



Improving productivity among repair technicians

FACTS

Customer: Safelite® AutoGlass, a US-based windscreen replacement specialist.

Challenge: Safelite was looking to replace their existing paper-based dispatching system with one that uses the advantages of wireless technology to improve their field technicians' productivity and customer service, and streamline administrative processes.

Solution: Safelite selected the ExpeData® Enterprise Digital Writing platform, based on Anoto technology for the creation of its own solution, Mobile Resource Management (MRM).

Benefits: Each technician can complete one extra job per day. A 25% reduction of jobs that have to be cancelled. An 80% reduction of work order paper used. Centralized deployment to a diverse population of field technicians all over the US. Met business requirements in a cost-effective way. Realigned business process.

“One of the most interesting benefits that was unplanned in this process is the “Wow!” factor that customers experience using the pens. When customers see that we are willing to invest in creative technology in order to provide the highest level of service possible, it creates a priceless environment of trust and security.”

Nate Beckman, MRM Project Manager, Safelite

Background

The US-based company, Safelite® AutoGlass, employs more than 3600 field technicians to repair and replace windscreens for over three million United States customers annually.

Previously, Safelite's process consisted of dispatching technicians and providing administrative reporting manually. Each day, at the beginning of their shift, technicians were required to drive to a central location to pick up work orders and return at the end of their shift to drop off their completed paperwork. Therefore, the only way a staff member could alert the technician about work order changes was to call him on his two-way Nextel BlackBerry® smartphone. These calls were distracting to the technician, especially

if he was in the middle of a job. “Commonly, work order changes occurred (e.g. changes to appointment time and contact telephone numbers) and happened any time of day”, says Nathan Beckman, MRM Project Manager, Safelite. “For records purposes, the staff had to update the most recent work order with new information as soon as they received it. On average, work orders were printed five times a day, creating wasted paper.”

Moreover, the process required numerous steps to obtain approval prior to beginning the work and to receive final authorization to process the payment. This delayed the ability to issue claims to insurance companies and to keep track of the billing cycle at the home office.

The new solution

Safelite wanted to create a custom solution that could manage field tasks wirelessly – without the multiple steps, phone calls and paperwork previously needed. The solution needed to be easily deployed, scalable, reliable, cost-effective and minimally impact the technicians. After researching and evaluating several technology options, including tablet PCs, signature pads, docked and undocked applications, as well as internally developed applications, Safelite selected the ExpeData® Enterprise Digital Writing platform, based on Anoto Digital Pen and Paper technology for creating its solution.

Europe

Anoto Group AB
Phone: +46 46-540 12 00

US

Anoto Incorporated
Phone: +1-508 983 9550

Japan

Anoto-Maxell K.K.
Phone: +81 (0)3-5774 1212

“ExpeData provided the most mature platform as well as the partnership and commitment to make this solution possible”, says Chris DeLong, Director of Information Technology, Field Systems, Safelite.

Safelite’s new Mobile Resource Management (MRM) solution is comprised of several components, including ExpeData Enterprise Digital Writing platform, ExpeData-provided thermal paper rolls with Anoto’s unique dot pattern, Anoto Digital Pens, portable thermal printers, BlackBerry smartphones, GPS tracking & mapping services and credit card processing capabilities.

How the solution works in practice

- Safelite technicians use BlackBerry smartphones to clock in and receive work orders for the day. They can start routing right from home, saving time and fuel. When the technicians click on the first job of the day, the customer information comes up. The technicians will then call and let the customer know that they are on their way. The driving directions provided by the GPS will give them an estimated time of arrival.
- When the technicians arrive at the customer’s site, a job preparation screen comes up on their BlackBerry smartphones. They enter the required information, which triggers a work pre-authorization form that also includes the estimate. Using a portable thermal printer, the technicians print the form on paper with Anoto’s dot pattern.
- The customers sign the authorization form with an Anoto Digital Pen. The pen writes like a standard ink pen, but contains a tiny infrared camera and processor which enables it to “read” and digitise words as they are written on the form. The data is transmitted via Bluetooth® to the BlackBerry smartphone where it is processed and then routed, using ExpeData’s routing software to Safelite’s Enterprise Digital Writing server.
- Once the windscreen is replaced, the technicians hit a button on their smartphones and Safelite’s tender shows up on the screen. The technicians swipe

the customer’s credit card and receive approval on the spot. They print the receipt and the customer signs it with the digital pen. The pen transmits the data to the BlackBerry smartphone and then on to Safelite’s server.

- As a result, all paperwork is left with the customer: From Safelite’s perspective, it is a paperless system, even though there is a piece of paper (digital) in the solution.

User-friendly solution

Safelite understood that technology was only one challenge that their IT team would face when deploying a new way of doing work. They knew that changing people’s work habits could be met with resistance. However, due to the user-friendliness of the Anoto Digital Pen, the technicians were able to start using it quickly, which accelerated their adoption of the new technology.

“There was some expectation that they (the pens) would be fragile or would be lost in the hectic nature of the day for our technicians. This was proven not to be an issue”, says Chris DeLong, Director of Information Technology, Field Systems, Safelite.

Improved productivity

The new solution also includes GPS tracking on each work order. It sends longitude and latitude information from each technician’s BlackBerry smartphone to the home office. And if a technician can’t find a customer location, a GPS link in the work order will provide a detailed map of directions.

“Because of the GPS tracking, we can monitor and track our technicians during the day to ensure we’re using our resources in the best way possible. We’ve found a technician’s overall productivity has increased by 7% due to this approach. Technicians are also communicating more effectively with customers, which has led to a drop of almost 25% in the number of jobs that have to be cancelled or rescheduled”, says Rod Ghani, Vice President of IT, Safelite.

Safelite estimated that the previous dispatching process took up to four phone calls to complete one work order. The new process is less time-consuming; Safelite is able to assign one more job to be completed per

day to each technician.

“Let’s also remember that while the increase in productivity has been tremendous, there is also a reduction in the back-office handling of the paper. We no longer have to mail the forms to the home office, open and microfiche the work order and then store the original. This savings is compounded by the fact that the transfer of the image is instantaneous. Without the ExpeData/Anoto solution this would not have been possible”, says Chris DeLong, Director of Information Technology, Field Systems, Safelite.

Since the “paperwork” has become digital and there is immediate access to documentation, centralized customer service has improved. Now, customer inquiries are able to receive attention within the same day and the work orders are processed nearly in real-time.

Environment-friendly solution

Another benefit is the reduction in driving time by the technicians since they no longer have to drive to the office each morning or evening. The new dispatching process has thus resulted in major fuel savings, contributing to Safelite’s “Green” mission. Speaking of going green: “Safelite has reduced the amount of work order paper used in MRM markets by 80%. In the previous model, a work order would need to be re-printed each time a material change occurred. This averaged 5 printouts per work order – printouts before a technician would have even taken the form out on the job”, says Nate Beckman, MRM Project Manager, Safelite.

Future plans

Another benefit is the high-tech impression that Safelite leaves with its customers.

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The project began rolling out in early 2008. By the end of 2008, Safelite had deployed 2,500 pens and, due to recent acquisitions, the total user base approached 3,600 in early 2009. Safelite has committed to a deployment of the solution in all 50 states in the US. Furthermore, Safelite is a part of Belron SA, the worldwide leader in auto glass replacement and repair. The MRM solution, of which the pen is a cornerstone, is seen as a global best practice and is a candidate to spread internationally in the coming years. Moreover, MRM is just the beginning for the ExpeData Enterprise Digital Writing platform.

"The most important point to me is that this is an enabling technology. It not only provided us with a technology to go paperless, but it opens up the possibilities for other solutions as we look to leverage the untapped potential", says Chris DeLong, Director of Information Technology, Field Systems, Safelite.

Partner profile:

ExpeData, LLC is the global leader in enterprise digital writing through the use of the ExpeData® Enterprise Digital Writing platform solution and Anoto Digital Pen and Paper technology. The ExpeData Enterprise Digital Writing platform allows immediate capture, transfer and interpretation of handwritten data from mobile users and routes it back to the company's back-end systems. In 2008, ExpeData was awarded the Golden Pen Award by Anoto in the category "Most valuable marketing and sales partner" for establishing an international partner network addressing the needs of large enterprise customers.

www.expedata.net

Customer profile:

Safelite® AutoGlass is a US-based company that was founded in 1947. Throughout 60 years of service, the company has grown from a single store in Wichita, Kansas, to a national automobile glass provider, serving more than 3.5 million customers per year. Safelite's goal is to be America's first choice for quality auto repair and replacement solutions. Through industry-leading 24-hour instant scheduling, convenient in-shop or mobile service, top-of-the-line materials and SafeTech™ certified technicians; Safelite AutoGlass offers superior customer service, value and quality.

www.safelite.com