

Driving the Cost Out with Handhelds

Manufacturing Alumni

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Beverage Control, Inc., has been supplying soda, juice, Co2 gasses, water, energy drinks and ice machines to companies in the Southeastern U.S. for more than ten years. The family owned and operated business serves a variety of different companies ranging from stadiums, hospitals, nightclubs, taverns, restaurants, and schools.

The Challenge: Moving from Manual to Automated Handhelds

Beverage Control uses a fleet of trucks and vans to deliver beverage products and provide services to customers. They were looking for a solution to reduce costs and improve customer service in three areas of their business.

First, they needed to reduce their paper printing cost. Beverage Control drivers would start each morning by taking a stack of triplicate paper order forms with them on their routes. These order forms were used by the drivers to write down what the customer ordered that day. After the products were delivered, the driver would give the customer their copy of the order form as a receipt. The driver would keep the second copy and give the third copy to accounting. Beverage Control noticed they were spending a large amount of money on paper costs each month.

Second, they wanted to reduce employee expense for data entry. After the truck drivers brought the order forms back to the office, four data entry employees needed to enter the order information into their accounting system software program. Beverage Control's goal was to reduce the number of order entry employees from four to two. They also noticed with the large number of order forms, that data entry errors were occurring when the employees were manually entering the information into their software system.

Lastly, they were motivated to improve their customer satisfaction by increasing the accuracy of calculating customer cost when delivering product. Using the paper order form system, drivers would either use a calculator or multiply in their head the extended cost of delivered products. Since the process was manual, drivers would frequently make a mistake on how much a customer owed. In order to correct the error, the driver would have to go back to the customer and explain why the error occurred. This process wasted time and decreased customer satisfaction.

Beverage Control management believed they could use data collection hardware and software to automate these manual processes, noting, "We needed to partner with a technology company that could create a software application to automate our processes and provide our drivers with a handheld device that would work in the field. We partnered with BaxTek Solutions because they had the experience and expertise in field mobile data collection."

The Solution: Handheld Devices with Bottom-Line Results

BaxTek Solutions developed a custom software solution that enabled Beverage Control to electronically upload data files from their accounting software program to a Unitech PA600 portable handheld device. According to founder Wayne BaxTek, "We chose the Unitech PA600 handheld device because it was durable, lightweight, had write-on screen capabilities, Bluetooth, and was priced to fit Beverage Control's budget. Beverage Control looked at other hand held devices, but only the PA600 provided them with all of the functionality they needed at a price point they could afford."

Unitech is recognized as the number three player in rugged mobile computers worldwide, focusing on automatic data collection products and services to improve productivity, efficiency and quality of operations. Unitech produces a full range of AIDC products including portable data collection terminals, handheld scanners, magnetic stripe readers, mobile receipt printers and fixed terminals.

The data files that were uploaded to the PA600 portable contained up-to-date customer information the truck drivers needed when visiting customer accounts. Some of the information on these files included the route information for the driver, products the customer ordered on a regular basis, customer past due amounts, and service information updates. If a customer wanted to place

an order for a new item they had not ordered in the past, the driver could use the touch-screen and select the item from a drop down menu from the software application that resided on the portable. With the PA600's Bluetooth wireless technology, drivers were able to connect wirelessly to a mobile printer and print a receipt for the customer. Since the PA600 captured the customer's order information and enabled them to print a customer a receipt, they no longer needed the triplicate order forms.

Once the drivers were back in the office at the end of their shift, they were able to put the portable in a cradle and have the information automatically upload to their accounting system software program. Since this data was sent electronically, it improved the accuracy of getting the information to the accounting software program and it reduced the need of manually entering the data. According to Beverage Control, "The new data collection solution has saved us so much money so quickly we have already been able to reduce the number of data entry employees."

The software program on the portable also automatically calculates the extended cost of the delivered products. The drivers no longer needed to manually figure out the cost with a calculator. This software feature has reduced errors in calculating customer extended cost and improved customer satisfaction. "Our drivers love the new portable solution because it saves our drivers time and eliminates costly invoicing errors," reports Beverage Control. This new technology has enabled Beverage Control to provide their customers with an enhanced level of customer service. Beverage Control's desire to keep improving their service is one of the many reasons they are one of the top beverage distributors in the southeast.

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