

Case Study



Legacy Technology Doesn't Affect Gas Company's Ability to Deploy Wireless Dispatching Solution

Company: Alabama Gas Corporation

(Alagasco) is a division of Energen Corporation and the largest natural gas distributor in Alabama, providing clean-burning, energy-efficient natural gas to approximately 450,000 homes, businesses and industries.

Industry: Utilities

Region: Americas

Company Size: Large Enterprise
– 1,000 employees

Email Environment: Microsoft® Exchange

Type of Solution: Field Service/CRM Dispatch Operations

BlackBerry Alliance Partner: Intelligent Service Management™ and Intelligent Workforce™ by MWA™ Intelligence, Inc.

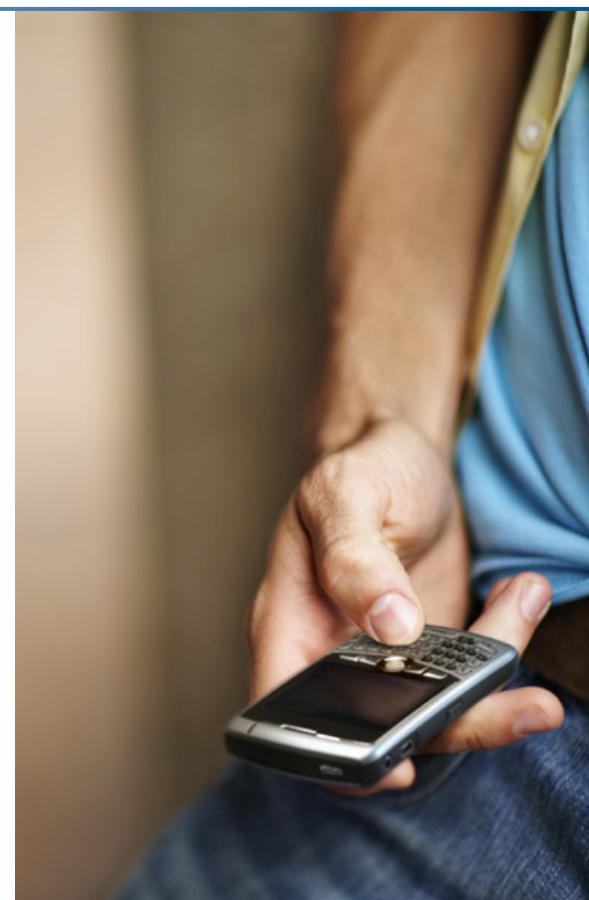


Challenge: Alagasco wanted to upgrade from a paper-based system, used to dispatch and track service mechanics providing gas service at customers' homes, to a wireless system where the process is automated, flexible and streamlined.

Solution: MWA Intelligence adapted a mobile service management solution designed to meet the requirements of Alagasco's legacy Customer Information system. Service mechanics began using BlackBerry® smartphones to receive and respond to work orders faster and more efficiently, and their job status was wirelessly reported to the back-end system.

Alagasco's Results:

- Minimizes management by leveraging existing IT investment
- Retains existing back-end infrastructure
- IT workaround helps increase productivity
- Enhanced benefits to the business and to customers



The Challenge:

Automate a Paper-based Dispatch System Built on Legacy Technology

Alagasco sends service mechanics to people's homes to manage their gas service, including turning on and off service and responding to emergencies. They struggled with a dispatching system that relied on paper records and poor communications.

"Each morning, operations personnel had to come in at 4AM to print out the work orders for the day," says Lynn Lovelady, IT and PMO Director. "They tried to optimize the day's visits as best they could, but they only had radio communications to check on the service mechanic's progress during their shift."

As a result, some service calls were not completed on busy days, and when a service call needed to be rescheduled, it had to wait until the next day. Alagasco wanted to give their customers better service. They also wanted to eliminate the slow and time consuming process of printing work orders by hand, then manually entering the data into their ERP system.

For Lovelady's IT team, any solution to automate this process would have the additional challenge of having to fit with an existing, legacy Customer Information system that was specifically customized to their company.

Why the BlackBerry Solution?

The management and IT teams at Alagasco were using BlackBerry smartphones for email and personal information management, so the company was already familiar and comfortable with the BlackBerry® Enterprise Solution.

They also saw the lightweight, portable aspect of BlackBerry smartphones as an advantage to service personnel who often move around in small spaces. "Some big devices, like couriers use, would be no good for our people who are crawling around in small spaces," says Lovelady. "We liked the easy to carry, rugged nature of the BlackBerry smartphones."

The management advantages of the solution were also important. Alagasco already used the BlackBerry® Enterprise Server's many IT policies to manage and deploy hundreds of BlackBerry smartphones throughout the organization. The ability to build on their existing investment and keep management simple was important.

"Managing all those mobile devices can be a big job," says Lovelady. "The ability to further the platform that we felt was reliable, highly secure and easy to manage by using a solution we already had in-house was an easy decision."

"When it came time to automate our dispatch system, we knew there were other wireless platforms we could have tried. But we were already comfortable with the security functionality and reliability of the BlackBerry solution and we knew it wouldn't overload us with additional management headaches."

~ LYNN LOVELADY, IT and PMO Director, Alagasco

Partner Profile:



Company: MWA Intelligence, Inc.

- Provides machine-to-machine (M2M) solutions and tools that are designed to support the exchange of information between hardware assets, mobile workers and key stakeholder
- Offers solutions and services that are customizable to various industries and vertical markets

Solution: Intelligent Service Management™ and Intelligent Workforce™

Application Type: Field Service/CRM Dispatch Operations

"MWA Intelligence is the most customer service oriented solution provider I've ever worked with. Anything we needed, they made themselves available and we continue to work with them to enhance the existing solution."

~ **Lynn Lovelady**, IT/PMO Director, Alagasco

For more information, visit www.mwaintelligence.com



Making the Right Fit with an Existing Infrastructure

Alagasco's existing SQL-based, mainframe system was over a dozen year's old. But it was what they had to work with. In fact, Lovelady says that ERP systems weren't really independent solutions back when this technology was offered, so the solution had been customized by his company to offer ERP capabilities.

They approached their wireless partner, MWA Intelligence, Inc., and explained their challenge. MWA Intelligence had two solutions used for the copier industry that could be adapted to Alagasco's needs: Intelligent Service Management for back-end integration and Intelligent Workforce for the application on the BlackBerry smartphones.

Lovelady's team had to work closely with their partner to make the necessary connections to their ERP system for access to dispatching work orders and updating records. "It took us about four months to build the front and back-end," says Lovelady. "We created a blueprint of our system, then MWA Intelligence helped us define our requirements by actually going out on service calls to see the steps involved. That means we put a lot of work into the interface to make sure our users would be comfortable with it."

The result was an application that dispatched work orders to service mechanics almost automatically, every day, on their BlackBerry smartphones. It included built-in logic that used Microsoft MapPoint® to plot optimized routes so calls are made within a logically mapped geographical area. Service mechanics used the application to update their work during the day and close out jobs, so Alagasco could better communicate with their customers.

Because of the restrictions of the legacy ERP system, immediate records updates were not possible. As a workaround, all of the day's information was captured by the MWA Intelligent Service Application server at Alagasco's offices. At the end of the day, a file would be automatically sent to Alagasco's ERP system where it updated the back-end system, without the need for manual inputting.

"The workaround gave us a fully automated system where data is captured, updated and generated a new set of work orders the next day," says Lovelady. "The next step is to move to an SAP system that simplifies and updates this whole process, and we'll work with MWA Intelligence on that."

Business Impact

This creative IT solution shows how it's possible to leverage older back-end technology and still take advantage of wireless productivity and Alagasco's business has never been better for the effort.

"With the BlackBerry solution, our interaction with customers is now more pleasant because we can get rough time estimates from our service mechanics and narrow the timeslot of our visits," says Lovelady. "We're also making better use of our service mechanic's time and they're making approximately one extra visit per day. We have 300 service mechanics so that's about 300 extra visits."

They've also eliminated the time-consuming administrative work of manually creating service orders and updating reports at the end of each day. The people assigned to these tasks have been reassigned to areas of the business where their time is more valuable.

"Our next project upgrade, which involves moving to an SAP system, will take the business impact to a new level," says Lovelady. "We're all looking forward to integrating the wireless capabilities of our BlackBerry solution with this more robust system."



"The MWA Intelligence solution and BlackBerry smartphones has been transformational, not just for serving our customers, but in giving us the ability to contact our service mechanics in the event of an emergency."

~ Lynn Lovelady
IT and PMO Director, Alagasco

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~ LYNN LOVELADY, IT and PMO Director, Alagasco

Alagasco's Results

Minimizes Management by Leveraging Existing IT Investment: By choosing to use the BlackBerry solution they already had in place and liked, Alagasco simplified the management of the new BlackBerry smartphones with a reliable, versatile platform.

Retains Existing Back-End Infrastructure: Replacing their legacy ERP system would have been costly and slow. MWA Intelligence came up with a plan that built on the system Alagasco already had in place and deployed wireless dispatching to BlackBerry smartphones in the field within four months.

IT Workaround Increases Productivity: MWA Intelligence came up with a system to capture and update work orders, even though the older ERP system was not conducive to achieving that. As a result, service mechanics are receiving work orders faster and in a more prioritized way on their BlackBerry smartphones, making it possible for them to make one extra service call per day.

Enhanced Benefits to the Business and to Customers: The newer, streamlined system has enhanced customer service and helps the company realign its workforce to be more efficient and business-focused.

For additional BlackBerry customer success stories, visit www.blackberry.com/go/success

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