

Case study

Dairy Farmers of Ontario

New Mobile Computers enhance Milk Allocation Process



At a glance

Industry: Consumer Goods

Application: Field Service

Program Results: DFO turned to Intermecc for its rugged, durable CN2 mobile computer, along with an improved service agreement.

Handheld computers increase reliability and efficiency across organization

Approximately 6.6 million liters of milk are transported per day in Ontario, making dairy the largest sector of agriculture in the province. The Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) is the non-profit organization responsible for the marketing and service of this industry 365 days per year.

Accurate and timely data input is crucial to the success and overall operation of the organization. The drivers, known in the industry as bulk tank milk graders, collect pertinent information that is required for the allocation of the milk, billing of processors, overall milk quality and payment to the producers and milk transporters.

DFO realized that its data collection solution though adequate, could be enhanced to provide better service and reliability. Previously, transporters were equipped with consumer-grade handheld computers. While these computers did aid in reducing errors and data entry time for transporters, DFO quickly began to face problems. First, the consumer-grade devices were not durable, and would often break while bulk tank milk graders

were active in the field. Secondly, they lacked a comprehensive service agreement and the model in use was discontinued, making a broken computer obsolete.

"It was clear that a new, resilient device with an effective service agreement was needed," said John Wilkinson, programmer, DFO. "In this industry, data collection is vital for the successful allocation of milk, and we need the equipment and service that goes above and beyond."

In the Field

In November of 2006, DFO turned to Real World Communications to pilot Intermecc's CN2 mobile computer. The CN2 is a commercial-grade, pen-based mobile computer, which is compact enough to fit in a shirt pocket. Despite its small and lightweight features, the CN2 provides the power and ruggedness required for mobile data collection in the harsh conditions that occur during field work. After piloting the CN2 for a week and a half, results from the bulk tank milk graders were unanimous, and 40 more units were immediately deployed.



Due to the intense outdoor environment, transporters' handhelds go through regular wear and tear such as being dropped and getting soaked with wash water. They are also subjected to the harsh weather conditions during the winter months. With the previous consumer-grade handheld, casualty rates went up significantly during the winter months and it was imperative to have a 10% reserve of spare computers. When one did break, a bulk tank milk grader could be without a computer for up to six days, depending on location, before a replacement could be delivered. This caused significant problems because the transporter would have to resort to using a handwritten paper solution. As part of the process, transporters would fax in their reports and someone from the head office would manually key in the data. This extra step could potentially cause slow downs in the flow of information which in the dairy business is unacceptable.

"So far it's very encouraging how things are shaping up, especially in the cold weather," said Scott Thompson, marketing officer, DFO. "We have not had to send any CN2s in for repair, and we have heard excellent feedback from the drivers regarding the enhanced features and ease of use."

Enhanced Service Agreement

In addition to receiving a more rugged, durable device, DFO also received an improved service agreement. Intermec's service agreement was an essential factor in the decision to implement the CN2. Previously, if a handheld broke, it had to be returned to the United States, causing slow turnaround as well as high courier costs and brokerage fees. Overall,

it became more of a hassle to have the previous mobile computers repaired, and since the model was discontinued, the computer essentially became disposable.

"Intermec is located just down the road from us, and they agreed to come to our door to pick up units requiring service," said Lloyd Whiting, IT director, DFO. "I have to give Intermec and Real World credit for their marketing and sales effort; they have been a pleasure to work with."

Advanced Features

Along with solving its initial problems, DFO was impressed with its additional features that make the CN2 an invaluable tool in the field.

Most importantly, the CN2 is designed with an integrated bar code scanner. Previously, transporters used a separate bar code reader which would then be transmitted back to the handheld. Transporters became frustrated with handling two units and would often resort to entering the information manually. Because most of the information scanned is used for producer payment and milk quality assurance, the potential for mistakes by allowing manual data entry increased and was unacceptable. Now, the integrated scanner allows for error-free data collection resulting in ease of use for transporters and the confidence for producers that accurate sampling data is recorded.

The CN2 is also equipped with a rechargeable battery that gives transporters the peace of mind that their computer will last throughout the day. Beforehand, their computers relied on AA

batteries which would often die in the field. Now, the indicator on the screen ensures transporters that they can make it through their deliveries with a reliable device.

Looking Ahead to the Future

Implementing the CN2 has enabled the DFO to begin transitioning to a paperless system. Currently, every time a delivery is dropped off at a plant, a printout is signed and sent to the home office as a form of tracking and record keeping. However, with the CN2, the signature can now be captured on screen making the printout unnecessary. Industry partners can access the delivery information through a web based inquiry. As a result, the DFO will save money on printer and associated labor costs, as well as reduce environmental impact. The CN2 ultimately allows DFO to reduce time and resources by keeping employees connected in a disconnected environment.

"Going paperless is something that we have wanted to do since the day we started electronic data, but because of the limitations of our old handhelds, we were not able to do so," said Thompson. "Now the CN2 gives us the capabilities we need to pursue this."

Overall, with positive feedback from drivers, the comprehensive service agreement and the integrated scanner, DFO is pleased with Intermec's CN2 mobile computers and the doors that it opens for the organization in the future.

"The CN2 has a lot of nice touches to it, almost like it was designed with us in mind," concluded Thompson.

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