

The Next Level

BY JIM DUNHAM

How to raise your company to the next level is a challenge all business owners face. They look every day for innovative ways to reach their goals. Today, new technology is available for all aspects of business. When a solution is implemented that ties all levels of a business together the company will experience increased profitability through gains in productivity and customer satisfaction. These are the keys to getting to the next level.

Some of the best examples of utilizing technology at all levels of a business are package delivery companies. Everyone is familiar with the big names of UPS and Federal Express. We have all seen these companies embrace and evolve with technology. With barcodes and signature capture capabilities provided to their drivers, and integration with their corporate data storage and servers, everyone within the order and supply chain can have proof of pickup, shipping progress, and delivery as these events occur.

The embracing of new technology has not increased the cost of sending packages; it has in fact allowed shipping companies to expand their business and reduce operation costs with increased productivity. Technology is so commonplace in that industry that their customers now demand they be able to track the progress of their orders and deliveries quickly and simply. What would happen to the package delivery company that did not offer these services to their customers?

The same evolution of technology is occurring in the fire protection industry. Many fire protection companies are now expanding their technology usage to the service technician in the field. These companies are achieving the benefits of

improved productivity and customer satisfaction just as our familiar package delivery companies did more than a decade ago.

By putting technology into the hands of their service technicians in the field, these companies are much more efficient, thus getting more work done in both the field and the office. Let's envision how an efficient solution can work for your company.

It all starts with a assigning a job to a technician. The job or work order is downloaded to the technician's handheld device when he simply taps the synchronization button.

The technician will then have a list of jobs he is currently assigned. Each job will list all the fire protection equipment at the customer job site and a projection of what type of maintenance or inspection is currently due. By having this information available the technician will know in advance what is needed to complete the work in a timely manner. As the technician completes his inspections, parts used are entered into the device to be tallied with the invoice. Inspection forms are filled out and signatures captured. Once the job is completed an invoice can be calculated and printed, or if you prefer to mail invoices from the office, a work ticket can be printed and left with the customer. Other reports that can be printed from the handheld include inspection results and forms completed at the time of service.

Information on potential additional sales opportunities is also gathered into the handheld while the technician is at the customer's location. Some possible questions are: What other services does the customer require that we are not cur-

rently providing? When are these services due or are they currently past due? The sales information is gathered and reported, giving your company opportunities to expand its business with current customers.

After the job has been completed the technician can synchronize the handheld again with a simple tap of a button. During this synchronization with your office server, all of your records are updated automatically. The need for a data entry clerk is eliminated, which saves duplicate data collection efforts and costly translation errors from handwritten inspection records, work orders, and invoices.

The efficient solution described collects the information at its source and makes it available throughout the entire company. The collection and flow of information to the right people makes the company's work force highly productive and contributes to a better profit margin.

With this solution in place, we can see how productivity is improved by eliminating redundant office work with complete accuracy. Sales potential with the existing customer base is also increased. What other benefits can you now offer your customers?

Most all companies strive for a safe work environment for their employees. But creating a safe environment is not always enough; some must consistently prove compliance. OSHA, JCAHO, NFPA, and other authorities having jurisdiction have standards and regulations that your customers need help in keeping and proving compliance with.

When your company maintains an accurate record of the customer's entire fire protection and life safety equipment

you can provide your customer with information that is important to their needs. Reports can be produced to show location, date placed in service, and last test and inspection dates. These are the very records required by OSHA, NFPA, JCAHO, and other authorities having jurisdiction.

When these records are collected through the use of barcodes, each inspection is immediately date and time stamped when the inspection or maintenance activity occurred. The date and time stamp provides unquestionable proof of when the inspection was completed.

With all the information your company can now easily generate and supply on the job site at the time of service, your customer can readily prove compliance with life and safety codes. This same information will also assist your customer in budgeting for coming service and maintenance work due. It is easy to see how the superior service and information provided can improve customer satisfaction and retention.

We have seen how implementing an efficient solution throughout all levels of our company can increase productivity and improve customer satisfaction and retention.

The key benefits are:

- Collecting information at the source and eliminating duplicate work efforts
- Avoiding costly errors due to poorly written orders
- Getting the information to people who need it
- Getting payments quicker with faster invoicing
- Keeping accurate records of services due and service performed

- Proof of compliance for your customer
- Knowing when your customer's maintenance activities are due allowing your company to provide superior customer service
- Professional image through high quality computer produced invoices, work tickets and inspection reports

These are reason enough to improve our workflow with today's technology. But let's also remind ourselves what our industry is about. The fire protection industry is in truth a life safety industry. This is reason enough for us to properly train and to make available the best available equipment for our technicians to do their jobs of inspection and maintenance of our customer's fire and life safety equipment.

Good business sense requires that we give our people the proper training and furnish them with the proper equipment to do their jobs in a professional manner. Handheld computers are now part of that proper equipment that adds to a professional image for your company.

Now is the time to implement a solution that will address all levels of your business. Do you want to retain your customers by offering superior service or do you want to try and win them back as you play catch up to the competition? ▽

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