

Spirit is right on with data capture

Companies that use independent suppliers increasingly want solutions-based advice that looks at their specific needs, rather than just selling them a particular product. When Initial City Link wanted a new scanning system recently, it approached Spirit Data Capture Limited, because Spirit has a solutions-based philosophy. The end result was a system that will meet Initial's needs both now and in the future.



Initial City Link was formed in 1982, and has grown to become one of the UK's largest and most successful independent express delivery companies. It has a network of 50 depots, enabling it to provide a complete, nationwide distribution service. As the company is committed to the highest levels of customer satisfaction, it recently decided to enhance the efficiency of its operations by introducing a new barcode scanning system.

Chris Bale, Group IT Director, explains: "We realised that many of our manual processes would benefit from automation. At the same time, we wanted to move towards 'management by exception': a system that would enable us to be proactive in identifying any issues, so that we could provide a rapid response."



Case Study

Scanning can be useful at many stages of the distribution cycle, but Initial decided to implement the system selectively, in areas where it would give the most value. The initial focus was on scanning items at the point of collection by the driver. This would give the maximum time to identify any problems at any early stage. For instance, if the wrong items were given to the driver, Initial could immediately notify the client, who could take corrective action before delivery to the end customer.

Chris Bale comments: "Our strategy is to automate key stages, capture data automatically, and use this to alert customers to any issues – rather than sending them a lot of confusing data. It involves three steps: capturing the data; giving the customers visibility in a format that manages by exception; and automating decisions based upon this exception data."

"We have had previous dealings with the team from Spirit, so we asked them to find a suitable solution. We needed a device that would be ergonomic, easy to use and flexible, as we wanted to use it for different tasks. To get the most out of our investment, it also needed to be future-proof."

He continues: "Spirit's philosophy is similar to ours – they are a solutions-based company who focus on how our needs can be delivered and the benefits we can obtain from different devices. We wanted to carry out the application development and testing internally, and then hand over the normalisation and management of the devices and the infrastructure to Spirit."

Spirit recommended the Symbol MC3000 – a lightweight, rugged mobile computer which met all of Initial's criteria. Initial subsequently purchased 110 units. "The Symbol is an excellent mid market, versatile solution that is ergonomic, easy to use and robust," says Chris. "Writing applications for it was simple. The units are packed with features, and can capture images as well as data. They are also ready for technologies such as RFID in the future."



He adds: "The scanners are performing extremely well. Our drivers have found them easy to use, which has shortened the return on investment cycle. The speed from application development to deployment was also very quick, and the unit can easily be leveraged for other applications. Spirit is providing us with excellent support as we move forward." This support includes RF site surveys; porting the software to the Symbol units; and providing maintenance services.

Chris concludes: "The new system will enable us to meet our objectives of giving exception-based visibility to our clients, which will allow them to reduce costs to their customers. We will start to increase the number of devices as we increase the points at which we can scan data, and we will continue to work closely with Spirit in the future."



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