



Better cash flow and improved customer service with Digital Pen and Paper

“Within thirty minutes of the completed job sheet coming in, our service team can now make a proactive call to the customer. If there’s equipment that needs attention, or needs to be added to, moved or replaced, we can act much faster and get the parts ordered...”

Diane Marjoram, Service Manager for Channel Safety Systems

Background

The emergency equipment supplied by Channel Safety Systems is critical to life and safety. From fire alarms to emergency lighting and nurse call systems, the company has a thirty year track record of designing, manufacturing, distributing, commissioning and maintaining equipment that has to be completely dependable where compliance is key, and lives are at stake.

A nationwide team of ten service engineers carries out surveys, consultancy, installation and maintenance. Working from vans in the

field, they are often called on to undertake commissioning and maintenance on behalf of major electrical wholesalers.

The job sheets completed by engineers are of vital importance in keeping an accurate record of work carried out, continuing to satisfy accreditation by BAFE (a British organization dedicated to improving standards in fire protection), and triggering the invoicing process. Previously, four separate forms were filled in and faxed back to the office from engineers' homes in the evening. But this process was fraught with problems – from poor legibility to missing sheets and delays of several days.

Because the paperwork was slow in catching up with the job, service coordinators didn't have information on hand to answer customers' calls about progress or rescheduling. In some cases it could take weeks from job completion to invoice. And sometimes the company had to spend up to £100 on express deliveries to meet their 24 hour response commitment.

The new solution – how it works

Channel Safety Systems set about looking for a better way of improving both cash flow

FACTS

Customer: Channel Safety Systems, a UK-based supplier of emergency equipment.

Challenge: To speed up the invoicing process and improve customer service.

Solution: A digital pen and paper solution provided by Destiny, based on Anoto technology. With the solution, data can be sent instantly from the field via a mobile phone.

Benefits: Invoicing within the same day means better cash flow. Improved customer service.

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and customer service. PDAs were considered as an option, but they proved too expensive and not appropriate for a multi-page form. A key requirement was to keep things simple to avoid major changes to working practices or the need for training. Destiny's digital pen, which is based on Anoto technology, emerged as the most cost-effective answer.

An early task, as part of a process review, was to consolidate the previous four separate sheets into one digitized four page booklet incorporating a front sheet, maintenance record, commission handover and decibel level. More tick boxes were included to make completion even quicker and easier.

Now, after engineers have carried out each job, they write out the form in the usual way, but using a digital pen. Ticking a "send" box on the form automatically transmits the hand written details on the form from the pen via Bluetooth® in their mobile phones to Destiny's secure servers, where Vision Objects MyScript hand writing recognition software converts the hand written notes to data. Once they have first verified the job number on their handsets. Only one paper document is needed, and this is left with the customer.

The job number is the unique identifier that marries up the information recorded in the field with pre-printed data on the individual job sheet – customer name, address, contact, job number and instructions. This data is drawn from the company's in-house service management system – so when the completed form is transmitted, converted by Destiny and sent on, it goes straight into the relevant customer's job file as a graphical PDF which contains all the information about a particular job. The process is so fast that the completed form is back in the main system within a minute of being sent by the field engineer.

The benefits

"The new process has proved really beneficial. Using a unique job number and having the PDF sent back to our database so fast means that we can just click on the job sheet and instantly see all the details we need", says Diane Marjoram, Service Manager for Channel Safety Systems.

But the real rewards of the system, according to Diane Marjoram, are the dramatic effects that it has had on speeding up invoicing

and improving customer service.

"Within thirty minutes of the completed job sheet coming in, our service team can now make a proactive call to the customer. If there's equipment that needs attention, or needs to be added to, moved or replaced, we can act much faster and get the parts ordered. We're fully up-to-date with what's going on, and so are our customers. We've gone from poor visibility to being able to provide a brilliant service. Our paperwork is so well controlled now that we can concentrate on what really matters to our customers", she says.

Same day invoicing is also a reality now. This is a real boost for cash flow, and a big improvement from the days when invoicing was held up while staff waited for faxes to be sent through. There is now a clear and full audit trail based on each job number.

Getting rapid information about completed jobs has brought many other benefits. More time is freed up for planning, and less spent travelling. Engineers are more quickly free to go on to the next job – and are often able to go back to the customer the same day or first thing next day to carry out further repairs or to install new equipment. Ownership of service issues is better, and can be carried out by a smaller number of coordinators. Standard deliveries can now be used instead of express carriers.

Best of all, Channel Safety Systems has been able to take advantage of all this without any upfront capital cost. A five year lease and a monthly bill of just £15 per user covers the use of digital pens as well as form printing, licensing, hosting and support.

Partner profile:

Based in Guildford, Surrey, Destiny is a leading global provider of Anoto Digital Pen and Paper technology. It is the UK's leader in mobile data communications.

www.destinyplc.com

Customer profile:

Channel Safety Systems was founded in 1976 and has consistently provided high class products to a broad range of customers. The company specializes in the design, manufacture, supply and servicing of emergency lighting, fire detection, nurse call and Disability Discrimination Act products and systems.

www.channelsafety.co.uk

Anoto Digital Pen and Paper technology

A digital pen looks and feels like a normal ball-point pen. However, it contains an integrated digital camera, an advanced image microprocessor and a Bluetooth® transmitter. Any paper can be used with a digital pen, if the Anoto dot pattern is added to the layout before printing the paper. The Anoto dot pattern consists of numerous black dots that can be read by the digital pen, but are almost invisible to the naked eye. The pen reads the pattern and registers what and where the user writes.