CASE STUDY:
RIX PETROLEUM

Rix dates back to 1873 when a sea Captain and Merchant Adventurer called Robert Rix traded out of the Port of Hull. Robert Rix started in business as a shipbuilder, building small coastal craft on the south bank of the River Tees in Stockton.

The company's first major expansion occurred at the end of the Second World War with the easing of wartime restrictions on the sale of oil and petrol. On the 1st January 1947 Robert Rix's eldest son John Robert Rix, the Grandfather of the present Chairman, formed J.R. Rix and Sons with a working capital of £7,000 and one motor ship. Supplying agricultural and commercial diesel customers throughout Yorkshire's East Riding; "old man Robert" as he was fondly called also established petrol filling stations in the Hull area.

Fast forward to the present day and Rix Petroleum is one of the oldest remaining family-owned, independent fuel distributors in the UK. The company distributes and retails petroleum products to homes and businesses from local branches located throughout Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Mercia, Midlands, North East, East Anglia and Essex. Rix also have three fuel depots throughout Scotland, in Grangemouth, Aberdeen and Montrose.

ENHANCING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The fuel distribution system at Rix Petroleum is fundamental in maintaining their high levels of customer service.

Their previous IT system had served the company well for a number of years, but did not provide the flexibility to support future company growth. As a result, Rix were looking to source a new system to optimise the entire fuel delivery process.

> The benefit of the new system was that it allowed us to provide a single and enhanced means of communication between ourselves and the driver. Our investment meant we had an efficient way of communicating to the driver and the ability to receive communication back in real time which was not possible with a manual paper based system.
>
> **Duncan Lambert, Managing Director for Rix Petroleum**

SOLUTION

Designed specifically for the petroleum sector, Rix selected a new system from TouchStar Technologies. The core of TouchStar's 'FuelStar' system is P.O.D. software that is designed to digitise the entire process from loading to delivering and electronic confirmation.

The system utilises ATEX certified in-cab computers which fulfilled Rix's requirement for a device with a large driver friendly touch-screen. The in-cab computers were ideal for the Rix operation as they provided a robust, real-time link between the vehicle and the CODAS back office system.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOLUTION

Rix Petroleum worked in partnership with TouchStar and CODAS to ensure that the original system delivery dates were achieved. Sam Stanley, IT Project Leader for the new system implementation explains, "Considering this was a brand new system for us, we were very impressed with how smoothly it went when the system went live. This was helped significantly by the comprehensive induction that took place, enabling the drivers to fully buy into the new system".

HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

Pre-shift

Sales orders are taken by phone and entered into the codas back office, which allows for the job to be allocated to a specified driver. Building loads is simple. Orders can be rapidly entered then scheduled and sent directly to the driver on the touchstar in-cab computers. Rix now has the ability to view the deliveries via the fuelstar mapping console which enables them to consolidate deliveries more effectively.

The driver of the vehicle is required to complete the start of shift procedure before commencing the deliveries for the day. Prior to gaining access to the trip details the driver is required to complete a vehicle safety check. The safety checks are designed around dvsa standards and are configurable on a per client basis.

Vehicle loading

As part of the log on procedure, a totaliser reading is taken from the meter providing automatic verification data of the truck and stock status. Upon completion, the driver is instructed by the on-board computer what grade and volume of fuel to load onto the vehicle and confirm loading into each compartment of the vehicle. The system also captures the bol (bill of laden) numbers supplied by the loading gantry system.

Fuel delivery

Upon completion, the delivery information is updated on the touchstar in-cab computer producing a delivery confirmation. The driver can hand the device to the customer to confirm the delivered quantities and sign on screen. Connectivity to the in-cab printer then produces a signed receipt for the customer. Using gprs communication, the delivery data is transmitted to the back office providing real time proof of delivery.

Speaking about the benefit of the system, duncan lambert, Managing Director comments, "confirming the customer name, capturing the signature and communicating it to the back office in real time significantly speeded up the invoicing procedure. The system enabled us to respond to customer invoicing queries quicker which ultimately benefited our business with improved cash flow."

Real time improvements

The system now delivers performance information relating to number of deliveries per day, distance travelled per vehicle and volume of fuel delivered. The real time information that the system provides has been invaluable with respect to allowing rix to study and compare vehicle performance and overall delivery efficiency. Duncan lambert continues, "we can physically see the improvements that the system has made to our operation and this is a big step forward in the business. We have absolute confidence in the accuracy of the data we receive back from the system".

THE NEXT PHASE

Rix are continually examining ways in which their systems can provide even more benefits to the company and their customers. Having run the TouchStar system for a lengthy period of time, the company were diligent in re-examining the competitive marketplace.

TouchStar hardware and software solutions are specifically designed for the fuel distribution industry. The company has invested heavily in the development of a new range of terminals based around the Android operating system.

This platform offers multiple technical benefits over previous generation Windows CE devices and, as a progressive organisation, Rix readily accepted TouchStar's suggestion to upgrade their fleet hardware. The new devices will continue to be an integral part of the fuel delivery operation and offer significant additional peripheral benefits.

For example, the in-cab computers will now operate as phone devices which will preclude Rix having to invest in, and maintain, separate SIM cards. The company will also be able to run additional business applications directly on the in-cab device including HSE and training-related software.

Duncan Lambert concludes, "We expect to avail ourselves of many additional benefits to the business based on the Android OS and the new FuelStar application. The system creates a great opportunity for Rix to expand the connectivity and visibility between the truck, product, driver and the planning office."
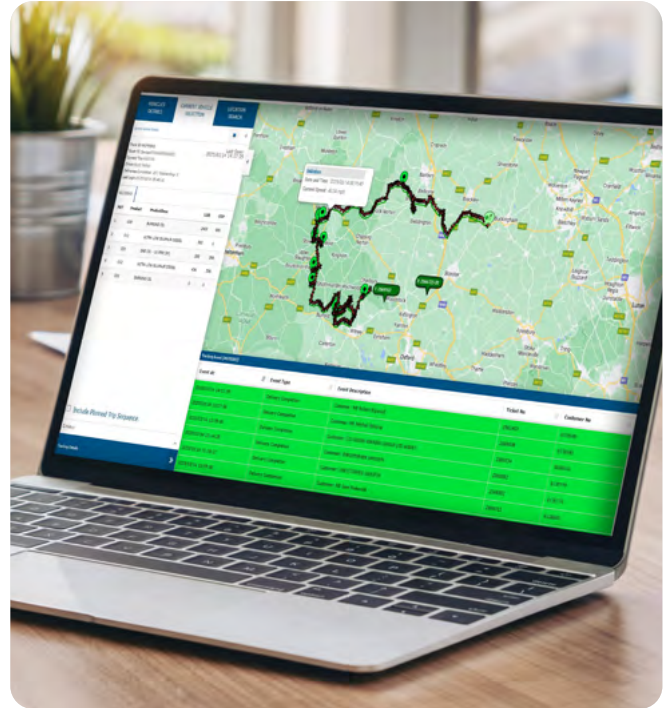
> Although we were not dissatisfied with the performance of FuelStar in any way, we were obligated to ensure that our business is operating with the most effective systems that we can acquire. As such, we conducted a thorough re-evaluation exercise which included the trialling of alternative suppliers in certain depots. I'm happy to say that our original decision to adopt the TouchStar solution was fully vindicated as it is clearly still the market leader.
>
> **Duncan Lambert, Managing Director for Rix Petroleum**

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Securing the Logistics of People and Product