

Case study

Arctic Glacier Ice

Cool Customer



At a glance

Industry: Consumer Goods

Application: Route Automation

Ice Giant Arctic Glacier, Inc. adds 1,800 daily route stops with Intermec wireless system

Ice: good for tea, good for lemonade, and to judge by Arctic Glacier Inc.'s history, good for business. Starting from a small private operation less than a decade ago, Arctic Glacier Inc. has grown cube by cube into a \$125 million (U.S.) enterprise.

The phenomenal growth hasn't satisfied the company's thirst to bring its product to more customers. Arctic Glacier is the largest ice distributor in Canada and among the largest in the United States, servicing some 50,000 retail, commercial, and industrial accounts with nearly 9000 stops per day. Since 1996 the Canada-based company has acquired 53 packaged ice businesses. It isn't done yet. "As far as our growth goes, we have no end in sight right now," said Arctic Glacier Inc.'s Dan Laurencelle.

A specialist who oversees his company's route administration and infrastructure, Laurencelle depends on the swift, accurate flow of information. From company headquarters in Winnipeg, he is charged with making sure Arctic Glacier delivery drivers across large swaths

of Canada and the United States can perform their jobs while sending timely data back for corporate analysis.

DOS-based handheld computers and printers fronted the previous route accounting system, but the company found it needed new technology, something as expansive as its burgeoning service area. After weeks of field testing and hardware comparison, the company found a partner in a system of wireless portable printers and mobile computers from Intermec.

"We were looking to be able to populate the whole real estate on the handheld computer screen and to get more data," Laurencelle said. He needed a system with more space. Disk memory on the old handheld computers was filled to capacity.

Laurencelle finds the new Intermec® 720 and 740 mobile computers data-roomy: "We're using compact flash cards that can hold up to 512 megabytes, and that's huge for us."

Intermec® PB40 and PB41 direct thermal portable printers are companions to the mobile computers. Integrated with Bluetooth® capability and BelTek Systems Design Inc. software, Route Assistant®, they're wireless, compact, and ready for signature-capture printing.

Managing 50,000 accounts across thousands of miles in two countries meant Arctic Glacier would need a flexible sales automation system. BelTek provides a mobile sales and route management solution that accommodates Arctic and offers true multi-site capabilities. Route Administrator® allows each distribution center to maintain its own routes while providing daily data uploads to headquarters for analysis. A central database traffic manager called T-Server!® helps gather uploaded sales data across the service area and sends back updates.

Wears well

Operating in both Canada and the United States opens up any new route management system to a wide range of environmental challenges. Winter temperatures across Canada can drop to well below zero. Arctic Glacier serves U.S. states all the way to Texas, where temperatures on summer's peak delivery days can scorch hotter than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius). Drivers and gear must be hardy enough to withstand whatever four distinct seasons can throw at them.

Portability is a big factor as well. "Our guys are heavy on wearing the device. They want to be really mobile and have everything on them," Laurencelle said. "In extreme cold, our guys here in Winnipeg never take the units off. They still wear them no matter what."

At each delivery, a driver calls up an invoice and has the customer sign the mobile computer's screen to digitally capture the signature. The printer produces a receipt on 4-inch-wide paper with crisp, 203-dpi resolution. Each receipt serves as a customer invoice, eliminating duplicate billing mistakes and prompting faster payment. The company never has to search for a physical invoice; for proof-of-signature questions, a worker simply reprints the original digital invoice and the customer's captured signature appears.

The speediness of processing and printing an order on-site has added an average of three stops to each driver's daily route. During peak summer shifts, that works out to 1,800 more stops each day corporate-wide.

At shift's end, a driver will pull into one of Arctic Glacier Inc.'s 63 distribution centers, unload whatever product is left on the truck, and complete the closing process on the mobile computer. The computer is then docked in a cradle to upload all its shift information to a regional server. Overnight, all 11 regional servers use a virtual private network to synchronize at designated times with the main server in the corporate office.

Headquarters now receives the corporation's entire previous day sales data by 7 a.m. The old system took several days to move information that now is ready to go by the next morning.

Border control

Doing business across North America brings more than just weather challenges. Before choosing route-accounting hardware, Laurencelle and his team had to consider another factor of using the equipment over such a broad area.

"One of the big benefits for us is that Intermec is on both sides of the border," he said. "Having the local market presence is by far an advantage, in particular with the service part of it. If I ever would need to send a handheld or a printer using ground shipping to Toronto from Winnipeg, I'm looking at a \$15 Canadian shipping cost. If I ship that same unit into the U.S., I'm looking at double the price. Plus I'm looking at customs fees going both ways.

"A couple of the other units we were considering didn't have a Canadian market presence. Once I did the calculations on what it would cost us if we shipped those over the border, I said, 'Wait a minute. Now we have to look at something else here.'"

Arctic Glacier Inc.'s growth will spread southward as its share of the Canadian market reaches maximum expansion. The warmer U.S. territory means many more hot and thirsty potential customers. While the company's development plan is as clear as its purified product, its execution depends on vendors that can handle the pace.

"We need a hardware and software company that is able to keep up with our growth," Laurencelle said. "BelTek has been able to make that possible with us. I'm not worried about Intermec because Intermec is going to keep up. And they're coming out with new products and technologies all the time."

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