An automated field service management solution helps Fujifilm increase productivity and service level agreement compliance.

Automation Puts Field Service In Focus

by Brian Albright

Once strictly thought of as a cost center by many manufacturers, field service departments have evolved into a major source of revenue and, increasingly, a key part of a company's value proposition. A successful field service operation, though, depends on effectively delivering service in a timely, efficient, and consistent manner.

For Valhalla, NY-based Fujifilm U.S.A., building a world-class service division meant deploying a best-of-breed customer relationship management (CRM) and field service automation system that has helped the company improve productivity while increasing revenue and providing additional value to customers.

Fujifilm provides imaging and photofinishing equipment to retail and laboratory customers across the country. Under the direction of service industry veteran Ron Santos, Fujifilm's VP of technical service and support, the company has expanded its service offerings to nonimaging equipment categories as well. When equipment malfunctions, the company is expected to rapidly resolve the issue either remotely or by deploying a field technician to the location.

The company had developed its own help desk and field service software solution, but it had a number of limitations. Management could not easily generate reports on key performance data, making it difficult to establish and maintain service agreements with customers. Supporting and expanding this solution to add functionality would have diverted valuable IT resources that Fujifilm increasingly needed for other mission-critical projects.

"Our service business was growing in a lot of directions, and we began bringing on some larger accounts," says Steve Pagano, VP of field operations for Fujifilm. "We needed additional features in the system, but in trying to drive the development of those features, we realized we were trying to reinvent the wheel. There were systems already out there that appeared to have the functionality we required."

"We needed a system that provided a wide range of functionality across all our areas of business, yet was versatile in handling customers that had different requirements," adds Virginia Mortun, IT manager.

Fujifilm needed a system that could manage the entire service experience, including the help desk, contract management, and inventory management. The company needed a system that included a mobile computing solution for the technicians and the ability to track the service history for each customer, along with data mining and reporting capabilities. They selected the Alliance product suite from Astea International.

Installation Profile

Technology User: Fujifilm U.S.A., headquartered in Valhalla, NY, provides imaging and photofinishing equipment to retail and laboratory customers across the country. Under the direction of service industry veteran Ron Santos, Fujifilm's VP of technical service and support, the company has also expanded its service offerings to nonimaging equipment categories.

Problem: Although Fujifilm had developed its own help desk and field service software solution, it had a number of limitations. Yet, Fujifilm could not afford to assign valuable IT resources to support and expand this software solution. The company needed a mobile computing system that could manage the entire service experience, including the help desk, contract management, and inventory management, and provide the ability to track the service history for each customer.

Solution: Fujifilm selected the Alliance product suite from Astea International. The company achieved an ROI in one year, improved parts tracking in the field, and reduced the time technicians spent on administrative duties. Also, Fujifilm expanded its service revenues and increased its service contract business to encompass approximately 87% of Fujifilm's customers without having to hire a substantial number of new employees.

END-TO-END SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Fujifilm deployed the Astea solution in 2001, opting to implement the entire solution at once in all loca-

Photos by Jack Miller

Steve Pagano, VP of field operations, and Virginia Mortun, IT manager for Fujifilm, state that by implementing Alliance product suite from Astea International, the company achieved an ROI in one year by improving field technician efficiency.

"We can now provide customers with data that shows them how much their service contract is saving them based their actual repair history."

Steve Pagano, Fujifilm U.S.A.

tions (currently covering more than 400 field service technicians and 180 help desk representatives) rather than taking a phased approach. The solution was deployed on SQL Server 2005 Enterprise Edition servers and is fully integrated with the company's SAP enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

"If we had installed things separately, we would have had to integrate Astea with our existing systems, which presented a number of challenges," Mortun says. "Implementing everything at once was a huge task, but we were better off doing it that way."

The IT team developed a comprehensive project plan in conjunction with subject matter experts (SMEs) from each functional area of the company (help desk, parts, service, etc.). Using Fujifilm's data, the SMEs worked with the system in a test environment and helped train their colleagues during the deployment. "We were able to make sure the users were ready and trained and also to prove that our assumptions about how the system would work were correct," says Pagano.

When a service call comes in to the help desk, customers initially speak to a non-technical representative who gathers information about the problem and enters it into the Astea system. "They get a basic description of the issue, verify the location, and open up a service call that goes into a queue," says Pagano. "Those calls are prioritized based on that information, as well as the type of equipment involved and the service contract entitlement."

Astea manages an escalation process that involves having help desk agents or consulting technicians call the customer back to try and resolve the issue over the phone (or through a remote connection to the equipment, depending on the customer). These consulting technicians review the calls and, if a service technician has to be dispatched, will verify the parts needed for the repair, in addition to those in the technician's trunk stock.

A question list built into Astea guides this process, and service representatives and technicians are able to tap into Fujifilm's library of thousands of technical bulletins for additional information.

If a technician must be dispatched, Astea Dynamic Scheduling Engine (DSE) reviews the skill sets of the technicians in the field, their location (based on GPS tracking data from their vehicles), the estimated length of the service call and their travel time, and automatically identifies which personnel should be deployed to the customer site (see sidebar).

Information about the service call is sent to the technician's mobile phone or BlackBerry device via text message. If the technician accepts the job, they can wirelessly download additional information about the assignment on their Dell laptops and update the status of the call in real time using their phones. "Once the repair is completed, the technician enters everything they have done on to the laptop (what parts were used, a description

Dynamic Scheduling Aids Dispatch Operations

Even after deploying its field service automation solution, Fujifilm's dispatching operations relied on a significant amount of manual intervention. The company utilized Astea International dispatch module, but it did not have all of the functionality needed to completely automate the process. "We were using a combination of their product and our in-house written products," says IT Manager Virginia Mortun. "We were downloading the calls from Astea and putting all of the information in front of our dispatchers. They had to sort through it manually and make a decision as to what technician to dispatch to which job."

Fujifilm U.S.A. uses Astea Dynamic Scheduling Engine for dispatching and scheduling field engineers.

In December 2008, Fujifilm implemented Astea Dynamic Scheduling Engine (DSE), which utilizes data on service level agreements, technical aptitude, location proximity, and travel time estimates for scheduling field engineers.

"The system looks at all of those parameters and determines what makes the most sense in terms of meeting our customers' service level agreements (SLAs), and the most economic method of getting a tech on-site quickly," says Steve Pagano, VP of field operations.

The DSE provides consistent dispatching and frequently uncovers hidden resources that a dispatcher, trying to manage the process manually, would never be able to locate. "The DSE had everything we needed in one product," Mortun says. "Instead of the dispatcher trying to make sense of all of that data, the system can make those decisions."

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of the problem, and how long it took to repair the equipment) and uploads the information into Astea. This information is available for the customers to view or print via the customer portal," says Pagano.

Astea then creates the invoice and sends the billing information into the SAP system. The Astea inventory management system deducts any parts used in the repair from the technician's trunk stock. If the technician has ordered a part that ends up not being used, the system tracks the return of those parts back to the trunk stock or to the main warehouse.

"The customer can log on and open up a service call directly on the system and even see the specific history of the equipment at their location."

Steve Pagano, Fujifilm U.S.A.

TECHNOLOGY INCREASES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Fujifilm achieved a return on investment in one year by improving field technician efficiency, increasing the number of service calls completed per day, and streamlining the invoice cycle. The company also improved parts tracking in the field and reduced the time technicians spent on administrative duties.

The company also expanded its service revenues and increased its service contract business to encompass approximately 87% of Fujifilm's customers without having to hire a substantial number of new employees.

"The organization overall gained more confidence in what we were doing and how we were doing it," Pagano says. "That's what helped us move forward and drive contract sales. We could readily demonstrate to the customer the value of what they were buying from us. We can now provide customers with data that shows them how much their service contract is saving them based on their actual repair history."

The company's technological capabilities in the field have, in fact, played a key role in improving the Service Division's competitiveness. Customers have also responded positively to the system's online customer portal, which provides clients with access to real-time help desk, dispatch, and field service information. "The customer can log on and open up a service call directly on the system and even see the specific history of the equipment at their location," Pagano says. "They can also view a real-time, color-coded map showing the status of our equipment at each of their locations."

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Fujifilm also has greater access to service data than ever before. "Trying to drill down and gather information was a pretty difficult task in the past," Pagano says. "We have a more in-depth view of our operations and a better understanding of what level of operational activity is taking place in the field. We have problem cause code information that we just did not have in the past, and we know more about what's really going on in terms of call duration, which allows us to make informed business decisions."

The company has gone through three major upgrades of the system since 2001, and the system is now in use in the Imaging, Graphics, and Medical Divisions, as well as at Fujifilm Canada and Fujifilm Tokyo. "The way we approach our service operations has changed dramatically just because of the tools and information available to us," Pagano says. "We have a totally different view of the business now."

The company has plans to make even better use of this data through improved business intelligence capabilities, which should further improve service effectiveness and reduce costs — good news for both Fujifilm and its customers. ❑