



Windows Mobile Customer Solution Case Study

Microsoft® Windows Mobile® helps Floridus Design Images process sales orders instantly

Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Distribution

Customer Profile

Floridus Design Images is a wholesaler of home, garden, and seasonal décor. Based in Mississauga, Ontario, the company distributes decorative accessories and plants to retailers across Canada.

Business Situation

Floridus needed a mobile solution that would seamlessly integrate with its new Microsoft®-based environment and provide a simple user interface for faster transmission of sales orders.

Solution

Floridus deployed 14 Windows Mobile®-based devices across its network of sales representatives and warehouse staff. The devices ran a customized sales application developed by PF Software Services.

Benefits

- Increased sales
- Better efficiency and accuracy
- Enhanced customer service
- Stronger customer confidence
- Reduced training times

“We've become more efficient since deploying the Windows Mobile-based solution. We're operating with three full-time people in the warehouse and processing approximately 70 per cent more volume.”

Ben Poort, operations manager, Floridus Design Images

Floridus Design Images is a premiere wholesaler of home, garden and seasonal décor. The Mississauga, Ontario-based company distributes a variety of decorative accessories and plants to retailers across Canada. After experiencing problems with order processing and its sales database, Floridus migrated to a Windows®-based environment, which helped resolve most problems, but caused integration issues with its existing line of MS-DOS®-based mobile devices. To resolve the integration issues and create new efficiencies, Floridus equipped its sales and warehouse staff with Windows Mobile®-based devices. Since implementing the solution, the Floridus sales force has reduced the margin of error in its shipping department from 10 to one per cent and is now processing approximately 70 per cent more volume with fewer warehouse employees.



Situation

Floridus Design Images is a leading wholesaler of home, garden, and seasonal décor. Based in Mississauga, Ontario, the company distributes a wide selection of silk flowers, decorative accessories and floor plants for home and office environments to retailers across Canada. Floridus has been in operation since 1967 and employs approximately 18 staff.

In 1994 Floridus retired its paper-based sales and order processing system and moved to a modernized automated platform. The company leveraged an existing enterprise resource planning (ERP) system and deployed DOS-based Intermec handheld mobile computers for its 11 sales representatives across the country.

The new system aimed to increase the efficiency and accuracy of the sales process and reduce the time sales representatives needed to transmit orders to head office. Floridus also hoped that the time needed to process daily sales orders would be reduced and that warehouse staff could fill and ship orders faster and more accurately.

However, Floridus began experiencing challenges with the Intermec solution. The previous paper-based order forms originally faxed to head office were now replaced with text files that were uploaded over an analog modem to the mainframe order processing platform. Intermec's handheld devices ran an embedded version of MS-DOS 5.0, which caused integration issues with the Floridus mainframe. In addition, the modem wasn't an off-the-shelf product and was limited to data transfer speeds of 9600 kbps, which contributed to a high failure rate.

"The user interface on the Intermec devices was too difficult to use," says Ben Poort, operations manager, Floridus Design Images. "Our sales team found it difficult to read the

small screens and was frustrated with the text-only display and lack of integration with backend systems. In addition, orders were created using a complicated system of codes and sales representatives had to frequently refer to a master code book to decipher which codes they needed to input for simple operations. This did not translate into an effective mobile solution for us."

Floridus also struggled with inventory management. Slow upload times and constant job failures combined with manual order entry resulted in an inventory that was 24 hours out of date at any given time. The inventory status did not reflect the orders they had taken the previous day, which led to problems when customers placed orders, who frequently found that the warehouse did not have the product in stock.

After experiencing problems with order processing at the warehouse and with its database, Floridus upgraded its ERP solution to a Web-based system customized using Microsoft® SQL Server™.

When the migration from the old system to the Windows®-based environment was complete, Floridus discovered integration issues with its existing DOS-based devices. There was no way for them to network with the server, and no networking capabilities in MS-DOS 5.0.

"After deploying our new ERP system, we quickly realized that we needed a fast, accurate mobile solution that could be used across the company instead of at one specific site. We wanted something to connect our people whether they were out in the field, in their truck or at a tradeshow," says Poort. "We needed a solution that could capture orders and transmit them seamlessly into our ERP system."

Solution

Floridus replaced its DOS-based handhelds with more flexible, reliable and user friendly devices based on Microsoft Windows Mobile® software. The company enlisted the help of independent software consultancy, PF Software Services, to design customized software to support the new sales and warehousing process.

“Because Floridus had already invested in Microsoft Exchange Server and SQL Server, the lowest cost option that would deliver the highest ROI was moving to a Windows Mobile-based environment,” says Ken VanderBoom, president, PF Software. “The platform allows us to easily develop custom applications to connect Floridus staff with the information and data they need whether they’re in the office or on the go.”

Choosing a Windows Mobile platform also ensured that Floridus could select the device that made the most sense for its workers. To provide access to both email and applications, the company made plans to deploy Symbol MC9090G devices to its warehouse shipping department and Symbol MC50 devices to its sales force.

Benefits

Since implementing the Windows Mobile-based solution, Floridus has solved several of the business challenges it faced, including issues related to order processing and the complex nature of the system.

Increased sales

The Windows Mobile-based solution helps the Floridus sales force upload orders to the company’s server faster and more frequently. Sales orders can now be transmitted directly from the mobile devices to the company’s processing department immediately after the sales representative closes a sale. Previously, all sales orders would be transmitted at the end of the day. By transmitting the sales

instantly, Floridus can process orders as they enter the system and keep its inventory up-to-date, which translates into faster, more accurate service for its customers.

Additionally, with updated inventory at their fingertips, Floridus sales representatives are enjoying increased sales opportunities and can search for product availability due to instant access to the company’s complete catalogue through their Windows Mobile devices.

“One benefit from the real-time inventory that we never anticipated is new sales opportunities,” says Poort. “If a customer inquires about something and they want three units, the sales representative can instantly see that there are only six of those items left in inventory and then recommend that the customer take them all, as they may not be available later.”

Better efficiency and accuracy

By mobilizing its warehouse staff, Floridus is enjoying an unprecedented level of efficiency and accuracy. Orders are sent electronically from the sales staff to the warehouse, which eliminates illegible, hand-written orders and the complex code-based orders from the previous system. Now, the order processor reviews the orders that have been uploaded to the system and transmits the data to the shipping department where the warehouse pickers upload the information to their mobile devices. Poort says that the margin of error in the shipping department is now around one per cent—down from 10 per cent.

“We’ve become more efficient since deploying the Windows Mobile-based solution. We’re operating with three full-time people in the warehouse and processing approximately 70 per cent more volume,” says Poort. “Because the wireless technology eliminates the need to manually carry and file paper reports, our warehouse employees

spend less time walking to and from the shipping desk, which allows them to spend more time picking and packing.”

Enhanced customer service

Floridus sales representatives now have access to an updated and complete customer profile, including information such as addresses, phone numbers, customer history and customer billing terms. The sales representative can better serve the customer because they have all the necessary information they need to complete a sale quickly.

“The mobile devices help us provide better service to our customers, but they also protect us. We can anticipate problems with customers because there's a history right on our mobile screens,” says Poort. “For example, our accounting department can now attach notes on the customer's file that can notify the sales rep of an unpaid account. By knowing this information, the sales representative can then take steps to ensure payment arrangements are made before entering into any new agreements.”

Increased customer confidence

Integration issues created a slow upload process on Floridus' past system which not only led to outdated inventory, but also to customers purchasing out-of-stock items and not receiving what they ordered. The Windows Mobile-based solution helps reserve inventory for the customer the moment the order is downloaded into the system. In addition, sales representatives can print order confirmations onsite using mobile printers. The confirmation clearly shows the product the customer ordered and the exact quantity, which in turn helps instill consumer confidence.

“Deploying Windows Mobile devices has helped make things easier for everybody involved with the sales process,” says Poort.

“Our customers feel comfortable and trust that if we say we have a product, we definitely have it.”

Reduced training times

Floridus' familiar Windows-based environment helps make using mobile devices easier, and has contributed to reducing training time to a fraction of what it was previously. A typical training session, which includes a tutorial on the custom software employed by Floridus, now takes approximately two hours to complete, whereas before, ongoing training would take an average of four months before a user was competent using the system. Sales employees can also file test orders to make sure that they are comfortable with the system before going into the field.

“The sales representatives adopted the system very quickly. Those who had previous experience with pocket PCs, or with any Windows-based environment for that matter, found it extremely easy to use,” says VanderBoom.

“We're very happy with the Windows Mobile-based solution. Compared to the old system, it's like giving up a horse and buggy for a Lamborghini,” says Poort. “It's made us think beyond the traditional way of doing things. We're becoming open to new and different processes, as well as ways to improve our operations further.”

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For more information about Floridus Design Images products and services, call 1-800-268-4902 or visit the Web site at: <http://www.floridus.com/>

Windows Mobile

Windows Mobile brings the power of the Windows® operating system to mobile devices, helping businesses and their mobile employees stay connected while on the go. Windows Mobile runs mobile versions of Microsoft programs, including Microsoft Office Outlook® Mobile, Internet Explorer Mobile, Pocket MSN®, Windows Media® Player Mobile, and Microsoft Office Word Mobile, PowerPoint® Mobile, and Excel® Mobile. With Windows Mobile, information workers get powerful software combined with the familiarity of Windows. Combined with available service plans and connectivity options, Windows Mobile-based devices, available from 42 device makers and 68 mobile operators in 48 countries, can be used to make calls, send e-mail and instant messages, surf the Web, and access critical business information even when users are away from the office.

More information about Windows Mobile can be found at:

www.microsoft.com/windowsmobile

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