

No Paperwork Means No Guesswork: Using Mobile Technology for Real-Time Shipping Data

Every day, around the world, marine shipping containers carry an almost unimaginable amount of goods. With the scale of today's delivery systems, any single container is like one tree in a vast forest – but if that container is carrying your product, it's the most important piece of cargo in the world. You want to know exactly where it is, where it's going, and when it gets there.

And yet for many years transport and delivery information was transmitted by phone and written down by hand. That system was ripe with the possibility for errors. But thanks to advances in communication technology and the advent of rugged and mobile handheld computers, today forward-thinking companies are using a far superior way of tracking those containers.

Lack of communication reduces efficiency

Speed OY is a Finnish company that emphasizes marine container transportation. For nearly two decades, Speed has been transporting sea containers and providing auxiliary services including permitting, customs clearance, import and export declarations and more. In 2008 the company was awarded an AEO (Authorized Economic Operator) certificate, a global trade designation signifying reliable and safe customs procedures. Speed is one of only four Finnish companies awarded the AEO certificate. With their years of experience, Speed knows that efficiency and communication are the keys to doing their work well and keeping customers satisfied. With that in mind, they recognized the need for a better way to work.

The downfalls of a paper-based system

In the past, delivery assignments were relayed over the phone, to truck drivers who quickly scribbled container code numbers on the nearest scrap of paper. There was no formal or efficient documentation system. And even for a company as committed to customer service as Speed, at least once a week a driver was unable to pick up a container for delivery because the paper had been lost or the driver had written down the wrong number.

Beyond the basic information needed to pick up the container, the informal paper-based communication system presented other problems. Drivers would also write a container's weight, delivery time and any other details on bits of paper, and then take that paper to the dispatcher's office when they had time. It was an inefficient, time-consuming process that led to too many human errors.

Finding the best technology

So Speed overhauled the process. Recognizing the advantages of electronic record-keeping, they invested in a communication system using smartphones. It helped the communication process, but the smartphone devices weren't particularly easy to work with, and they couldn't withstand the rigors of the delivery environment.

It wasn't until Speed connected with Handheld Finland OY that the solution truly came together. Handheld, a supplier of durable mobile computers, suggested the M3 Mobile, a versatile, rugged handheld that offers ease of use, reliable service in extreme environments, and a variety of capabilities that matched Speed's requirements.

Today, Speed uses the M3 Mobile as a vehicle terminal, receiving task assignments and sending delivery information using the Internet and SMS (Short Message Service) technology.



Challenge

Speed Oy had a paper based system that was time-consuming and led to many human errors, such as wrongfully written data or loss of paper. There was a need to implement a more efficient documentation system.

Solution

An investment in an electronic communication system was made, using the M3 Mobile, a versatile and rugged handheld that could withstand the delivery environment and was easy to use.

Result

Speed Oy now has a streamlined communication system, where the drivers receive and send task assignments and delivery data over the Internet and via SMS, also providing the customers with real time information.



Handheld is a world wide supplier of rugged PDAs and handheld computers. All our products are ruggedized and can withstand water, dust, drops and vast temperature changes. Handheld and its partners deliver complete mobility solutions to businesses in industries such as logistics, forestry, public transportation, construction, military and security.

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Taking paper out of the process

Customers place orders through the Internet, using individual usernames and passwords to fill out a form on Speed's Web site. That form goes to the fleet dispatcher, who forwards it as an SMS message to the appropriate driver's M3 Mobile. The message contains data including container number, handling instructions and customs seal numbers. Throughout the delivery process, the driver uses the M3 Mobile to keep the system up to date with information such as departure and arrival times, load weight, and loading and unloading times. The data system also streamlines the billing process, quickly sending accurate invoices by e-mail.

The Speed communication system is part of a larger online network that is streamlining the entire transportation industry. Everyone involved in getting a product delivered can now use the Internet to be connected throughout the process – manufacturers, shippers, storage facilities, dock workers, transporters and those who eventually receive the product.

Increased customer satisfaction

Using the M3 Mobile increases both the speed and the accuracy of Speed's process, with no more reliance on scattered paper-based notes. It also reduces costs by eliminating lost time due to transcribing errors. Perhaps most important, Speed's customers can view the progress of their shipments in real time. This provides those customers an unprecedented level of service, satisfaction – and peace of mind.

Today, there are nearly 1,000 users in the Speed network, including consigners, consignees, shipping agents, truck drivers and others. Typically, 100 to 150 orders a day go through the system – roughly 90 percent of all transport jobs Speed handles use the new communication system.

And thanks to the versatility and technology capabilities of the M3 Mobile, Speed will continue to improve the system going forward. In 2009, they will add a step to the process that lets consignees attach an electronic signature to each order.

About the M3 Mobile solution

M3 Mobile is a handheld computer that includes multiple integrated applications. Speed OY uses a model that has integrated GPS, GPRS/EDGE and a camera. Other configurations can include applications such as a barcode reader, WLAN 802.11b and Bluetooth. With its durable design, this product can withstand falls from 1.5 meters and is exceptionally flexible and light. Its IP64 rating means the M3 Mobile withstands dust and water, as well as external temperatures ranging from -20 °C up to +50 °C.



For more information about the M3 Mobile, visit www.ruggedm3.com or www.handheldgroup.com

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