units, jump from about 75 to well over 200 for its 25 routes, says Controller Bill Poczekaj. It was the need to handle more inventory and maintain more information about specific route stops, that led Euclid to upgrade to Intermec mobile computers installed with Sales Delivery & Merchandising (SDM) software.

Challenge

"The technology of our old system was not able to keep up with daily invoice generation. At the same time, our industry was changing. Marketing and competitive information was becoming more and more important to our business," Poczekaj says.

"I started looking at the Sales Delivery & Merchandising software from Intermec. It is a full-featured application with driver-sell and pre-sell functions as well as some pretty slick messaging capabilities and survey functions. At that point, I started looking for a piece of hardware that best fits our business requirements."



Solution

Poczekaj settled on the Intermec system because it offered the ability to upgrade over a period of time. "We can put in additional memory, and if we need to, incorporate scanning, radio frequency and two-way radio. I can add any of these features without getting rid of what I had and without making the investment in hardware over and over again; we want that to last four to five years.

"In addition, we needed to update our sales inventory information at the customer location. The system was flexible enough to use Nextel's® Dial-Up Data Service (circuit data) to provide wireless data transport. This allows orders to be sent from the field up until the cutoff time, which could mean the difference in one or two additional customer orders and result in substantial sales increases."

Installation Made In Just Two Weeks

Direct communications between the mobile system and the host computer was also important to Euclid. "The direct connection to our RS/6000 is important to me because it takes one step out of the data transfer process."

To handle the installation and interface between the Intermec mobile computers and the RS/6000, Poczekaj chose Data Concepts, an Intermec Value-Added Reseller (VAR) in San Antonio. Euclid is using Data Concepts' Handheld Management System (HMS) middleware using an ODBC (Open Database Connectivity) connection to streamline the interface to the accounting system on the RS/6000, an IBM mid-range RISC processor designed to handle enterprise computing needs.

"With the HMS interface, users can take full advantage of the Intermec SDM



software," explains Phil Beck, president of Data Concepts. "With the interface, the mobile computers become more feature rich, tracking product displays and additions such as neon display signs and mirrors that greatly increase the sales volume. The Intermec handhelds have more memory and more speed so they deliver sub-second response time. The salesmen need that to handle the more complex sales promotions without experiencing lag time."

The installation and upgrade for all the beer routes of the St. Charles, Illinois company was completed in just two weeks. Data Concepts, which has over ten years experience implementing Intermec automated route accounting systems, also handled all the training for drivers, administrative staff and management personnel.

"We take responsibility for making sure the installation goes well. We are continuing to provide them with telephone technical support, upgrades to HMS and we will assist them with any upgrades to the SDM software," says Beck.

As soon as implementation was complete, Poczekaj began collecting day-to-day data more easily. "I had to have very highly skilled technical people to tend to the communications process. Now, one of the warehousemen starts and ends the communications process.

"He just looks at the screen to make sure information has been received for each route," he explains. Information is uploaded to the host computer and new information downloaded to the mobile computers in about half the time of the previous system.

Outcome

The touch screen and the faster processor make generating invoices faster and make it easier to calculate discounts. "When we have substitute drivers, they just enter the case quantity; they don't have to enter the product information. The correct discount for that customer pops up," says Poczekaj. "Now the discount for each product is on the invoice."

He says the Intermec system is even making it easier to sell customers on adding new products or increasing their inventory level of current items. "Customers are more concerned about profit. They want to know which are their low-profit items. Now, we can deliver that information and use our ability to do so as a selling technique.

"Likewise, if we're trying to put in a new product, we can provide the customer with a calculation - right there on the mobile computer - of what the profit would be, given a purchase and a sale price."

By accessing customer history information on the unit, says Poczekaj, Euclid drivers can show customers their current order level and show them when they consistently run out before the next delivery. "The driver can convince the ten-case customer he needs five more cases, or show him that by taking two more cases he is entitled to a discount. It all adds to my volume and it makes the customer happy."

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