

WHY BUSINESS INFORMATION MOBILITY IS KEY TO SURVIVAL IN TODAY'S INDUSTRY

Anglia Business Solutions has capitalised on what it sees as a niche in the mid-range market for packaged mobile real time applications, providing solutions to the differing needs of G's Marketing and Nature's Way

MAKING INFORMATION available on mobile devices is currently one of the fastest growth areas in the IT sector. This is driven by the speeding up of business coupled with the increase in numbers of the mobile workforce.

In today's competitive environment, up-to-date information is becoming a vital tool in the quest to win new business and the retention of existing customers. However, the IT industry still faces significant challenges in meeting the new requirements for mobility in the mid-range business management sector.

Most people are now aware that today it is possible to access e-mails, calendar and contact information while on the move. Gaining secure mobile access to sensitive real-time customer and product information presents the industry with some formidable hurdles to overcome. The key issue is that modern

business solutions have to be adaptable to meet the changing demands of the customers as they adapt to market conditions.

The technical problem is that changing the file layout in the core business system to meet a new requirement means that mobile applications have to be rapidly reworked to synchronise the files. Otherwise, they will stop working with potentially commercially damaging results.

This makes mobile business applications both difficult to implement and support without a new approach to the synchronisation issue. For this reason, suppliers of business management systems to the mid-range market have yet to provide packaged mobile real-time applications as part of their offerings.

The Microsoft .NET development tools provided Anglia with the base technology to begin to tackle the

challenges of securely distributing business information to mobile end users. Development director Richard Jones explains: "Having the Microsoft Dynamics Navision based LINKFresh system available to automate the customers' business process provided us with a superb foundation as it did all of the heavy lifting. We then just had to replicate the LINKFresh workflow files on the CE mobile devices using our extensive range of .NET components from our catalogue.

"However, this was extremely

reduce the risk of EPWs. The system has also helped to significantly increase productivity in the despatch department."

Natures Way, on the other hand, had different business issues where a mobile business application could make a significant commercial difference. The key requirement here was real time access to dynamic stock information. The LINKFresh suites, together with integrated mobile applications, were rapidly deployed to meet the need. The total solution provided

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time-consuming in the early stages as each of the mobile tables had to be rebuilt when the core Navision solution was changed. Recognising that this would become a major resource and cost issue as the wave of applications grew, we stepped back to explore if there was a better way."

Jones continues: "As a result, we made a significant investment in the design and development of a unique software utility called DataMaker. DataMaker automatically creates a structured .NET code that exactly matches the underlying business solution database. This has saved many man hours in the implementation of new mobile applications as well as facilitating rapid changes in existing solutions."

While a number of these applications were successfully deployed in the wider commercial market, customers in the fresh produce sector were quick to spot the potential of this technology as a major competitive and productivity aid. For example, one of the UK's largest growers and producers of fresh produce, G's Marketing, has deployed the mobile technology to check the accuracy of its labelling processes.

Group systems manager Terry Potter says: "The LINKFresh LABELCheck solution has halved the time taken to carry out label checking activities as well as improving the accuracy of the process. This will greatly

real time information on all business operations. The mobile applications tracked all quality control and stock movement information as it happened.

The results to date have been impressive as Natures Way managing director Steve Barnes explains: "Having on-line access to live stock records with full lot traceability enables us to see what products come in and from where, who handled them, where it is now and where it went. This has given us total control over the movement of stock across the organisation. From a financial viewpoint, the system has enabled us to increase our gross margin by between four and five per cent."

In summary, the new wave of business management systems can provide a degree of flexibility that is not possible with the older technologies. However, it is when live information from these modern applications are securely distributed to the mobile workforce that significant additional business benefits are gained.

The fresh produce sector is one of the most demanding and competitive supply chain industries in the world. It is here that the demand is strongest for real time information. The integration of dynamic mobile applications can satisfy that demand and can help to change everything.

Full details of the G's Marketing and Natures Way solutions can be found on www.angliabs.com. ○

