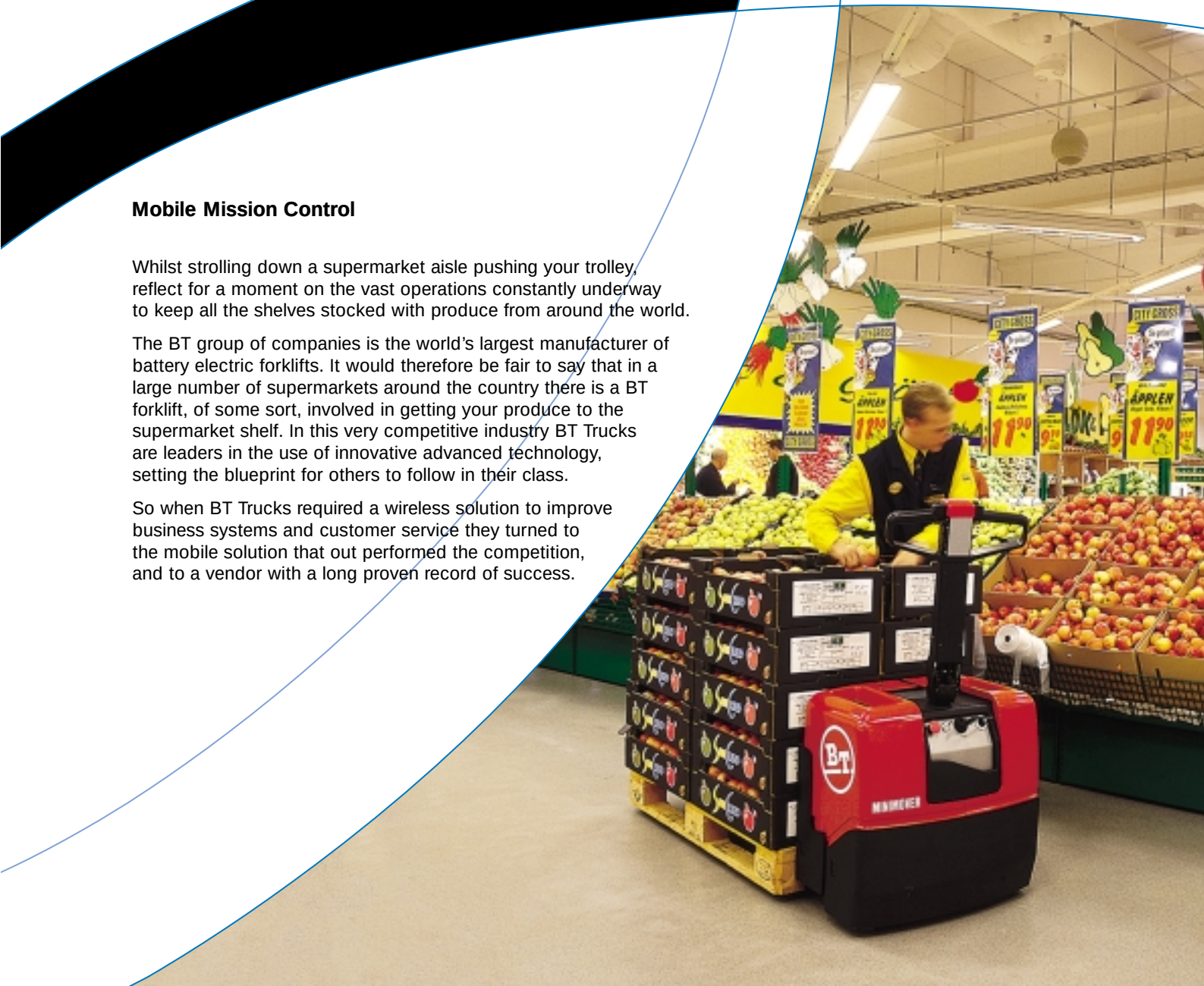
Taking Business on the Road

Case study

Industry Field Service
Market Battery Electric Forklifts
Application Field Mechanics
Products Intermec 760 Colour Computer

γSolutions



Mobile Mission Control

Whilst strolling down a supermarket aisle pushing your trolley, reflect for a moment on the vast operations constantly underway to keep all the shelves stocked with produce from around the world.

The BT group of companies is the world's largest manufacturer of battery electric forklifts. It would therefore be fair to say that in a large number of supermarkets around the country there is a BT forklift, of some sort, involved in getting your produce to the supermarket shelf. In this very competitive industry BT Trucks are leaders in the use of innovative advanced technology, setting the blueprint for others to follow in their class.

So when BT Trucks required a wireless solution to improve business systems and customer service they turned to the mobile solution that out performed the competition, and to a vendor with a long proven record of success.

Fat Fingered Technology

Graham Bastin, National Field Service Manager, explains that BT required a ‘fat finger’ technology, with exceptional readability and large screen icons that anyone can use under any conditions.

Graham says, "All the feedback on applicability and reliability clearly established Intermec as the industrial leader in wireless hand-helds, with proven success both locally and internationally."

With BT drivers keen to get rid of paperwork, and the company seeking a total solution to improve efficiency and service levels, the Intermec 760 was the best product on the market and Gamma Solutions the product’s leading Australian vendor.

BT Trucks recognised the need for a wireless solution to improve and streamline their nationwide mobile service operations. The Intermec 760 with colour screen and rugged construction was shown to be the leading option, prompting BT to choose Gamma Solutions, a vendor with a long record of success with Intermec and their range of mobile devices. Graham makes mention that "Gamma Solutions’ experience in all aspects of the mobile industry proved to be invaluable as part of the roll-out".

Prior to the new system, paper-based systems meant mechanics had to come in to the depot to pick up new ‘job cards’ and drop off signed paperwork from completed jobs. This meant unavoidable delays of sometimes more than a week between completing a job and an invoice being issued. As well as the cash flow issues arising from this delay, paper-based systems also lead to lost paperwork, and manual data entry mistakes. Furthermore, should new jobs arise during the days events, or should existing work be rescheduled, mechanics were only contactable by mobile phone. This meant excessive mobile phone costs and time wasted travelling long distances to discover that a job had been rescheduled.

The old system did not provide access to an up-to-date inventory of spare parts available from the warehouse, nor did it allow for vision of inventory in the mechanics vehicles, leading to over ordering, with orders for parts often not reconciled with warehouse stock for over a week.
Paper based systems also required a large investment of labour, with 2 or 3 head office staff required for manual data entry alone.

The new system provides a wide range of cost savings and improved productivity, including automated real-time processing of invoices, elimination of paperwork losses, elimination of incorrect data entry, reduced mobile phone costs and the reduction in travel time for each driver. Using the new system, each mechanic receives job information automatically on their Intermec 760 each morning and can receive updates and changes to the schedule throughout the day without having to travel to the office. At the completion of a job the customer is presented with a Job Summary Sheet on the colour screen of the 760, which they simply sign to confirm the work, as specified, has been carried out.

Intermec 760 Colour Computer
- Pocket PC operating system
- Rugged casing IP64 sealed
- 64MB RAM, 400MHz processor
- Scratch proof touch screen
- -10°to + 60°C operating temp.
- Integrated GSM/GPRS Radio

The BT mechanic then enters the customer’s fax number and sends a copy of the Summary Sheet, via the GPRS network, to BT’s head office, where an invoice is immediately dispatched to the fax number entered. The new system has also radically improved BT’s ability to manage spare parts inventory, providing real-time accuracy for all stock control. All parts are barcoded, allowing them to be scanned upon receipt, and then again when they are sold, sending an automatic message to BT’s host system of parts used and/or received.

Another crucial requirement for BT was that the solution would have to protect all job information from accidental loss. To make sure this was adhered to every Intermec 760 is fitted with a Secure Digital (SD) card. Working in conjunction with Retriever Communications, the application was developed to automatically save critical information to the SD card on a regular basis, giving the user peace of mind that the information gathered is safe from loss in any circumstance. Even if a unit was to fail or be permanently damaged the SD card can be removed and simply transferred to a new unit, allowing the user to continue from where they left off before the mishap.

Each 760 comes with a built in GPRS radio to provide constant connection with the BT Trucks’ host system, allowing the user to maintain up-to-date real-time information of work carried out and work yet to be started. It also allows for communication with the back office staff. As part of the Retriever application a user can be sent notes from staff in the back office, requesting all manner of information or updates. This is just one of the many features that has helped reduce the time spent on the phone and the costs incurred by doing so.

The 760’s are all safely mounted in each mechanic’s vehicle using a vehicle cradle. The cradle allows the 760 to be locked into place and still have access for power to be connected to the vehicles cigarette lighter, much like a mobile phone hands free car kit.
BT Trucks Graham Bastin travelled Australia to test the mobile coverage of the terminals and found that the Intermec 760 provided direct network communication from Perth to Bundaberg. This meant there would be little restriction in where and how the units and their application could be used.

Graham explained the system supports BT Trucks expanding position in the Australian market, increasing efficiency across all areas. He said, "There are many devices out there, but BT’s conditions were that the unit be both rugged and reliable. The partnership between Gamma Solutions and Intermec provided a durable hardware solution that has proven the right choice for our operations."

Intermec hardware is now being used by BT offices both in Europe and Australia. Locally, BT are looking to eventually expand the system to encompass all work scheduling, invoicing, inventory and quoting. For BT Trucks the application of wireless technology has provided the edge in an increasingly competitive field and will continue to change the way this company meets the needs of its clients in Australia and around the world.