

CASE STUDY

Communications Leader Vidéotron Hopes to Save \$1.6 Million by Automating Service Calls on BlackBerry Smartphones



Vidéotron offers cable television, Internet access, cable telephony, wireless telephone and softphone services to customers in the province of Quebec, Canada.

Industry: Telecommunications

Region: North America

Company Size: Large – 4,000 employees

Email Environment: IBM® Lotus® Domino®

Type of Solution: Field Service, CRM and Dispatch Operations

BlackBerry Partner Solution:
Field Force Automation by Soluteo

Challenge:

Change from a paper-based work order system for field technicians to a wireless one that automates all administrative steps involved in handling a service call.

Solution:

Vidéotron chose to build on their BlackBerry® solution with an application for field force automation by Soluteo. About 1,200 field technicians were given BlackBerry smartphones with Soluteo's mobile field force application to simplify dispatching and work order management.

Results:

- Projected savings of \$1.6 million over three years
- Reduces need for dispatcher's activities
- Improves market competitiveness
- Encourages more effective, happier technicians
- Improves customer experience



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Why the BlackBerry Solution?

The Challenge

Update to a more efficient, electronic work order system

Vidéotron has 1,200 technicians who service their customers' communications systems, such as cable TV, high speed Internet and telephone service. Work orders were all paper-based, with technicians picking up the list of jobs in the morning and returning the completed paperwork at night.

Any communications about a particular work order, or a change of plans in the work schedule, was handled over the phone with dispatchers. During the day, there could be a lot of verbal traffic as jobs were processed and instructions passed on.

"We wanted to get away from the paper and offer our technicians a tool that gives them as much information as possible, but was also mobile enough to go into houses where repairs or installations take place," says Fidele Toghua, Senior Director, Technical Quality.

Vidéotron wanted to implement a solution that helped manage service requests in a way that cut costs, sets it apart from the competition, and showed market leadership.

The Company was already familiar with the BlackBerry® Enterprise Solution because it was used by executives for corporate communications. But before they decided to go with the BlackBerry solution, with the Soluteo's field force application, they looked at other market solutions.

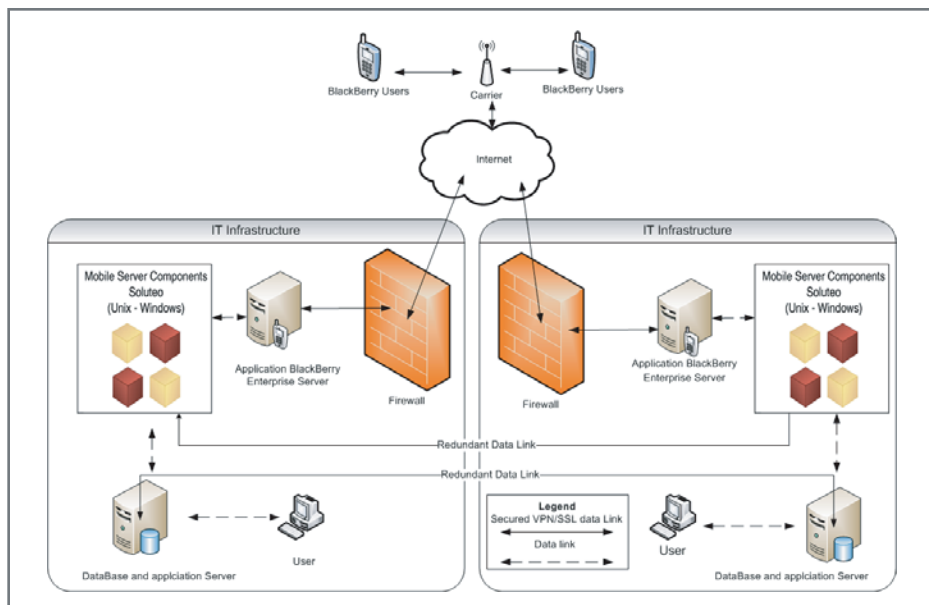
"We looked at other handheld devices but we found that the BlackBerry solution was a more stable platform," says Marc Montambault, Senior Director, Information Technology. "We needed our field force application to connect to our back end Advantex dispatch system, and I didn't believe that other handheld devices would offer us the reliability we needed in making that connection," he says.

Montambault felt that the security of the BlackBerry Enterprise Solution was adequate enough for this kind of application. "The security and integrity of the BlackBerry solution, over-the-air, was what made this solution a good choice."

Vidéotron also considered using laptops, like many of their competitors do. They quickly realized that a laptop would tie a technician down, since they would have to carry the laptop while working and inside the customer's house. Since they were trying to simplify the technician's job, they felt this approach was too cumbersome.

"When we compared costs, we found that we could save 30% to 40% in the long-run choosing the BlackBerry solution over laptops," says Toghua.

How it all works



Improving the Service Call

From Dispatch to Completion

Vidéotron used Soluteo's Enterprise Field Force Automation for BlackBerry software to elevate their work order and dispatch system to a new level. All paper orders were replaced with an electronic workflow on the BlackBerry smartphone that matches how the technicians process a service call.

Overnight, the Soluteo solution automatically dispatches work orders to the most logical technician and calculates the best driving routes. Before starting their work day, technicians see a list of current work orders on their BlackBerry smartphones and prioritize work orders. They indicate the progress made on a job, from "Confirmation" to "In Progress" to "Completed," using the Soluteo application.

Dispatchers can also see the up-to-the-minute ongoing status of work orders as they are completed from their web-based dispatching console. The Soluteo solution monitors progress as the day progresses. Work order assignments can be dynamically changed, allowing technicians that are ahead of schedule to receive work orders from technicians that are behind schedule. This transparent work order management allows Vidéotron to achieve its service level objectives for all of its customers.

Technicians can also update equipment requirements and enter job codes. They can even activate Vidéotron services for cable or other products directly from their Soluteo Field Force Automation Solution for BlackBerry smartphones without having to call the dispatcher.

"This is a huge time saver because technicians no longer have to call a dispatcher to activate cable or Internet service," says Toghous. "Once they are using the Field Force Automation solution, they can access all that functionality – from activating a service, to changing a phone number or substituting equipment at a customer's home."

By reducing dispatching demands, Vidéotron estimates it was able to reduce staff needs by 40% and also save on costs. The BlackBerry Solution with Soluteo's Field Force application also cuts down phone calls between technicians and dispatchers by approximately 35%. The next step is to build out the BlackBerry solution so technicians can directly contact customers and tell them when they will arrive.

This ROI is part of Vidéotron's three-year plan for deploying the BlackBerry solution and Soluteo's Field Force Automation solution. The Company, in year two of their three year plan, believes it is right on track for saving \$1.6 million over three years and hopes to reduce staff and process work more efficiently.

"With the BlackBerry smartphones and the Soluteo application in hand, our technicians are handling all of their work orders themselves," says Toghous. "That is going to push us ahead of our competition, who are still using phones or laptops."

« The BlackBerry solution is great in terms of cost, flexibility and stability. The BlackBerry smartphone goes everywhere - perfect for field technicians who move around a lot. »

Change is good

Overcoming the End User Learning Curve

When new technologies are introduced, there's often a period of adjustment for the end users. Vidéotron had young and new field technicians on the job, and also 20-year veterans accustomed to the paper-and-phone approach.

To help everyone adjust, the company did several things. They gave technicians BlackBerry smartphones almost nine months before the Soluteo application was to be rolled out. This gave users time to learn about the phone and email functionalities of the BlackBerry smartphone.

"We also included a group of 10 technicians in our Quality Assurance phase of the application," says Montambault. "This helped to make sure that the solution matched how they handled their work flow and helped them buy-in right from the start."

Once rolled out, technicians received a three-hour training period. A mobile Help Desk support person was available for them 10 days after the roll out occurred to come to their location and troubleshoot issues.

"It took older technicians a bit more time to get acquainted with the technology but now, all is very positive," says Toghous. "They like it because they no longer have to call in, or wait in line to close jobs. That reduces stress during their work day."

Results

■ Savings of \$1.6 million over three years:

Choosing the BlackBerry solution and Soluteo application was about 40% less expensive than giving each technician a laptop. When combined with staff reduction costs and improved efficiency, Vidéotron believes it will save approximately \$1.6 million over three years.

■ Reduces the need for dispatchers:

Switching from a paper-and phone-based system to a BlackBerry solution let Vidéotron reduce staff costs by 40% and cut down phone calls by 35%.

■ Improves Market Competitiveness:

Vidéotron is one of a few telecom companies to use wireless technology for work order process management. It believes its customers will benefit from this advantage and plans to add more customer-friendly features in the future.

■ More effective and happier technicians:

After a short learning curve, technicians are enjoying the advantages of the BlackBerry solution because it helps them work faster and reduces customer wait time.



Leader in mobile solutions exclusively for the BlackBerry

Company: Soluteo

- Specializes in the mobilization and automation of existing business processes for faster customer response times and lower costs due to greater process efficiency
- Offers extensible and integrated solutions leveraging existing IT investments in Market Research, Field Force Automation, Transport, Real Estate Management, CRM, and Data Acquisition
- Products are based on open architecture technologies that have been endorsed as industry standards, which enable them to be cost-effective and easy to upgrade and support

Featured Product: Field Force Automation

Application Type: Field Service, CRM and Dispatch Operations

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« Soluteo is an agile, adaptable company with software that is very flexible and configurable. And the advantage is that they know the telecom industry, so deployment only took four months. »

MARC MONTAMBAULT
Senior Director, Information Technology
Vidéotron