

Orca Bay Reels In Fresh New Computers.

CASE STUDY

ORCA BAY. Freezing cold conditions are ideal for maintaining the quality of the Alaska salmon, Southern Pacific mahimahi, Indian Ocean albacore tuna and other fish that pass through the facilities of Orca Bay Foods. But they're not so great for handheld computers, whose performance and display can wilt under such conditions.



With ten years' experience under their belt, working with radio frequency and mobile computers, logistics manager Troy Roy and his colleagues set out to find replacement units that would both stand up to their harsh environment and deliver more functionality for workers.

"Our Teklogix equipment needed a lot of repair, and the service contract was getting expensive because the units were so old," says Roy. Orca Bay decided to replace its dated, narrowband RF network with an 802.11b-compliant Cisco network at the same time.

Even though Orca Bay was already reaping the accuracy and productivity benefits of RF-enabled bar code scanning, upgrading their computers and network had a clear bottom-line benefit for the Renton, Washington-based producer of table-ready, portion-controlled seafoods. Since deploying LXE VX7 vehicle-mounted computers and MX5 handhelds, worker productivity is way up; maintenance expenses have virtually disappeared; and labor costs have been cut 10 percent.



A Tough Unit for Harsh Conditions

Orca Bay's state-of-the-art, 15,000-square-foot FDA HACCP processing facility and four-million-pound racked cold storage enable the company to supply retail and food service customers quickly, with orders sometimes taken, processed, and shipped in a matter of hours. That means fish can pass in and out of its ambient-temperature docks, 40°F food-portioning plant and -20°F freezer quickly.

That can wreak havoc on handheld computer displays, which fog up with condensation. Orca Bay needed heaters for the screen and internal casing of its handhelds. The units are also subject to splashing,

necessitating sealed casing, and durable construction inside and out. "Our lifts run 20 hours, five days a week, and there is a lot of jarring," Roy says.

Beyond the ability to accommodate harsh conditions, Orca Bay needed to run Windows CE and have full-size touch screen monitors on vehicle-mounted units thereby enabling workers to perform additional functions right from the warehouse floor, rather than traveling back to stationary computers with unresolved issues.

"We wanted the ability for drivers to do inventory queries, look at histories, and print labels, without having to go back to the desk," says Roy, "while easily running the text-based ANSI emulation needed to communicate with their Datamax label printers and warehouse management system for standard transactions."

Also essential was the ability to upgrade the units to RFID decoding in the future, since Orca Bay supplies retailers including Wal-Mart.

Narrowing the Choices

Orca Bay tested handheld and forklift-mounted models from each of the major manufacturers and spoke to customers already using those units. "We put staunch timelines in the RFP because we wanted to install in our slow season and implement by Lent, a busy season for seafood producers," Roy says. "They were all stalling, waiting for new models to come out with CE flash memory" in addition to the heating elements. "LXE was first [to produce the right models] and they allowed us to keep the units longer for testing."

Testing of the LXE computers went particularly well. "The warehouse folks did a fine job of man-handling the units to test their durability," says Roy. "That made me confident they could hold up." The fact that screens didn't fog up made a big impression on operators, who

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were accustomed to condensation problems with the older units.

Those factors and the endorsement of a warehouse down the street led Orca to purchase LXE VX7 and MX5 wireless computers. Units are already deployed in Orca Bay's warehouse and distribution areas.

"The implementation was very plug-and-play," says Roy. "We needed very few modifications to the display unit."

Production and quality control departments will be deployed with additional terminals following modification to the host software. The VX7 units will be incorporated into a mobile cart and integrated with a scale.

Roy is pleased with the impact so far. "We've gained efficiency in picking, shipping and receiving, because we're able to get info right into operator's

hands. When information is right at their fingertips they more readily use it. If they can't find something, they can look it up right there." That has boosted productivity.

Eliminating repeat trips to a desk-based computer helped cut labor costs by at least 10 percent. "There was an immediate, tremendous impact in speed and reliability with the units and new network," Roy notes. The savings on maintenance for the old units easily paid for five years' worth of service contracts on the LXE units.

"We've also gained expandability, so we can easily integrate with other systems now," says Roy. "We tend to roll with proven products, and expect these will last us at least six or seven years."



About LXE Inc. LXE Inc. improves supply chain performance by applying over 35 years' experience developing wireless products and solutions. From wireless computers, advanced auto-ID technologies, and wireless network infrastructure, to our award-winning customer support - LXE's easy-to-use products are as reliable as the people who install and support them.

Based in Norcross, Georgia, LXE also offers a full range of turnkey services, including radio integration, project and installation management, network design, technical support, and repair services. LXE is a wholly-owned subsidiary of EMS Technologies, Inc. (NASDAQ: ELMG), and has offices worldwide. For more information, visit www.lxe.com.