

Case study

Ajinomoto Philippines Corporation (APC)

Making waves on the road



At a glance

Industry: Food manufacturing

Application: Mobile inventory control and invoice printing

Product: Intermec 730 Mobile Computer and PB40 (or PB42) Mobile Printer

Partner: Technology Links International Corp., Philippines

Ajinomoto Philippines Corporation gains tremendous time savings with Intermec mobile computing and printing

For a country that boasts of more than 7,100 islands, the Philippines is a massive and beautiful territory that can however, be a colossal responsibility to manage – especially if you are a sales manager handling retail and distribution country-wide.

Ajinomoto Philippines Corporation (APC) has been at the forefront of the Philippines' food market with its innovative amino acid products, and remains one of the innovators using sugarcane molasses as its primary raw materials. However, to distribute the much used and loved products throughout the archipelagos of islands across the country requires dedication and passion from its many field salespeople, serving retail outlets throughout the country.

The APC field salespeople typically had to travel from branches nationwide, and service retail outlets with Ajinomoto products, and then collect payment with invoice generation at the same time. The tasks were onerous on the salespeople. For example, due to the time constraints and pressures the salespeople faced in a typical workday, they inevitably made frequent inaccurate computations

of pricing and local taxes on sales of products. Also, it took a minute for the salespeople to generate a simple 3-line invoice for their outlet customers. When they return to the branch office, they would spend another 1.5 hours every day just to generate sales reports to account to their bosses. At the organizational level, administrators would take 30 minutes to manually encode sales invoices based on the daily sales generated per salesperson.

Reaching out to a diverse customer base

To put in perspective on how APC has grown with and in the Philippines, perhaps we can reflect a little on its history. APC, affiliated with the AJINOMOTO Group, celebrates 50 successful years in the Philippines in 2008. There was a time when APC is associated almost exclusively with AJI-NO-MOTO Super Seasoning only. Starting early 1990s, APC began to produce other valuable products for the Filipino family. Today, APC is known as a total food company and now ranks as one of the top 250 corporations in the Philippines. This achievement is a result of the global strength of the AJI-NO-MOTO brand, relevant products of highest quality and the passion and commitment of dedicated employees all over the country.

"The APC sales network reaches out to a broad spectrum of customers within the Philippines. We serve retail channels such as supermarkets, chain stores, and provision stores. We also serve institutional customers such as hotels, restaurants, and caterers. In addition, we have industrial products and solutions meant for the industrial customers requiring key raw materials such as amino acids for pharmaceuticals and feed use, nucleotides and other specialty chemicals," says Robert T. Federez, IT Manager, APC.

Robert and his team determined there must be a more efficient and productive way for the hardworking field salespeople, and to empower them to focus on their sales tasks at hand rather than to be distracted by extra administrative tasks. After extensive research and evaluation, the team decided that Intermec's products were most suited to transforming their field sales administrative tasks. Federez standardized his choice on the Intermec 730 Mobile Computer and the Intermec PB40/42 Mobile Printer.

Empowering field salespeople with Intermec technology

The APC team examined available solutions in the market, and decided to build a custom solution from scratch instead. The current solution each field salesperson is provided with, is a

graphical application that takes care of the entire sales process, and includes an Intermec 730 Mobile Computer and an Intermec PB40 (or PB42) Mobile Printer, paired with Bluetooth connectivity for wireless data processing and printing.

"APC is one of the pioneering users of mobile sales automation in the Philippines, which we launched successfully since July 2007 just after 10 months of development and trial," says Federez. "Our salespeople now enjoy a more streamlined system whereby they can easily collect payments from retail customers at off-site locations and enter the payment information into their Intermec mobile computers, and then generate invoices immediately using the Intermec mobile printers. Retail customers get computer-generated legibly printed invoices, with little margin of error. Once back at the office, salespeople can synchronize their Intermec mobile computers with the office back-end system to off-load daily sales information for processing into reports easily."

Since both the Intermec 730 and PB are mobile devices that can communicate with each other wirelessly via Bluetooth, field salespeople are not straddled with excess weight and bulk, and have the freedom to get their administrative and reporting tasks done easily. For example, what used to take 1 minute for a 3-line item invoice

using the method entry method, now takes 30 seconds or less per invoice. Salespeople used to spend 2 hours just to generate reports and to manually encode sales invoices, but now needs merely 5 minutes or less to synchronize the information with the office server. Salespeople reported that they are able to garner more cash sales and gain more use of their time on the road, and in turn, increased market penetration and revenue for APC.

The system faced some initial challenges, which the APC team overcame. The team found issues with Bluetooth connectivity and battery charging, as well as durability of the tiny storage cards for each of the Intermec mobile computers. The team ensured that each Intermec mobile computer was properly charged and upgraded the system firmware to solve the Bluetooth connectivity issue, and invested in better quality, higher capability SD cards for all the mobile computers.

The team will be looking at providing GPRS (general packet radio service) connectivity to the mobile computers in the future, which would allow field salespeople to have corporate data access wirelessly across any location within the Philippines, and further reducing the "ties that bind" salespeople to the office. This would further increase field sales productivity for the salespeople in the future.

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