

Case Study

IT Team Wins By Launching Custom Field Force Application



Company: Belron Canada® is a nationwide vehicle glass repair and replacement company.

Industry: Other - Service

Region: Americas

Company Size: Large Enterprise

Email Environment: Microsoft® Exchange

Type of Solution: Field Service, CRM & Dispatch Operations – Custom Application

BlackBerry Partner Solution: Custom Field Force Solution from Soluteo

Challenge: Belron Canada wanted to offer mobile repair teams a wireless approach to being dispatched, completing work orders and invoicing customers; but Belron's IT team needed a solution that easily fit within their current IT infrastructure.

Solution: Belron chose to extend the value of their current deployment of the BlackBerry® Enterprise Solution with a wireless field force application. Soluteo, specialists in custom-developed BlackBerry® applications, built the solution.

Results:

- Leverages investment in existing IT infrastructure
- Technology increases company performance
- Mobile printing simplifies life on-the-road
- A solution with room to grow



The Challenge: Meet Business Objectives within Current IT Infrastructure

Belron Canada saw mobilizing their field technicians with BlackBerry devices as a way to become more efficient and differentiate themselves in the competitive auto glass repair marketplace. Under their current work order system, repair jobs were dispatched to technicians by telephone; technicians completed work orders on paper; paper reports were manually inputted by back office personnel into the company's accounting system.

The existing system was inefficient. Not only did it limit the number of jobs a technician could handle per day, because every job was dispatched as the last one was completed, it was also labor-intensive. Both technicians and the back office struggled with an invoicing process that could take weeks to complete.

Belron looked at wireless technology as a way to dispatch their field force, keep track of jobs completed, print on-the-spot invoices for customers, and keep their administrative efforts up-to-speed. But the number one consideration was minimizing the impact on their current IT infrastructure; no one wanted to increase overhead by rebuilding or recreating the back end systems they were already happy with.

Belron uses Microsoft SQL as its central database for both dispatch and administration systems for billing. They also have the BlackBerry® Enterprise Server in place to manage BlackBerry devices already used by their executives. The challenge was finding a way to marry the two technologies in order to create a wireless field force application.

Why a Custom Solution for BlackBerry Devices?

For IT Director, Stephane Turbide, it was an obvious choice to extend the BlackBerry Enterprise Solution he already relied on to meet their mobile field objectives. "The more tools you make available to people working in your company, the more complex management can get," says Turbide. "We were already very good at managing the BlackBerry Enterprise Server and felt developing new uses for it would be the simplest route to go."

He was also impressed with the reliability of the platform as it stacked up against other wireless solutions. Since he knew Java™ would be the development framework for the wireless application, Turbide felt the BlackBerry Enterprise Solution which supports Java technology, "enabled us to build modules quite easily within a very stable platform."

Turbide and his IT team wasted no time deciding to outsource the development of their field force application. "You know what you're good at doing," he says. "We are not in the business of developing mobile applications, but several specialists are. It was an easy choice to work with Soluteo because they were better at this than us."

BlackBerry Alliance Partner, Soluteo and Belron divided up the workload for the project based on their respective IT strengths. Soluteo completed a needs analysis, built the Java-based application using the Soluteo Mobile Platform, supplied the links to the back end system, and created the drivers that enabled mobile printing using Bluetooth® technology. Belron created the workflow, handled the business logic and built the web services that enabled data to be transferred between the BlackBerry devices and the SQL databases.

"We chose to develop using the BlackBerry Enterprise Solution because we already had it in place and BlackBerry devices can do far more than people realize."

~STEPHANE TURBIDE, IT Director

Partner Profile:



Company: Soluteo

- Based in the UK, France and Canada, Soluteo develops real-time mobile extensions for existing enterprise software applications based on BlackBerry technology.
- Six years management, research and knowledge experience in launching enterprise level and highly customized mobile solutions.
- Offers a portfolio of innovative, ready-to-use and mobile solutions which meet the specific needs of various vertical markets.

Featured Product: Belron Custom Field Force Application

Application Type: Field Service

Business Value:

"Soluteo had good resources, good references and success stories, so all the ingredients were there. They were responsive right from the start and gave us the level of support we needed."

~STEPHANE TURBIDE, IT Director

For more information, www.soluteo.com

Technology Improves and Simplifies Life On-the-road

Since increasing on-the-job efficiency for technicians was a primary goal, the solution had to tackle the workflow in a format that made sense on a BlackBerry device. Soluteo and Belron decided that almost 60 screens were needed on the BlackBerry device to help technicians complete their work orders electronically.

The first screens immediately improved the process by giving technicians their job list for the day when they logged in. Before, jobs were assigned ad hoc and a great deal of time was lost as drivers backtracked along roads to their next assignment. Customers also had to wait while manual scheduling took place. But Turbide says doing everything wirelessly instead of over the phone means "the technician knows his commitments at the start of the day. We've reduced our ability to dispatch a technician to a customer from two days to a few hours, plus technicians are more productive, completing up to five work orders per day from the two they used to handle."

Other screens are used to record the parts used and needed. Turbide and his team built algorithms into the solution to improve the distribution process; while on-the-road, technicians used to have to request a distribution truck bring them the glass they needed to repair a customer's windshield. Thanks to the logic now built into the wireless solution, every booked job contains details of parts needed and this delivery is coordinated at the back end, without anyone having to ask. An approach that improves both customer service and efficiency.

Throughout the process, the solution is designed to keep a running total of the technician's start and finish times and the parts sold. When the job is complete, the technician now clicks on the screen to pull up the invoice. The invoice is immediately sent from the BlackBerry device to the administrative database, eliminating the need to have it manually delivered. Plus, they can now print a copy onsite using a mobile printing solution designed by Soluteo.

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~STEPHANE TURBIDE, IT Director

Mobile Printing

One of the most important challenges for the project was offering technicians a convenient way to generate invoices at the customer's location. For many customers, getting a record of the costs for the repair job is something they immediately need to send to their insurance companies for reimbursement.

Soluteo created a simple solution using standard, battery-operated HP printers and Bluetooth technology. When an invoice is created on the BlackBerry device, all the technician has to do is select "print" and the request travels over a Bluetooth wireless connection to the printer.

To make this happen, Soluteo invested a great deal of effort creating a custom PCL driver that helped the BlackBerry devices would talk to the printers. "Just this small thing gives our company a better image in front of the customer – it gives us a competitive advantage because we are using technology to make their lives easier," says Turbide.

The first 20 BlackBerry devices with the new field force application made such an impact on business, Belron is now planning to roll it out to 100 technicians in Canada and then has plans for it for their international operations. After that, they plan to develop the functionality that allows them to manage all inventory from BlackBerry devices.

"We've shown how much you can do with a BlackBerry device and built up our credibility as an IT team – people now believe we can do almost anything."

~STEPHANE TURBIDE, IT Director

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Results:

Leverages Investment in Existing IT Infrastructure:

The new field force application leverages Belron's existing investment in the BlackBerry Enterprise Solution, keeping costs down and avoiding the need to rebuild a new back end system to support the wireless solution.

Technology Increases Company Performance:

An intelligently designed solution, with good workflow, increases a technician's productivity and efficiency in the field. As well, back office systems run more smoothly, which helps to serve customers better and make the company more competitive.

Mobile Printing Simplifies Life on-the-Road:

A mobile printing solution that uses Bluetooth technology impresses customers and improves the billing process.

A Solution with Room to Grow:

Working with their partner, Soluteo, the company plans to roll out the field force application across the rest of Canada and internationally. A strong partnership lays the foundation to extend more functionality to the solution.

For more information on BlackBerry solutions, visit www.blackberry.com/go/success