

Leading UK newsagent's use of store-based mobile technology helps deliver improved customer experience

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Head of Development
WHSmith

WHSmith has implemented an In-Store Scanning system from BT Expedite into its high street and travel outlets, to automate manual processes, improve staff productivity, and boost customer service

Client

WHSmith plc is one of the UK's leading retail groups, offering a wide range of newspapers, magazines, stationery, books, and entertainment products. It has over 540 high street stores as well as over 430 travel outlets at airports, train stations, hospitals, and motorway service areas, offering a tailored range of products for people on the move. In addition, WHSmith Direct provides an online customer service option via the internet 24 hours a day at: www.whsmith.co.uk. The company employs 17,000 staff serving over 1.2 million people in WHSmith stores daily. Around 70 per cent of the UK population visit the stores annually, purchasing around 75 million magazines and in excess of 40 million books.

Challenge

In today's challenging business environment, retailers are faced with increasing pressures from growth in online sales and changing consumer demand. To stay competitive they must reduce non-selling time and improve customer service. Mobile technologies provide a wide range of new opportunities to improve productivity whilst enhancing the customer experience. Simon Baker, Head of Development, WHSmith, explains: “At WHSmith we constantly review and evolve our retail offerings to address competitive challenges and meet customers' needs. We are always seeking new ways to make life easier in our stores, drive efficiency, and deliver outstanding customer service.”

The BT Expedite differentiators

The key reasons for the WHSmith choice of a BT Expedite solution were:

- BT's supplier management skills, commercial flexibility and retail experience make it an ideal partner
- BT Expedite's partnership with WHSmith, in providing its In-Store Scanning system to deliver measurable business benefits
- The end-to-end nature of BT Expedite's Managed Service solution clearly differentiates it from other potential suppliers
- BT focuses on supporting key business processes and developing the right business metrics, against the traditional break-fix model of most suppliers

Case study

WHSmith plc

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WHSmith sells more than 25,000 different product lines in its high street stores, and its travel stores typically offer more than 3,500 lines, making the task of stock control and merchandising complex yet critical to the business. The nature of the business means that deliveries arrive at all of the stores on a daily basis. Historically, in-store management of inventory has been done manually by verifying goods received against a paper-based inventory. This proved to be challenging for staff, particularly during busy times.

WHSmith turned to BT Expedite – the specialist retail division of BT – to help it find a solution. BT Expedite has worked in partnership with WHSmith for the past five years and provides the company with a managed service solution based on its Connected Retailer Store software. This extends to the supply and support of all software, hardware, peripherals, and in-store networks associated with electronic-point-of-sale (EPOS) systems.

For more information on BT Expedite visit:
www.btexpedite.com

Contact us on: 0121 329 8138
or email: btexpedite@bt.com

Offices worldwide

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Together with BT managed network services – including 2Mbps ADSL access links to high street stores – the BT Expedite solution provides an end-to-end, systems and networked IT services environment, to meet WHSmith's exact requirements.

Solution

BT Expedite proposed a new mobile In-Store Scanning system, using a handheld device to read product bar code information, interfacing directly with store and centralised merchandising applications. BT Expedite provided all project management, store training and documentation, and the Bluetooth in-store network, together with the hardware and software rollout. Employees can log delivery of goods and carry out a whole range of in-store processes and tasks such as an item price enquiry or order placement. The interface with a portable Bluetooth printer allows store staff to print shelf edge product and pricing labels, as well as scanning depleted shelf positions for replenishment.

Building on the success and experience in its high street stores, WHSmith has expanded the solution further to support its presence at Heathrow's new state-of-the-art Terminal 5. WHSmith has six units with 24 tills in Terminal 5, all of which were fully operational and extremely busy from day one. “As part of an initiative to innovate in the software field and trial new technology from BT Expedite, together we selected a handheld device that automates stock management functions such as shelf edge labelling and replenishment lists and also acts as a mobile till,” says Simon Baker.

The mobile device is a small, light, and robust handheld computer with a touch screen, similar to a large PDA. The technology is compatible with and has the same functionality as the company's fixed tills, making it easy to use and requiring minimal staff training. The device can operate as a till or a stock scanner, provide immediate access to online systems such as stock and price files, and run other customer service applications. It also contains the latest technologies, including wireless communications, to process payments and update live financial and stock records.

Store staff can queue-bust when noticing lines of customers forming. They can take their handheld devices out to customers and process cash and card transactions in real-time on the retail floor, even providing a receipt using a small printer attached to their belts. This reduces the length of queues and provides greater flexibility in how valuable floor space is used.

The solution benefits WHSmith by serving its customers faster and more efficiently. It removes the need for paper-based systems to check and replenish stock. Increased revenues are achieved by using mobile tills, allowing more space for higher levels of stock and preventing customer walkouts. Cost reductions are achieved through price changes being quickly and accurately implemented by scanning a barcode and instantly printing shelf edge labels. Greater staff productivity is achieved by more flexible and effective deployment to address peak periods and changes in workloads.

Following the successful implementation in its Terminal 5 stores, WHSmith is rolling out the solution to its stores in all UK major airports and railway stations. Simon Baker concludes: “Even excluding additional sales, the implementation of this in-store mobile technology has a payback of just 18 months, based purely on the increased efficiency of store staff, especially where there is a remote stock room, as in many of our travel outlets. The project has definitely achieved what it set out to do. Looking forward, we can further develop the software by building in new functionality. Ideas are already floating around on how we can further streamline processes and continue increasing staff efficiency.”

The BT Expedite solution

- BT Expedite In-Store Scanning System
- BT Expedite Managed Services Solution
- BT Expedite Connected Retailer Store Solution