



Dixon Marketing Takes Smart Logistical Approach To Stocking Military Commissaries

featuring microFlash® 4t thermal portable printer
asset tracking for military ■■■

Dixon Marketing Inc. (DMI) of Kinston, NC, has kept America's military supplied since 1964. Not with bullets and tanks, but with something equally important: groceries.

Problem ■■■

Since 1964, the company has represented manufacturers' products to commissaries and exchanges worldwide, offering an array of services from marketing and sales to promotion development and full customer service. Always looking for ways to streamline procedures and help reps maximize their in-store time, DMI recently began researching ways to eliminate a time-consuming, error-prone paper-based replenishment system in the 173 commissaries it services in the contiguous United States.

Solution ■■■

The company discovered, through partnering with mobile solutions provider Integrated Solutions International (ISI, Winston-Salem, NC, www.integrateds.com), an integrated, easy-to-use application that stands up to the demanding job and which features rugged, and reliable microFlash 4t 4-inch-wide thermal printers from Datamax-O'Neil Product Development. Now, 40 DMI sales reps spend half the time they used to on replenishment – time they now use for merchandising and customer service.

Hitting The Front Lines To Replenish

DMI salespeople cover miles and miles to fulfill their duties, typically visiting one military commissary per day in their large region. Any equipment riding with them has to withstand all kinds of conditions as the rep makes his way

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to the store. Once inside, reps take stock of what's on shelves, order to replenish and make note if a bar-coded shelf tag is missing. Their old method involved bringing a computer printout to the store and hand-reconciling the list with the on-shelf product, then making a handwritten action list of orders to place and tags to replace. The whole process usually took 2 1/2 to 3 hours and was rife with accuracy problems.

To find a better way, Dixon partnered with ISI, which has specialized in automating mobile workforces since 1992. After a thorough analysis of the situation, the integrator, which deals exclusively in Datamax-O'Neil printers, recommended to DMI a combination of Datamax-O'Neil's microFlash 4t 4-inch-wide thermal units and Symbol Technologies 2800 handhelds to meet the tough demands of the on-the-road DMI sales team.

Results ■■■

“The printer had to be rugged, durable and lightweight because our people have to carry it into and out of the store,” says Laura Dixon, CEO of DMI. “ISI recommended the Datamax-O'Neil printers, and we have not disappointed.” From experience, Integrated Solutions knew a less rugged printer would not hold up to the rigors of this type of field service application, bouncing along in vehicles mile after mile and then traversing the bumpy road from vehicle to back room, where it was still expected to produce impeccable printouts. The 4t was chosen because of its durability and also because the larger print area accommodated the amount of information needed for the various reports Dixon needs.



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right by our customers.

In place for just a few months, the new system has already paid dividends in terms of speed and accuracy. Workers head into each store and reconcile shelf inventory with the account information downloaded onto the hand held through scanning and key entry. They also note if any shelf tags are missing. When finished, they hook the hand held up to the 4t to print one of three reports detailing what they have found. If needed, the reports can be printed with bar code, which can be canned to reorder products and/or shelf tags.

Not only have all the paper lists and tedious handwriting been eliminated, but workers now complete their reconciliation in half the time. Even in the larger stores, the job now takes just 1 ½ hours (better if you said “1/3 of the time” or similar). To complete the process, once a week, reps utilize ISI’s MobileConX communications infrastructure to sync up with the DMI AS/400 host to exchange information in another seamless, simple procedure.

Getting It Just Right, Now And In The Future

For Dixon, the system, with its reliable Datamax-O’Neil printers, is exactly right. “The printers work. They do exactly what we expected it to do,” she says. “The reps have responded very positively. The system is helping them do a

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better job.” Time not spent on replenishment allows them to do more customer service-related activities such as merchandising, she adds.

In fact, DMI is so pleased with the system and what ISI has been able to provide them that the company is investigating how to expand the system to include the military exchanges it also services. “ISI has been very responsive. They put the system together in a very timely manner,” says Dixon. “Now we want to work with them to expand it to the exchanges to help our reps do a better job there as well.”

