

The Spirit of Motorola enhances Jewson's customer service

Wireless technology has developed in leaps and bounds in recent years. For instance, handheld wireless mobile computers now provide users with unprecedented levels of freedom and flexibility. When Jewson IT started looking for a solution that would streamline its customer product selection and ordering process, it asked Spirit Data Capture Limited for help. Feasibility studies led to the choice of the Motorola MC9090 wireless mobile computer, which has speeded up the whole ordering process.



Jewson IT provides IT services and solutions to most of the UK businesses within the Saint-Gobain Building Distribution Group – the largest of which is Jewson. Jewson was acquired by Saint-Gobain in 2000, and has a nationwide network of over 500 branches. It has become the UK's leading supplier of timber and building products to the trade and general public.

Over seven years ago, Jewson installed wireless handheld terminals in a large number of its branches. These have been used mainly for managing sales and stocktaking functions. Following dramatic developments in the sophistication of wireless technology, the company recently decided to upgrade its solution. ▶

Case Study

Russell Bower, Jewson IT's Business Services Manager, explains: "We realised that we needed independent advice in finding a handheld unit that would meet all of our requirements. For the previous two years, we had been working closely with Spirit Data Capture, who sourced a wide range of cordless handheld barcode scanners for one of our subsidiary companies, Platform. We have been delighted with their service and had no hesitation in approaching them for help."

Jewson had previously been using PDT computers from Symbol (now Motorola). Spirit recommended two alternatives, including a new and highly versatile solution from Motorola – the MC9090. This is a rugged, handheld mobile computer that incorporates the latest technology, including multi-mode wireless connectivity and built-in barcode scanning and image capture capabilities.

"We needed a device that customers could use when picking products from our outlets," says Russell. "Many of our products are stored outside, in the yard or warehouse of each branch. The new unit would therefore have to withstand some fairly rigorous conditions, as we would be using it in areas where timber is cut, plaster dust is rife, and products such as aggregates and cement are stored.

"We needed to ensure that the device would not only be rugged enough for its intended use but would also be compact and easy for customers to use. We therefore carried out a feasibility study at our large branches, looking at alternatives from four manufacturers. Two were discarded rapidly due to poor battery life. Of the final two, the Motorola MC9090 had the edge."

Jewson primarily needed the MC9090s for use in its 'tally book' process of customer ordering. Customers move around the yard and warehouse area of a Jewson branch selecting products and loading them into their vehicle with the help of an employee. Previously, this process involved an employee manually filling in a tally sheet, which the customer would then take to the sales counter. The sheet details would then be keyed into the computer system and the transaction completed.

The Motorola MC9090s now enable this whole process to be automated. The employee merely scans the chosen products and enters the quantities purchased onto a live order. This order is already awaiting the customer when they reach the counter. The Motorola MC9090s are also used for inventory checks and full stocktakes.

Russell observes: "Spirit helped us both with the initial feasibility study and supplied two of the four models trialled. They also joined us in identifying the key measurement factors. During the trial period, they helped with configuration, security standards and network application compatibility. Having chosen the Motorola

MC9090, Spirit then helped us with the first phase of the roll-out. They provided assistance with site-specific pre-configuration of the units; and installed Motorola's Mobility Services Platform (MSP)."

Motorola's MSP provides complete central control and management of all of the mobile devices and mobile applications on Jewson's network – assessing their performance levels and identifying any problems. It also monitors the wireless infrastructure. "It's an invaluable tool for such a distributed environment," says Russell.

He continues: "I'm glad that we engaged Spirit's help when we did. They have brought a wealth of knowledge and experience of the marketplace and the technologies available, and have helped us throughout this project. This has ensured that we could go to our customers with a sound and secure solution. I'm sure we wouldn't have reached this point as quickly or as professionally as we have done if we hadn't had their help."

Russell adds: "The initial feedback on the new system has been very positive, and the users are happy with the new Motorola MC9090s. They provide us with faster processing capabilities, and are lighter and more robust than ever. Factors such as their backlit keys and longer battery life have only added to their usability.

"The handheld market is now fiercely competitive, and to keep ahead, Motorola is now offering optional comprehensive cover, which was supplied by Spirit. This is a huge benefit when compared with our old maintenance arrangements. In terms of technology, the MC9090 allows us to take advantage of WiFi security advances (such as WPA) to ensure that our wireless coverage is protected.

"The addition of Motorola's central management console has changed the way in which we manage our estate, and takes some areas of reliance away from the maintenance contract. This allows us to provide a better service to both our customers and our branches."

John Coon, Chief Executive of Motorola, adds: "This provides a great example of the versatility of the Motorola MC9090. I have been impressed by the added value that Spirit has brought to this project. Their determination and professionalism has helped to secure an important sale that underlines the powerful business benefits that the MC9090 offers companies such as Jewson."

Russell Bower concludes: "We have now asked Spirit to help us with a project to rationalise our older wireless handheld estate. This project involves activity in over 200 branches nationwide, and has a tight timescale to ensure completion before the end of the year. To date, it is progressing well, and I am confident that it will be delivered on time and to the agreed standards."

