

Work Process and Efficiency Improve When Field Personnel are Dispatched Wirelessly



The Challenge: Automate a Manual Dispatch System

Dataco completes disconnection services for utility company customers who are delinquent on their payment. The job requires speed and accuracy to ensure that service orders are correctly issued and acted on in a timely manner. The company must also electronically report to its client on a daily basis about the status of work orders.

The entire system relies on a high degree of coordination and reporting – and Dataco's ability to deliver high quality, low cost and efficient service is their key to customer loyalty. Until recently this system was manual and labor-intensive, causing too much paperwork and cost inefficiencies.

In 2004, Dataco reviewed its dispatch process to find ways to improve the system for technicians and back office personnel. At the same time, they wanted to automate their reporting system to improve how quickly they advised their clients of completed work.

Why a BlackBerry Solution?

Improving efficiency was the first priority of any wireless solution Dataco considered. Service technicians were leaving the office every morning with printed service orders and did not return to home base until the next morning. Even though they could dial into one of five phone lines, many technicians found themselves waiting on hold to talk to an administrative agent.

The process field technicians used to indicate that a service call had been closed out was also unreliable and caused delays. At the back office, administrators typed the information into a spreadsheet, which was forwarded to the utility company client. Workloads were heavy at the back office, causing frustration and stress and leaving Dataco with the belief that they would have to expand their personnel and move to a larger office.

"The biggest reasons we went to BlackBerry was that I wanted a way to manage the workload for dispatching so I could reduce, not increase, my staff," says Monique Pellerin, Operations Manager. "We are also very aware that proficiency, accuracy and efficiency for our clients is very important to our competitiveness in this industry."

Company:

Dataco Utility Services Ltd. is a third party contractor that provides metering and disconnection services for major utility companies such as Enmax Power Corporation and BC Hydro. Located in Calgary, Alberta, they offer services in Calgary, Vancouver, Lethbridge and Red Deer.

Industry:

Utilities and Energy

Region:

Americas

Company Size:

Large Enterprise

Email Environment:

Microsoft® Exchange 2003

Solution:

Field Service, Dispatch Operations

BlackBerry Partner Solution:

Flowfinity Actions from
Flowfinity Wireless Inc.

Business Challenge:

After relying on the inefficiency of telephone dispatching, Dataco needed a better way to dispatch its field technicians. The company also wanted to speed up the reporting cycle to provide clients with more efficiency, as well as reduce the workload on the administrative office.

Solution:

Dataco deployed 15 BlackBerry® devices on the BlackBerry Enterprise Server™, equipped with the Mobile Data System™ (MDS). They customized Flowfinity Actions, an out-of-the-box field service dispatch application, to reflect the specific data they needed to capture.

Results:

- Communications efficiency and savings
- Fewer reporting errors
- Better customer service
- Reduced salary costs
- Better team morale

After attending a Bell symposium on wireless solutions and coming across Flowfinity, a BlackBerry partner, Pellerin knew she had found the solution. Flowfinity offered a simple, out-of-the-box application called Flowfinity Actions which worked with the BlackBerry Enterprise Solution™, equipped with the MDS.

With the solution, a dispatch console would allow Dataco to complete electronic work orders and have reports of closed orders sent back to the office. The reports could then immediately be updated in their clients' systems.

Partner Profile

Company:

Flowfinity Wireless Inc.

- Since early 2000, has been developing solutions to meet the challenge of delivering high usability wireless applications for a growing base of customers in North America and Europe
- Developed several unique innovations, resulting in over 200 pages of patent specifications filed in multiple countries
- Products include Flowfinity Forms, Reports and Actions

Featured Product:

Flowfinity Forms

Application Type:

Field Service, Dispatch Operations

Services:

- Custom development
- Problem-solving
- Maintenance

Business Value:

"Flowfinity worked very closely with us. We figured out how to get the BlackBerry Enterprise Server up and running quickly, but if we needed their help we had a response from Flowfinity within a few hours."

Monique Pellerin, Operations Manager, Dataco

For more information, visit www.flowfinity.com

Maximizing the Work Process

Improved Job Management: For Dataco, The Flowfinity and BlackBerry solution has improved the work order list, which is now created on the BlackBerry device. If the dispatcher needs to add a new job to the technician's list, the technician will then receive a message to accept or reject the job. Once at the job, the technician uses a series of simple drop down menus to report back – which reduces cell phone charges by \$2,000/month.

Better Reporting: Data sent from the technician is received at head office. The administrator opens the work order as an Excel spreadsheet and updates both Dataco's system and their client's database. Dataco no longer has to manually create spreadsheets since BlackBerry and the Flowfinity application does it for them. The result is a savings of \$45,000/annually in staffing.

"We now have someone in our office to open the spreadsheets coming in from the BlackBerry devices," says Pellerin. "Our client has a customer care centre that receives phone calls all day from people who have had their service changed. In the past, they couldn't quickly tell them the reason why they had been disconnected because they had to wait for us to send them a report. With this solution, we have reduced our turnaround reporting time from eight hours to 30 minutes."



Fewer Errors: When Dataco relied on a manual system, it was easy to make an error because details were communicated verbally and inputted by hand into the system. Numbers were easily transposed and errors were not caught quickly.

In reaction, an error in reporting could affect up to five divisions at their client's operation. Pellerin estimates a 30% reduction in errors with their new automated system.

Dataco Experiences Superior ROI

Challenge	Impact of Flowfinity and BlackBerry Solution
Errors in relaying data	Reduced technician and administrator errors by 30%
Report more quickly to customer on problems	Reduced turnaround time for problem reports from eight hours to 30 minutes
Reduce dependence on cell phones	Data solution resulted in savings of \$2,000/month on cell phone bills
Reallocation of staff	Eliminated two FTE positions for a salary savings of \$45,000/annually

Customizing the Out-of-the-box Solution

One of the major advantages of Flowfinity Actions was the freedom within the application to customize specific field information. During the pilot project, Pellerin chose a tech savvy field technician to work with her IT leader. Together, they worked through all possible information that would be needed on a report and all the scenarios that technicians encountered. When technical issues arose, they turned to Flowfinity.

Drop down menus were customized with new fields that saved technicians from having to re-input data. In fact, one of Pellerin's goals was to limit the amount of typing that was needed. She envisioned a solution that was largely clickable to ensure that her technicians would like and use the application. The entire customization and deployment took three weeks.

"Our field technicians really like the BlackBerry device and the Flowfinity solution," says Pellerin. "Some of that buy-in came from involving one of them in the development process to make sure the approach reflected their typical work day. But they also really like how efficient it's made them and how much it's cut down on the frustrations of waiting on the phone and not being able to get through."

Results

Communications Efficiency and Savings: Field technicians have reduced their waiting time to get through on phone lines and cell phone costs have been reduced by \$2,000/month.

Fewer Reporting Errors: Reporting errors were reduced by 30% with a clickable system for inputting data.

Better Customer Service: Dataco has reduced its reporting time to its customer from eight hours to 30 minutes. "Our customers are so happy with how fast we turnaround data to them now," says Pellerin. "We look very proactive rather than reactive because we have helped them work in a more timely way with their customers."

Reduced Salary Costs: With a more efficient system, Dataco saved \$45,000/annually in staffing costs.

Better Team Morale: "The morale in our office has improved. Stress levels are down and people are happier because we are working so efficiently," says Pellerin.

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