Fresh Produce Journal IT Monthly – Article 8
Published – October 2004
On- Line Mobile Computing in the palm of your hand

As business continues to speed up and with more than 22% of the UK workforce operating on a mobile basis, the need to provide them with access to updated customer and product information is growing daily. In the fresh produce industry, the percentage is higher with field workers, quality controllers, category managers, delivery drivers and executives constantly on the move. Furthermore, with perishable items such as fresh produce, disruption in the supply chain can result either in significant consignment write-offs or complaints on product quality.

Up to now, the technology to tackle this issue either fell into the "too difficult" or "too expensive" category. In both cases, the solutions if they existed were beyond the budgets and capabilities of many mid range organisations. However, the advances provided by industry leaders such as Microsoft with its major investments in .NET technology have thrown a lifeline to solution providers worldwide. As a result, it is now not just feasible but affordable for forward thinking organisations to provide their mobile workforce with dynamic access to relevant, real time business data any time and anywhere in the world.

The issues in tackling the challenges involved in deploying such solutions are security, speed of response, ease of use and suitably rugged mobile equipment. From a security viewpoint, a balance has to be struck between providing mobile users with access to potentially sensitive client data and supplying sufficient relevant information to enable them to carry out their duties. The speed issues revolve around the challenge of transferring massive volumes of data across very limited GPRS airwaves.

making technology pay!

Using a combination of the MBS Navision business management system and a unique .NET developed application tool set called Drizzle Technology, Anglia Business Solutions has deployed an award winning solution that met the above challenges. The customer, a forward thinking manufacturer and distributor of building components, collaborated on the implementation. The business problem was the amount of time and duplication of effort involved in the processing of orders taken by a field sales force of 20.

The solution provided the sales force with instant access to customer and product information as if they were sitting in the office. Orders could be placed and order signatures captured which were automatically uploaded to the main system. Product availability and credit checking takes place while face to face with the customer. As a result of the deployment, the double entry of 500 orders a day was eliminated. Customer service significantly improved and the productivity of the field sales force dramatically increased.

Solutions of this nature will be very relevant to the fresh produce sector. Imagine being in a position to update the core system with quality information of a batch of produce from a field or pack house. Think of the advantages of providing category managers with updated product information virtually as it happens – even providing access to the Intake QA records whilst carrying out a store audit. Consider how much administrative duplication could be removed in the management of both internal and remote labour timesheets plus proof of deliveries. The cost reduction advantages and efficiency improvements could provide your organisation with a vital edge in the battle to retain existing clients as well as win new business.

This technology will be on full display at our special Fresh Produce Industry IT seminar being held at the Anglia Business Solutions offices in Cambridge November 25th.

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In the next article, I will be returning to the topic of return on investment with other examples of how to make technology pay.