Spirit's mobile solution makes life easier for Greenhalgh's drivers.

The effective use of mobile computing hardware and software can make a significant difference to the efficiency of a business. When leading bakery Greenhalgh's needed a new solution for its delivery drivers, it turned to Spirit Data Capture Limited. Spirit installed Motorola MC75A Enterprise Digital Assistants, Zebra mobile printers and specialist route accounting software. This combination has greatly assisted Greenhalgh's delivery operations.

Greenhalgh's is a 'craft bakery', with a thriving chain of 62 retail shops throughout the north west of England. It also serves the wholesale sector, both in the UK and abroad (including Spain, the Balearics and Canary Islands). The company has one of the UK's most up-to-date and hygienic bakeries, which has been recognised for combining tradition with innovation. As a result, Greenhalgh's has won a host of prestigious bakery awards.

The bakery has its own back-end computer system, which holds information such as customer details, products and prices. Greenhalgh's also has a fleet of vans for making deliveries. The drivers have used handheld mobile data capture devices for many years. However, the ageing equipment needed replacing and the device screens were difficult to read in the early hours. The company also started looking for a new application to streamline its delivery operations.

Greenhalgh's IT Manager, Dean Simpson, explains: "We had a bespoke application that was originally developed in 1999, in anticipation of the Year 2000 problems on both the handheld and back-office systems. We used our existing handhelds with DOS embedded on them, so the application was written in Pascal. The back office was developed in Clarion, which enabled the developer to finely tune it to our requirements."

The company started searching for a new solution that would match its existing system, with devices that were rugged and easy to use. During an Internet search, it came across Spirit Data Capture Limited, a company which specialises in sourcing, deploying and supporting mobile devices for businesses of different sizes.

Spirit recommended the Motorola MC75A Enterprise Digital Assistant (EDA) and Zebra RW420 mobile printers, along with route accounting / mobile data capture software specifically developed for van-based deliveries. The MC75A is a rugged handheld device that incorporates a mobile phone, PDA, computer, scanner and imager. It also has a colour screen that is easily readable in different lighting conditions.

The route accounting software is very easy to use and has a graphical user interface, barcode scanning and signature capture capabilities – as well as report printing and batch or GPRS real-time updates. "The simplicity of the software and its functions were a close match with our existing system," says Dean Simpson. "The graphical user interface is visually clear, making it easy to identify the different functions."

Spirit subsequently supplied the hardware and installed the route accounting application on the devices. With this application, the user logs in and the back-end system then creates a file with data for that person (it downloads a manifest of the customer delivery details). The software can also be used to carry out stock reconciliation: the driver can amend the order on the spot to add or deduct items.

Dean continues: "The new software has a function for searching for products using a code or description that is particularly helpfully for new employees. The original system for finding products relied heavily on the use of codes, which favoured the older drivers, as they knew the codes. However, with the new software, they can display not only the code but at a press of a button, they can change to a description of the product, which makes life easier for the newer drivers as well."

Greenhalgh's system has evolved around two key areas: the main office and the drivers on their rounds. In the main office, during the day, the fleet department takes orders from customers and enters them into the back office fleet system. At the end of the day, when all orders have been received, the requirements are passed to the main production system. The required delivery day, standing orders, phone orders and stock are then exported to the Motorolas ready for the drivers.

The next morning, the drivers collect the MC75As and load their vans using the information on the devices. They then deliver the goods and produce invoices whilst on their rounds. During delivery, drivers are able to give customers full account details (including history, balances, credits, receipts) and can also record forward orders. When the round is finished, the driver places the Motorola into the docking cradle and all of the round's data is transferred to the back-office system, which also updates the customers' accounts.

Dean concludes: "The drivers are all enthusiastic about using the devices and the software. From start to finish, Spirit have been there when advice was needed about the devices and they were very accommodating with any software amends and bug fixes. They fully understood our requirements from the outset."

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