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Spirit gives JJ Food for thought
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Many companies that need to deliver items regularly have discovered that one of the key solutions to greater cost-effectiveness lies in the use of mobile computing devices. In recent times, due to the added need to save costs, these have assumed even greater importance. JJ Food Service is a prime example of a company that has saved time, trouble and costs by moving over to an automated data collection system – in this case, sourced by an independent consultancy, Spirit Data Capture Limited.

JJ Food Service is the UK's leading company specialising in food service delivery and collection. Founded by its Managing Director, award-winning entrepreneur Mustafa Kiamil, the firm delivers a full range of foodstuffs from five distribution centres. The company boasts one of the highest profit margins in the food sector.

Some time ago, JJ Food Service decided to automate its methods for capturing a range of data relating to the truck-based deliveries it makes from its distribution centres. Previously, most of this data collection had been carried out manually, using paper-based processes. However, this proved to be a slow and cumbersome procedure.

IT Manager, Rif Kiamil, explains: "We realised that our systems didn't really show us what was happening in a key part of our company's activities. We wanted a better system that would provide us with real-time data relating to deliveries on the road. We also wanted to improve the efficiency with which we picked and handled our stock - and to boost our productivity in terms of the deliveries."

The company started looking at the options available. One of its key criteria was to source equipment that would be really reliable. "We've seen too many mobility projects fail as a result of poor and unreliable hardware and software," says Rif. Ultimately, their search led them to Spirit Data Capture, an independent consultancy that acts as a distributor for a range of leading brands.

"Spirit were able to source some unique hardware offerings that no-one else in the UK could offer," adds Rif. One of these solutions was the M3 Sky from M3 Mobile – a fully-featured PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) that runs a version of Microsoft Windows Mobile 5. The M3 Sky incorporates some impressive technology – including Bluetooth, GSM, GPS and GPRS. Rif continues: "It offered us the reliability we were seeking, it was nice and compact and was competitively priced."

The new devices were subsequently given to all of JJ Food Services' delivery drivers. They are now being used for a wide variety of applications, ranging from proof of delivery and providing invoices at the point of delivery through to internal product auditing and stock checks. They also enable the system to track the positions of each of the vehicles during deliveries and will eventually be used to help the drivers to navigate to their destination.

Rif comments: "Spirit supplied us with a complete hardware solution. In addition to the M3 Sky devices, they provided Extech mobile printers, cases, chargers and various other accessories. They also helped us to get the maximum benefit from the hardware and software and shared their in-depth knowledge of the Application Programming Interfaces and Software Development Kits for the devices."

The M3 Sky units have made a significant difference to the efficiency of JJ Food Service's distribution operations. The company has made considerable savings by increasing the effectiveness of how it loads and routes it vehicles, and through better stock control.

Rif Kiamil concludes: "Thanks to the system that Spirit has helped us to develop, we now know what is happening with our delivery service at any point in time. We can keep our customers informed about the progress of their items as all of our systems are updated in real time. The M3 Sky has improved the productivity of our drivers and now enables us to deliver more items with fewer trucks."