

Case study

Raymond Handling



At a glance

Industry: Industrial

Application: Maintenance and Repair

Wireless data collection systems allows Raymond Handling Concepts technicians to eliminate 90,000 paper forms

Raymond Handling Concepts sells and services lift trucks that make it easy to pick up heavy loads, but the company's own service technicians have traditionally struggled to get out from under heavy paperwork. In the past, Raymond's service technicians have filled out almost 90,000 multipart forms a year and then handed them over to data processing personnel for manual entry into the company's billing and record-keeping systems. Raymond Handling turned to a mobile and wireless reporting system from Intermec, MobileFrame and Interactive Solutions to do the heavy lifting instead.

Mission: maximize skilled labor assets

Raymond Handling Concepts is headquartered in Fremont, Calif. and has eight branch offices that service customers throughout the Western U.S. The company sells complete material handling systems and services, including lift truck maintenance. It can take years to attract, train and retain skilled technicians, which are highly valued and somewhat scarce in the material handling industry. Raymond's 86 service technicians make up about half of the company's workforce, so making them more efficient is essential to the company's competitiveness.

"We wanted a system that would help our technicians," Raymond said. "Whenever we ask them what we can do to make their jobs more enjoyable or efficient, the message that always comes back is, 'Do something about all this paperwork.' We knew that mobile computing and wireless communication technology would eventually come to our industry, but I don't think anyone else in the industry is using this particular solution yet."

Raymond didn't relish being the first company in an industry to adopt new technology, and spent several years evaluating potential systems with the help of Interactive Solutions, a systems integrator and Intermec partner. The review revealed why material handling companies hadn't embraced mobile computing systems: no package specifically addressed the type of data that needed to be collected. Prepackaged applications also appeared inflexible, with too much time and expense required to configure them for the data collection Raymond required. Additionally, many of Raymond Handling's proprietary business applications are difficult to modify, which predisposed the company against custom software development.



Interactive Solutions crafted a system using modular mobile computers, wide-area wireless data service and platform software that is ideally suited to Raymond Handling's working environment. The heart of the system is MobileFrame's Business Suite™ software. Raymond Handling and MobileFrame worked together to design exactly the computer screens, specific data entry fields and response options technicians needed. They used Business Suite, which is an application development platform that doesn't require programming expertise or reliance on the vendor or the integrator to modify. MobileFrame created repair order and maintenance recording applications then deployed the system at the Sparks, Nevada service center. "The software is designed so that we can easily support it. For some of our other systems, we have to call someone every time we want a change, which usually takes three months and costs between \$2,500 and \$7,000 every time," Raymond said.

True to form, system saves time, cuts paper

The software is easy to change, but procedures for service technicians hardly changed at all, which has kept them happy and productive since the system was rolled out.

"Our premise is the software has to be easier to use than pen and paper," said MobileFrame President Lonny Oswalt. "All that Raymond Handling needed was a one-hour training session for their field force and some additional training for system administrators."

Before starting work on a lift truck, Raymond Handling technicians use their Intermec 761 handheld computer with built-in laser scanner to scan the serial number label on the truck, which ensures the correct vehicle is being serviced and saves the step of having to manually record the vehicle

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number. When the job is done, technicians follow the prompts on the computer to enter activity codes and other details. Check boxes, pull-down menus and verifications are built in to speed data entry and ensure information is entered accurately. If parts are installed, technicians scan a bar code on the part package to deduct the item from inventory and enter the charge on the customer invoice.

When the job is complete and has been recorded, the technician presents the 761 mobile computer to the customer to capture an electronic signature. Then, the technician takes advantage of the integrated Bluetooth radio to send a print order to an Intermec PB40 mobile printer, which quickly produces a professional, legible and signed work receipt. Additional work orders can also be created and printed on the spot.

"The Bluetooth mobile printer is an important device because our technicians don't have to go back to the van, just to print something and walk it back to the customer," Raymond said.

A second radio integrated within the handheld computer is used to communicate completed work orders to headquarters. Raymond Handling's Intermec 761s are configured with an internal CDMA radio to connect to the Sprint national network. Because technicians transmit their activity records throughout the day, work flow is more consistent, and end-of-day bottlenecks caused by returning technicians simultaneously submitting their daily records are eliminated.

The flexible Intermec 761 was configured with exactly the features Raymond Handling wanted, and everything is wrapped in a rugged housing that can withstand five-foot drops to concrete and other rigors of an industrial environment.

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"The family concept of the 700 Series makes the computers easy to configure, which integrators and customers both appreciate," said Michael Robbert of Interactive Solutions. "We selected the 761 for this project because it had a nice, large screen, large keypad, had all the features that Raymond needed, and we know it will be very reliable."

Raymond Handling also installed an Intermec EasyCoder PM4i printer to create the bar code labels it now uses to identify customer lift trucks. "The PM4i is an intelligent printer, which was very useful for this application," said Robbert. The PM4i can store label formats and execute print jobs without a dedicated PC, and includes an Ethernet interface to provide a network connection to host systems. "We connected it to Raymond Handling's network, so it could receive information from the company database to create serial number labels for each customer's equipment."

Branching out

Raymond Handling Concepts is eager to build on the success at its Sparks branch and roll out the system to additional locations.

"I never want to be first with new technology - I'd rather be fourth," Raymond said. "But this isn't a bad system to be first on. It's not a big deal to roll this out, because the software is so intuitive and easy to use, and because the system doesn't require a big investment.

"As this implementation continues throughout our branches, it will become widespread knowledge among our competitors and customers that we have something better than pencil and paper," he said. "Customers will see how much more efficient our technicians are and how they benefit from that, either from a lower bill or more responsive service."

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