

Making paper a thing of the past

Database Workshop Managing Director Alison Peters explains more.

After water, what does an average bottled water company produce and supply the greatest amount of to its customers? You might like the answer to this to be cups, or some other chargeable item or service, but on reflection you will probably agree that it is . . . paper. Reams of paper. Mountains of it. Some of it has to be posted, and all of it will need copying and storing. Delivery notes will need to be entered or confirmed on the computer. How many people and how much time does all that take? Most importantly, how much does all of this cost?

Let's assume a typical bottled water company with 1,000 active customer sites requiring a water delivery every two weeks, a sanitisation visit every three months, and a single monthly invoice. This adds up to 30 delivery notes and 12 invoices each per year, as well as envelopes and stamps for posting. This is a total of 30,000 delivery notes and 12,000 invoices. The stationery and postage alone will cost around €7,500 per year, and the time spent handling all that paper will probably be three times that amount – every year.

Cardiff based watercooler company **Just Water** did the maths and didn't like the results, so they decided to do something about it. Just Water Managing Director Simon Poynter explained: "The costs involved in processing paper delivery notes and invoices were at least 30p for every bottle of water we delivered. If we could eliminate, or at least significantly reduce those costs, it would make a big difference to our profitability."

Just Water had been using our Database Workshop ProWat software since 2002 so Simon called us to discuss his thoughts. At the time we were at an advanced stage of developing a handheld solution to work with ProWat SE, but the other features he required were not planned.

The key to a truly paperless watercooler office lies in three technologies:

- a handheld computer to replace printed delivery notes.
- email to distribute invoices and also Proof of Delivery (POD) to those customers who required a copy POD signed by one of their people.
- document storage on the computer for copy documents and also received faxes, emails and letters.

The handheld computer was already up and running. We had a system for our ProWat 2000 software based on standard Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) which can be purchased for around £200 each, and this program was being extended to work with ProWat SE. The PDA allows the screen to be signed with a stylus to capture the customer's signature.

The beauty of email is that it is virtually free. When you consider that most companies already have ADSL (broadband) for email and internet access, then making additional use of the connection to send emails and PODs becomes essentially free. While we worked on developing the software, Simon took on an agency worker to call every single customer to obtain an email address and to explain that in future invoices would be coming by email. Simon also told us: "It was important that this paperless office concept was 100%, so I wouldn't need to still post 30 invoices every month. It took a while, but every business these days has email, and we got there eventually." Invoices and PODs are now sent out as PDF documents, complete with signatures on the POD.

The final link in the chain is electronic document storage. Invoices and PODs can of course be produced at any time from ProWat, and can be stored as PDF documents if required. However, this doesn't solve the problem of received email or other posted or faxed documents. The answer to this was to save emails as separate files (HTML) and faxes as JPG files. Printed mail needs to be scanned and saved. ProWat SE will then allow these documents (and any other document types such as Excel spreadsheets and Word documents) to be attached to an entry in the customers contact log. The document can then be viewed in the appropriate program by clicking on a link.

The project was finalised over the summer months and delivered in stages. Simon revealed: "I'm delighted with the whole programme. I believe that this is the way forward for our industry, and that no company is too small or too large to benefit. Our stationery, postage and handling costs have been reduced to zero, and the ongoing costs associated with the handheld computers are about 10% of what they were, with pay back time for the whole project only around six months."

For further information, contact **Database Workshop**
Tel: **+44 (0)1827 52233**
www.dbworkshop.com



Just Water using PDAs on delivery.

"The costs involved in processing paper delivery notes and invoices were at least 30p for every bottle of water we delivered. If we could eliminate, or at least significantly reduce those costs, it would make a big difference to our profitability."

"It was important that this paperless office concept was 100%, so I wouldn't need to still post 30 invoices every month."

Examples of the ProWat SE software.

