IBM

Internet Puts Customer Service on a Roll

Imagine running a 24x7 manufacturing company where your business depends on just in time (JIT) delivery of parts. If you're running low on a particular part, will it arrive in time? Manitoulin Transport, which operates a large fleet of flat-deck, refrigerated, stake and rack tractor-trailers, is not just in the transportation business; it has a larger vision that goes beyond just hauling goods. Head-quartered in Gore Bay, Ontario, Manitoulin Transport has an extensive terminal network throughout Canada that uses the Internet to link the firm more closely with its customers.

"We operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can't afford to have a system that requires a lot of downtime for maintenance. Our IBM system has been extremely reliable, plus it is enabled for remote support and maintenance."

—Robert Wilks,
Manager of Information Systems,
Manitoulin Transport

Launched in September 1997, Manitoulin Transport's e-business solution allows customers and logistics partners to enter freight bill numbers to query the same production data that the company's customer service representatives access. The Internet-based solution instantly produces tracking information as well as details about pick-up and delivery times. Customers get immediate access to information around the clock without the delay of going through customer service.

Customers requiring more detail can check the final status of a number of shipments for any period of time, as well as who signed for the shipment. Other information on the site includes the locations of Manitoulin Transport's many terminals, including areas serviced directly or through trucking partnerships. By providing these extensive capabilities, site visitors can easily learn about other time-saving options offered by the transport company.

Application	Customer Web site for tracking shipments
Business Benefits	100 percent improvement in time required to deliver customer tracking information; increased customer base; decreased administrative overhead; reliable, high-availability Internet access
Software	IBM® DB2® IBM Net.Data™ Lotus® Notes® Lotus NotesPump™ Lotus Domino Go Webserver™
Hardware	IBM AS/400® IBM AS/400e series

Manitoulin Transport is improving customer service and internal processes using an IBM e-business solution.

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e-business

Manitoulin Transport realizes the substantial competitive benefit that comes from the opportunities that Internet capabilities can offer. "This opens up a lot of markets, allowing us to compete with larger package carriers with international exposure," says Robert Wilks, manager of information systems for Manitoulin Transport. "Our dedication to customer satisfaction and service is superior and is backed by an infrastucture that allows us to immediately respond to their changing needs."

A crystal clear solution

Manitoulin Transport had rigorous requirements for its system. To find the optimum solution, Manitoulin Transport turned to Ontario Northland, an IBM Business Partner. Ontario Northland recommended a Lotus Domino Go Webserver running on an IBM AS/400 that is linked to a Token-Ring network connecting more than 30 remote sites. The extremely reliable Domino Go Webserver provides 100 percent uptime for customer access.

Additionally, an AS/400e series server functions as its data warehouse, housing all of the shipment and delivery information, as well as accounting and office applications. Manitoulin Transport chose to have this internal server to protect its business systems from the exposure of the Internet and to keep delivery server information unaffected by possible server downtime. Both servers provide the scalabilty necessary to grow without interrupting business systems or customer inquiries.

IBM Net.Data provides critical access to both the Web and data warehouse servers. Developers can easily build dynamic Internet applications by combining the simplicity of HTML with the power of SQL. And Net.Data provides seamless connectivity to the backend DB2 database, housing the shipment and delivery information.

More than split second customer service

Both Manitoulin Transport and its customers benefit from immediate access to information. "It's given us a value-added capability we can present to prospects," says Wilks, noting that Manitoulin Transport has gained several customers who were attracted by the trucking company's e-business capabilities.

Manitoulin Transport has cut much of the administrative overhead involved in shipment tracing. With five employees dedicated to the task, no new customer service representatives will need to be hired as the company grows. Because faxes and phone calls related to tracing have been reduced, Wilks notes that there is a potential to save money on telecommunications as well.

Using a Lotus Notes-based contact mangement system, the mobile sales force is able to keep track of customer calls and generate reports for the sales management team. Driven by Lotus NotesPump, customer shipment information can be uploaded and downloaded to provide accurate and timely information to the entire Manitoulin Transport sales force.

A few words of advice

Manitoulin Transport plans on implementing a sales automation system that will allow the remote sales force to create rate requests from the customer site. "We're just starting to realize what a powerful technology this is. It's giving us a lot of ideas about how to expand this capability into other areas of our business," says Wilks.

For example, Manitoulin Transport is currently looking at ways to expand the range of information available to customers, including equipping its truck fleet with satellite-based systems for real-time tracking. The system's capabilities will also be expanded by adding electronic images of proof of delivery, electronic pick-up requests, and Internet EDI. Manitoulin Transport is investigating ways to integrate workflow more closely with the logistics of their customers, including the ability to get involved with demand and replenishment systems.

For other companies looking to expand their customer service and other capabilities through the Internet, one important requirement is reliability. "We operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can't afford to have a system that requires a lot of downtime for maintenance," Wilks says. "Our IBM system has been extremely reliable, plus it is enabled for remote support and maintenance."

Beyond reliability, Wilks suggests teaming up with the right partner. He suggests, "You'll want a system that can grow as your requirements evolve and that's exactly what we got with Ontario Northland and IBM."

For more information, please contact your IBM Marketing Representative or IBM Business Partner.

Visit our e-business Web sites at: *www.ibm.com/e-business* *www.lotus.com*

For detailed information on Manitoulin Transport, visit its Web site at: *www.manitoulintransport.com*

To learn more about Ontario Northland, visit its Web site at: *www.onlink.net*

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