Mobile Technology Enables Aquascutum Communications Objectives

Improving branch communications was a major driver for Aquascutum's recent upgrade of the Data Capture systems in all its concessions. They had previously been using a dedicated, bespoke terminal solution for sales and stock management provided by mobile scanning and printing specialists, BancTec AutoID FIRST. Whilst Aquascutum IT Manager, Matt Gailer describes it as "a nice bit of kit", after several years of good service it was time to upgrade. The new system would not only continue to provide the same high level of functionality but would also improve all-round communications by giving users access to email and the company's intranet.

Aquascutum's Objectives

In addition to improving branch-to-branch, and branch-to-head office communications, it was vital that the new system be quick and easy to set up, both in existing concessions and new ones. Matt Gailer comments, "When we take on a new concession, we want it up and running as soon as possible, so speed of deployment was essential. In addition, not being dependent upon, or having to pay for, host store technology was a key requirement."

Currently, staff requiring to use a fax machine may have to travel several floors away in a large department store. Email access would enable them to stay on the shop floor and maintain consistent staffing levels. The ability to view other concessions' stock reports over the intranet would benefit customer relations, as staff would be able to advise, instantly, whether one concession's out of stock item could be found in another, nearby branch.

Sophisticated reporting ability would enable concessions to record their own sales and produce various Z style reports – providing them with instant access to daily/weekly/monthly sales figures.
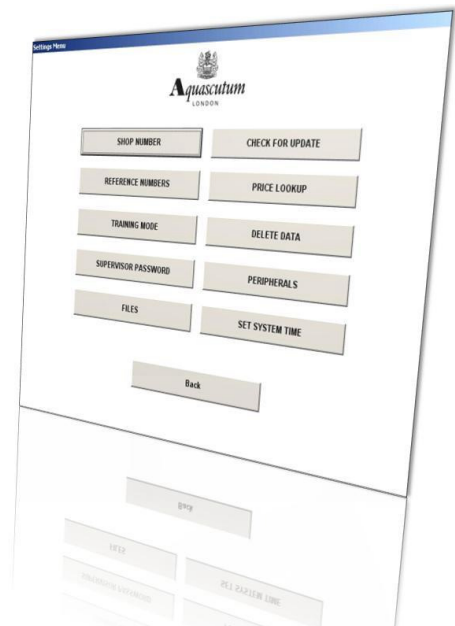
The Solution

The old system polled each store in turn, overnight, via landline, and the terminal was limited to the application that ran on it. BancTec suggested a completely wireless, tablet-based, portable solution. In addition to running sales and stock management, the new Windows terminal would also be, essentially, a mobile communications unit, with its own bar code scanner and portable printer.

According to Matt Gailer, "Staff can take the terminal around the concession space with them. They have a controlled view of the Head Office ERP software - a filtered business intelligence layer – through the intranet. The nature of our business means we like to connect with people frequently, improving communications via instant responses to queries, access to training materials, and a view of what is happening in the organisation."

The permanent intranet connection enables staff to view stock – both at their own concession and at others. The system records IBTs (inter-branch transfers), as well as recording stock received from general distribution. The email facility enables all reports to be sent electronically, too, eliminating the need for a PC in the concession. Future enhancements like the Aquascutum "look book" or e-catalogue will also be available via the intranet – this will allow concessions to view the entire product range and order from it.

The kit itself is an 8" tablet touch screen PC (although it is also available as a PDA-type device, , with a built-in scanner) and the printer and separate bar code scanner are connected to it via Bluetooth. Aquascutum chose the larger screened version as it is more suitable for showing fashion items in greater detail. Running on XP and CE Mobile it also employs the latest development tools including .net framework and visual studio.

Whilst the original EPOS device ran a proprietary operating system, the new version runs the same, industry standard applications as Aquascutum's head office. Any new tools employed there can easily be added to the tablet.

Dave Pennell, Technical Sales Manager of BancTec AutoID comments, "The system incorporates typical concession functionality, including, sales, refunds, stock taking, receipts, and IBTs. Price check and mark down re-labelling is also available on the system. All the daily data transfer is now accomplished over the 3G network via secure VPN connection. If there's a program update to an application, it can automatically update itself in the same way."

Matt Gailer concludes, "One of the most exciting things about the new system is its potential. Having moved away from a bespoke solution, we can now add future developments such as staff timesheets, digital signatures, and roll out other applications that will improve the information that staff can access."

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About BancTec AutoID FIRST

BancTec's AutoID FIRST division supplies high quality, hand-held terminals for mobile scanning and printing applications used in retail, warehousing, logistics, healthcare, and postal services. AutoID FIRST supplies only premium products from the leading manufacturers to provide solutions that combine the most modern and reliable devices available in the marketplace for every application.

BancTec has the complete package from applications and solutions to replacement units and repairs. Please call us for further information on 01753-776762 or contact us on autoidsales@banctec.co.uk.