

W.E. Dowds *Improves Tracking and Shipping* with LXE Real Time Data.

CASE STUDY

W.E. DOWDS is a family owned business operating under a long-term commercial agreement with Associated British Ports in the Port of Newport. Historically the company handled a variety of cargoes, but in the past five years they have dealt exclusively with the import and export of steel, and in particular, steel coils. There are seven warehouses in operation with a total area of 26,000 square metres and storage for 98,000 tons. The warehouses are served by rail as well as road and ten gantry cranes with a capacity ranging from 20 to 40 tons handle the coils. The total tons handled per year is approximately 600,000.



W.E. Dowds was growing rapidly, and a change in their existing processes and systems was needed to keep up with this growth. A wireless data collection system was in order. "We set ourselves the task of ensuring that the movement of data through our business was as efficient as the physical handling of steel," comments Charles Dowds, Managing Director.

Simple But Effective

W.E. Dowds utilizes both adjoining and remote warehousing facilities. Before the wireless solution was implemented, the company used radio messaging to contact the adjacent warehouses and sent faxes to remote facilities. Although this method was simple, there was no way of following through on load requests and it was time-consuming as users spent a lot of time checking information over the radio or walking to the fax machines.

All employees now carry LXE mobile computers giving them access to real-time data. Once the dispatch office has confirmed the order, the instructions are immediately updated on the computer. The computer tells the employee exactly which coils are wanted, the coil details and location, and the hauler picking up the load. When the coils are located, they are moved to the loading bay and scanned. The coil's status is easily identified by a colored mark on the screen. Colors change as coils are identified, moved and loaded.

This information can be accessed or amended by the dispatch office, to change the priority of an order. Conversely, an employee can also interrogate the system using his wireless computer. The ability to view coil locations has increased operator's involvement allowing the employee to self-plan a personal work schedule to bring forward coils most efficiently.

Selection Process

Employees were consulted from the early decision making process and were actively involved in selecting the computers. It was imperative that the wireless computers support a Windows® CE based program, multiple columns and lines of work instructions, and had a bright color display for easy viewing in any condition. The employees also needed a light but rugged unit.

In addition, the computers had to be suitable for outdoor use and able to cope with the tough conditions. "We knew that LXE had proven success in port environments," comments Charles Dowds, "and we were particularly impressed by the screen size and the color display of the MX3-CE."

Improved Customer Service

Customers are now offered a number of options to communicate with W.E. Dowds. Before the system was implemented, customers faxed or telephoned orders and information requests. Now customers can contact W.E. Dowds and review order data via a password-protected gateway via the internet.

A customer can use the system to request a coil-off (an instruction to deliver coils) via the internet, in which they can view coils in stock for selection. Once selected and submitted, an email confirmation is sent to the customer and an internal email is routed to the stock control department and dispatch office of W.E. Dowds so that transport can be arranged. The coils selected are then displayed on the LXE computers as instructions. Using this method, a customer is in effect giving W.E. Dowds warehouse personnel a direct order for specific coils for delivery while it tells employees the

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location of the coils. The coil off request can be made at any time, 24/7, without intervention from W.E. Dowds' employees. W.E. Dowds uses all available internet technologies to improve the process in the docks. Many customers value the ability to access information over the internet 24/7. They can view real-time details of their dispatches, a full-coil history and obtain instant reports in a format of their own choosing.

Improved Information Flow

Stock identification and location processes have also improved following the implementation of the new system. Before LXE computers were implemented, a paper based system was used to track stock. When coils first came off a vessel they were ticked off against a list, any damage was noted and had to be manually entered later. Finally, a reference number was written on the coil to enable tracking.

Although employees knew that a coil was in a specific warehouse, they only had a rough idea of the coils actual location. Knowledge was personal and queries often took days to resolve. Now when a coil comes off a vessel, the bar code of the supplier is scanned and checked via the wireless network against coil data held on the database. When the match is found, a barcode label is printed from the wireless printer carried by the employee and attached to the coil. Any damage is noted on the computer and uploaded to the server. When the coil is moved inside the warehouse, the row number is entered onto the computers. From this point forward, the coil can be tracked by warehouse and

location. Regular stocktaking checks are also carried out with ease since the implementation. Previously stocktaking took two days per warehouse, and involved hiring of subcontractors who were given lists of coils to find. Warehouse operators now do stock takes by simply scanning the barcodes and the whole process can be completed in 3 hours without extra labor. A variance report can then be printed out for analysis. Office staff have also benefited from the introduction of the new system. Routine jobs such as typing packing lists, collating and posting "tickets" to customers, and printing and faxing stock and delivery reports are all now offered to customers via the web. Packing lists are uploaded automatically.

In addition, by allowing customers direct access to data, employees are freed from sending reports or dealing with routine inquiries, allowing them more time to deal with customer service issues.

Key Issue-Vehicle Loading Times

In conclusion, W.E. Dowds has measured the success of the wireless installation in several areas, but has mostly focused on one issue that customers have identified as the key performance indicator; the time it takes to load a vehicle. W.E. Dowds regards haulage supply as a critical company resource, and in light of the Working Time Directive they wanted to improve their performance in this area. Even with a greatly increased number of lorries handled, the project has been a success.



About LXE Inc. LXE Inc. improves supply chain performance by applying over 30 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.