



Mobile Field Service Solutions

Big Improvements for Small Service Organizations

One of the greatest advantages of today's mobile-technology tools is that they offer companies of all sizes the opportunity to improve process efficiency, customer service and even profitability—without breaking the bank. The proliferation of mobile solutions means companies can scale their mobile capabilities to their needs—and for a small company like Excell Refrigeration of South Carolina, that can make a very big difference.

This market-focused company found its niche with supermarkets and other commercial enterprises, installing and servicing large refrigeration systems. This has brought Excell steady growth over its 20 years of existence. As with all businesses, however, market pressures require them to be lean and competitive or lose business. Recently the company was faced with the possibility of having to add an additional person in their office to handle the growing amount of paperwork. This would mean an increase from 4 to 5 administrative personnel supporting 21 field workers, representing a 25% increase in the “overhead” (non-revenue-generating) workforce.

Instead, Excell decided to get more efficient.

The challenge: Increase the efficiency of their field service technicians. Excell already offered industry-leading construction and repair services in the commercial refrigeration market, but they recognized that becoming more efficient in dispatching, reporting and billing could add benefits for customers and the company.

Excell President Glenn Taylor and Service Manager Mike Driscoll began plotting their strategy. Having previously implemented a leading software solution in their back office for service management, dispatching

In Brief

COMPANY:

Excell Refrigeration of South Carolina

CHALLENGE:

Avoid hiring more staff by improving the dispatching, reporting and billing efficiency of field technicians who repair and service large refrigeration systems.

SOLUTION:

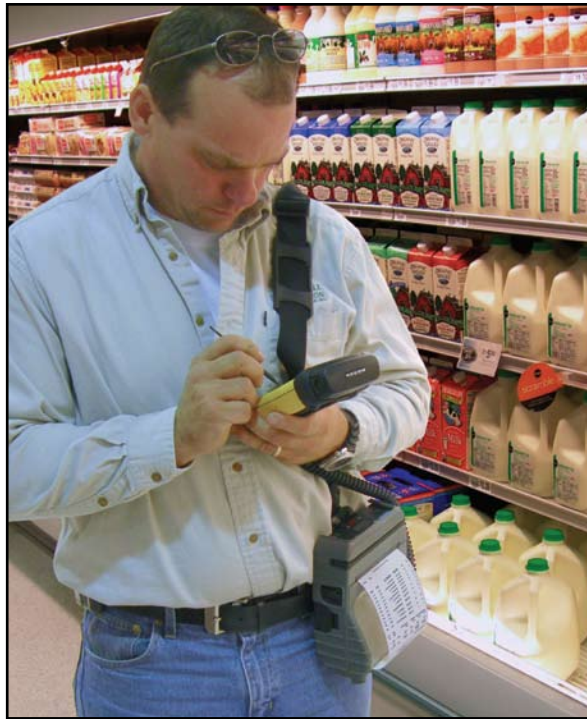
- Recon rugged handheld computers from Tripod Data Systems
- MtP 400 rugged direct thermal mobile printers from Printek



and billing, the twosome was ready to explore how mobile solutions could increase their business-process efficiencies. And a driving motivation was to eliminate the need for the additional administrative position.

First they confirmed that their back-office software included mobile capabilities, and then they researched devices for their mobile initiative. They became convinced early on that rugged devices were the way to go. According to Taylor, "Refrigeration repair technicians working in and around mechanical rooms need rugged devices that can withstand some abuse. It's not that the techs don't care for their equipment—but it's a work area, not an office." Based on that requirement and other considerations, Driscoll and Taylor did some searching and found a solution that combined the products of two innovative companies: Tripod Data Systems (TDS) and Printek Incorporated.

They chose the Recon rugged handheld from TDS because it offered extreme ruggedness in a compact, functional package. In addition, the Recon offered expandability. To allow technicians to receive their work orders wirelessly, Excell added GPRS using one of the Recon's two CompactFlash slots. TDS recognizes the need for multiple options in wireless connectivity, as each customer is different and requirements change over time, so they built in the ability to expand capabilities and customize each handheld. According to Mike Zelman, Director of Sales and Marketing at



Excell's Service Manager Mike Driscoll uses the mobile devices to create punchlists of customer service items.

TDS, "Excell currently employs an off-the-shelf solution for wide-area access using GPRS cards. But they can also reconfigure the Recon's mobile computing platform later if they need a different solution, such as a vehicle-area network using a mobile WiFi hotspot."

The second component Taylor and Driscoll chose was the Printek MtP 400 mobile thermal printer.

'The 80-column format on 4-inch paper allows us to just shrink down our old forms without major changes.'

— Mike Driscoll, Excell

They picked it for its features as well as its rugged design. According to Driscoll, "Not only has the printer been dropped from four feet up, it rolled six feet after the fall. Accidents happen, but these devices keep on working despite them." The MtP 400's 4-inch

format and 80-column capabilities were also key selling points. "Our previous field documentation was full-page format," Driscoll explains. "We didn't want to put a lot of effort into redesigning the forms. The 80-column format on 4-inch paper allows us to just shrink down our old forms without major changes."

The key to a mobile solution's success, of course, comes with its users. Excell's technicians like the new setup for its ease of use and efficiency. Choosing from dropdown menus on the handhelds, they can quickly enter parts they use during calls. This alone has eased the office workload by greatly reducing original and transcription errors in

recording the parts used. At the end of the call the work completed is recorded, and the tech can then print a receipt for the customer that includes accurate information.

"We're a time-and-material business," Driscoll said. "We need the flexibility to print receipts for our customers that are accurate to the work actually done. This speeds billing by automating the captured information, and payment by reducing questions and exceptions."

Another key to selecting a mobile solution was the customer service offered by Printek and TDS. "Just the fact that Printek was willing to provide an evaluation printer to us with no upfront charge made a difference," Taylor said. "Mike Driscoll calls me Mr. Cheap," he says with a laugh, "but we respond to a company that wants to build a relationship as much as make a sale." Driscoll

and Taylor are highly satisfied with the responsiveness of both companies. "Getting service is easy," Driscoll said. "The people are nice, and our questions are answered quickly." As a service manager himself, he knows what customers demand and is pleased to be on the receiving end of good customer service.

Driscoll also found an additional creative way to apply the new mobile solution. To ensure Excell customers' satisfaction, he regularly visits their stores and creates punchlists of concerns and corrective actions for the techs to address. No surprise—the punchlists are also printed on an MtP 400 mobile printer.

Excell has proved that well-planned, correctly applied mobile solutions pay off. Driscoll cites an ROI figure of one to one and a half years. Considering TCO (total cost of ownership) factors, the payoff should be even better. "Smart companies recognize that rugged devices offer much lower TCO in mobile solutions," said TDS's Zelman. "Once downtime repair and replacement costs are considered, there's no question that rugged handhelds and printers are the most cost-efficient devices for field service."

Scott Barnett, VP of Sales and Marketing at Printek, concurs. "Supply costs like pre-printed forms, ink cartridges or ribbons add up over time," he added. "Mobile thermal printing cuts those costs to the bone. Additionally, Excell has gained the soft benefits of improved interaction with their customers via more accurate receipts and fewer billing disputes."

No matter what the payoff, Driscoll and Taylor are happy that they achieved their goals and had a fast and easy rollout.



When field technicians began using mobile devices to confirm work performed before leaving a site, Excell saw decreases in questions and billing disputes and an increase in customer satisfaction.

"We picked two of our more computer-savvy techs to test the solution at first," Driscoll said. "Once the bugs were worked out, we rolled it out to 12 field techs. Even those who are not avid computer users have found it easy to use and beneficial. None of them would ever want to go back to the old way of doing things, with manual paperwork and telephone dispatching. The time savings and efficiencies have just been too great."

Oh, and one more benefit for a small business with big ideas: Excell never did have to hire for that administrative position.

For more mobile solutions, visit:

Printek, Inc.
www.printekmobile.com

Tripod Data Systems
www.tdsaway.com



About Printek, Inc.

For more than 25 years, Printek has supplied industrial printing solutions to businesses and governmental agencies of all sizes.

The company's PrintekMobile group partners with hardware and software manufacturers, system integrators, and value-added resellers to deliver cost-effective mobile business solutions across a wide range of industries and applications.

PrintekMobile's direct thermal printers support cabled or wireless printing of invoices, forms, receipts, tickets, labels and other documents used in field service, route accounting, manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, transportation, retail, public safety, and hospitality applications. Wireless options include Bluetooth® and Wi-Fi.

PrintekMobile printers are designed to withstand industrial use and are backed by unparalleled support and comprehensive warranties.

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