HipLink

Loblaw Companies Case Study

INTRODUCTION: If you've ever wondered how today's supermarkets, offering a virtually infinite stock of products were born, look to Loblaw Companies Limited. Canada's largest food distributor was founded in 1919 as one of the first "self serve" grocery stores. This progressive idea significantly reduced overhead and prices, and allowed for rapid expansion to more than 80 stores in just over a decade.

Almost half a century later, the company continued to break new ground in cutting prices by introducing the concept of private labels with its famous "No Name" brand. That brand is now called "President's Choice," and is considered the most successful private brand in the world. Today, Loblaw employs over 134,000 employees in 1000 stores, and is one of Canada's largest private employers.

As is the case with many companies known for pioneering innovation in their industries, Loblaw is committed to using advanced technology systems to assure a continually productive operating environment. This study discusses Loblaw's use of HipLink Software's HipLink wireless communication software to keep key personnel informed of a range of critical processes, from inventory to workflow.

NEED: Loblaw's technical support group monitors and runs the company's numerous business process applications, including software used by the inventory, distribution, and billing departments. Should any of these systems fail, the support group must communicate as quickly as possible with key personnel, especially those in the distribution center to avoid delays in order fulfillment. The technical support group had historically relied on manual pages and phone calls to communicate, but they ultimately decided it simply wasn't an

adequate method for such time sensitive tasks. The company needed a wireless system that rapidly communicated critical information and, as will be discussed in more detail, could demonstrate its ability to scale with Loblaw as the company expanded its use of wireless technology.

PROBLEM: Loblaw employs sophisticated distribution methods that assure customers' favorite products are always in stock - from "Just in Time" fulfillment and delivery, to advanced order processing systems. The company's 40 technical support employees are in constant contact with distribution center personnel, keeping them apprised of any interruptions or downtime of critical inventory systems. Likewise, distribution center workers alert the support group of issuesthat indicate an inventory application is down, such as feeds not coming in for pick lists.

"Communicating through manual paging and phone calls is obviously a time consuming process," noted Carl Korody, Loblaw's IT Systems coordinator. "And in our business, any delay in order processing can have a 'ripple effect' on the whole distribution operating environment."

Carl continued, "For example, one of our systems takes real time snapshots of existing inventory. If that system should go down, our distribution center people can quickly run into problems. It's essential that we communicate with them as fast as possible about such issues, and manual paging and phone calls were not offering this in a satisfactory time span." What's more, the paging software Loblaw was using did not provide message status, so the IT support group had no way of knowing if a page didn't go through — unless they got a call from the distribution center asking, "What's going on?"

"Loblaw wanted to deploy a wireless communication system that would eliminate these problems, but not result in more interruptions as we got it up to speed," Carl said. "In other words, we wanted an advanced system that didn't require an advanced implementation process."

But when Carl's team reviewed a wireless messaging application that billed itself as one of the industry's leading solutions, they were concerned this might not be possible.

"This particular product emphasized its enterprise-wide platform. and certainly even its standard package was designed for a large number of users and departments. But a complex integration was more than we were prepared to take on at that point, and we did not want to test a new messaging application on an enterprise-wide level," Carl recalled.

SOLUTION: Loblaw needed a wireless messaging system that could quickly integrate with key business processes and rapidly communicate critical information. A more basic package suitable for an initial testing environment was desired, but this solution would need to have the scalability to easily add new users, departments, and applications. Enter HipLink, HipLink Software's wireless communication software.

"Almost immediately, we realized HipLink offered all the functionality of the other product we evaluated, and more — an opportunity to quickly launch a simple, straightforward solution first that would solve our immediate problems," Carl said.

Right from the beginning, Loblaw's support team was impressed with HipLink' ease of implementation and use. Carl stated HipLink' installation process was "smooth as silk."

"HipLink Software has a very responsive technical support team, and they've also done a terrific job with the documentation they provide. People sometimes don't consider this issue until after they've purchased a system, but the level of clarity in supporting documentation is important," noted Carl. "HipLink provides a very clear, logical layout for the HipLink manual. Every possible question is answered and easy to understand."

HipLink' fast install produced the desired results, as the wireless software's group and department messaging feature eliminated one-at-a-time pages and calls. Reporting capabilities tracked every message sent and even measured carrier and messaging protocol performance.

These features have effectively reduced response time to distribution center issues to an average of 15 seconds. Currently, 250 users make use of HipLink to send and receive approximately 100 messages per day — numbers that Loblaw expects to grow. Carl concluded, "In a nutshell, HipLink lets us communicate a lot of information — a lot more effectively. Our next step will be to integrate HipLink with our Remedy Help Desk so we can send and receive wireless alerts of trouble tickets. We're pleased with the flexibility and results we've seen so soon from the software."

OVERVIEW

Business Requirements

Loblaw's technical support team and distribution center depended on manual pages and phone calls to communicate with each other about downed order processing systems, batch job changes, and other issues. This time consuming process needed to be replaced with a reliable wireless solution that could rapidly communicate information to many people at once and verify if messages went through. A complex implementation that risked business interruption would not be acceptable. Finally, the chosen solution would need to scale with Loblaw's expanded usage of wireless messaging.

HipLink Wireless Alert Notification

- Group messaging features allow communication between multiple departments
- Reporting capabilities track message status
- Does not require complex enterprise-wide installation, but new users and departments are easily added
- Can integrate with any number of business process applications, including BMC's Remedy Help Desk

Key Benefits

- Fast incident response time
- Real time message status
- Smooth installation prevents business interruptions
- Flexible solution provides both desktop and application messaging

HipLink Software
408 399-6120
800 524-7503 Toll Free
HLsales@hiplink.com
www.hiplink.com