



Spirit is on the right road for Stapleton's

In recent years, mobile computers have revolutionised data capture and communications for workers in the field. Companies with large distribution networks have found that they can make a radical difference to the efficiency, reliability and cost effectiveness of their operations. When Stapleton's (Tyre Services) Ltd recently decided to upgrade its mobile devices, it opted for Intermec CN3 PDAs. It selected Spirit Data Capture Limited as a supplier that could offer genuine value for money, coupled with excellent levels of support.

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Stapleton's (Tyre Services) Ltd is primarily a tyre wholesaler. Established over 70 years ago, it is one of the largest distributors of passenger car tyres in the UK. It supplies approximately 6.5 million tyres a year from a nationwide network of seven distribution depots. It also provides a number of retail brands (STS, Tyre Pros, Central Tyres and Tyre City) from 115 outlets around the UK.

With such an extensive network, the company has to ensure that its distribution processes are as efficient and effective as possible. It therefore uses Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) in each of its delivery vans to provide point of delivery control. Some of the devices are also used for stock control in the firm's warehouses.

The company recently decided to upgrade these devices. Alex Biggs, an IT Support Technician working in Stapleton's IT Department, explains: "We decided to phase out the units that we had previously been using, mainly due to reliability issues and a lack of functionality."

The IT Department started looking for devices that would have enough capacity and functionality so that it would future-proof them in terms of the company's needs for at least the medium term. One particular capability that Stapleton's wanted from the new devices was GPS tracking.

Alex Biggs continues: "We started carrying out some research on the Internet to see if we could find a suitable supplier. We eventually settled on Spirit Data Capture Limited. We made this decision based on two main factors: value for money combined with their ability to support the devices in the future."

Stapleton's opted for Intermec CN3 PDAs. These are compact but powerful and rugged mobile computers that incorporate a range of communication technologies, including WiFi, Bluetooth and a choice of WAN radio technologies. They also have integrated GPS functionality and a colour camera. They have been designed specifically for use by mobile workers.

Alex says: "We already had a small number of CN3s and were happy to use them for the rest of the fleet on the basis of their performance. They are more robust and reliable than our previous devices."

The new Intermec CN3 PDAs are already in use for point of delivery stock control by the company's delivery drivers. They are installed with Stapleton's bespoke software, which uses GPRS to talk to an intermediary control server. This then manages the interface between the Intermec devices and the company's stock databases.

Stapleton's also has GPS tracking software. In conjunction with the Intermec devices, this allows the IT Department to track the real-time positions of the vans whilst they are on the road. The company also uses remote control software for device maintenance when required. Each delivery vehicle is fitted with a charging cradle to maintain battery life for the duration of the delivery rounds.

Alex Biggs reports: "The new devices have already made a difference. They provide us with better stock control and more effective customer account control. As we are able to monitor the drivers' movements in real time, we can control the time management efficiency of the delivery process more effectively.

"The mobile computers have been performing well so far. Our drivers are gradually coming round to the idea that these devices will make their life easier, not harder! The culture change in relation to their working environment is the most difficult hurdle to overcome."

He adds: "To date, we have been very pleased with Spirit. They pay good attention to detail throughout the order, supply and repair processes. We have an on-going programme of works within the IT Department and will continue to include Spirit Data Capture as one of our key suppliers in the future."

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