

## **Reduce Labor With GPS Fleet Management**

This company improved customer service and reduced labor by 12% with the implementation of a GPS fleet tracking solution.

*Integrated Solutions*, August 2008

Written by: Sarah Howland

Shumate Mechanical provides residential, commercial, and industrial products and services in the air conditioning and heating industry in Atlanta and surrounding areas. In 2004, Shumate Mechanical began implementing a five-year plan to become electronic, paperless, and wireless. The company has implemented a document management solution and new back office system in working toward this goal.

The next objective in becoming electronic was to mobilize its workforce. Rising fuel costs added to Shumate's desire to accomplish this goal as quickly as possible. "Our customers don't care what sort of new technology we're using," says Frank Steinocher, CIO of Shumate Mechanical. "They only care about fast service and air conditioning that works. But using technology enables us to provide more efficient service."

The company's process for fleet management consisted of manually tracking routes. In Shumate's dispatch center, there was a large map of Atlanta split into four quadrants. One dispatcher was assigned to each quadrant, consisting of a team of 10 to 15 technicians, and was responsible for manually planning the routes of each technician. Each technician visited between 3 and 10 sites per day and had to call dispatch after each site to close the call, review parts used, and report revenue collected. The technician also kept a paper record of work completed and payments collected that had to be turned in at the end of each day. Shumate Mechanical wanted to find a solution that would offer inventory management, fleet tracking, and point of sale for field service using rugged mobile computers and GPS vehicle tracking integrated with Shumate's navigation software.

In the summer of 2007, the company began preparing an RFP. "We provide services across Georgia, and we needed a GPS provider that had the coverage and consistency to deal with the rural and metropolitan areas, as well as the Appalachian Mountains," says Steinocher. The GPS solution also had to be compatible with the Motorola MC70 handhelds the company chose for field technicians to use on-site. The Motorola handhelds give technicians access to useful information such as wiring diagrams, inventory of the nearest trucks, and real-time customer services history without having to call the dispatch center.

Shumate Mechanical chose Discrete Wireless for the GPS installation. Discrete Wireless complied with the company's RFP, and UAT (user acceptance testing) began with the GPS and handheld solutions in March 2008. The company spent two months using the solutions in the field to ensure that the GPS was providing the correct information. In May, GPS was added to the 50 vehicles that comprise the residential service division of Shumate Mechanical, with plans to roll it out to all 200 vehicles. Discrete Wireless

created a custom interface for compatibility between the GPS solution and Motorola handhelds.

### **ELIMINATE ON-SITE TRAINING COSTS WITH WEBINARS**

Shumate Mechanical's dispatch workers had to be trained on the function, codes, and alerts of the Discrete Wireless GPS solution. Shumate Mechanical decided on a train-the-trainer approach, and chose 'power users' (employees most comfortable with the new technology) to train other employees. The company set up a training room where each of the four field service teams were trained one at a time. Discrete Wireless was involved in the training process, which included on-site training and Webinars to minimize the cost of travel associated with on-site training. "Eliminating paper and forcing employees to function electronically, we have to expect the training process to be ongoing," says Steinocher. "Repetition is the key."

Using the Discrete Wireless GPS, when one service call is completed, that vehicle is automatically dispatched to another location rather than having to call in. This automated dispatch gives the dispatch center the ability to focus more attention on customer calls. Each technician uses the handheld to communicate with the dispatch center during each job. This visibility into the status of each job provides the dispatch center the ability to estimate a technician's arrival time for customers. For example, you can tell a customer how many times a unit has been repaired and how much money has been spent on it to suggest an upgrade.

Steinocher touts savings of \$3,000 per year per vehicle as a result of the increased efficiency made possible by this GPS solution. "That means that with just the 50 trucks we've already installed, we will save \$150,000 this year." In addition, Shumate Mechanical has reduced labor by 12% with the ability to track technician efficiency so closely. The company is aware of when each technician arrives at and departs from a job, and everywhere they are in between, which also increases safety because there is a record of detailed travel activity. Shumate Mechanical is continuing installation of the GPS solution on all vehicles and plans to customize the solution to track inventory usage.