



# Labatt's Mobile Printing Moneymaker

featuring PrintPad Integrated Printing Systems  
route accounting for the beer segment ■■■

Mobile computers have become a key component of successful route accounting and delivery operations in many industries. Mobile printers play an important part in these applications, but printer selection is sometimes treated as an afterthought by companies that don't realize the critical role printers play in making these systems run smoothly and efficiently for both delivery drivers and customers.

As the largest brewer in the country, Labatt Breweries of Canada has built its reputation both on the quality of its beer and service to its customers. In Quebec, more than 18,000 of those customers have benefited from the company's use of mobile technology to manage invoicing, truck inventory, and account settlement on the more than 300 trucks that deliver Labatt's beer throughout the province. The company recently upgraded its mobile printing solution with new rugged 4-inch thermal printers that have increased driver efficiency, improved customer service, and helped Labatt better manage its accounts.



"We wanted to offer our customers a 4-inch invoice, as it has become the industry standard and would help us reduce our paper usage," he says. "Switching to a thermal printer would also allow for faster printing and eliminate the cost of ink or printer ribbons."

The new version of CIS-Omniciel Route Manager and Route Partner software, in conjunction with Intermec CN3 mobile computers, provided the electronic signature capture capabilities that Labatt was looking for. The only piece missing was a more affordable printing solution.

## Solution ■■■

Labatt tested portable printers from a variety of vendors before ultimately selecting devices from Datamax-O'Neil. Datamax-O'Neil had just released 4-inch PrintPAD CN3 printers designed specifically for the Intermec CN3 computers, which would be the perfect fit for the Labatt application. The only problem was that in order to meet its deployment deadlines, Labatt

## Problem ■■■

Labatt initially deployed a mobile route accounting solution in 2002 that integrated mobile computers, mobile printers, and CISOmniciel route management software. While the existing system worked well, the mobile printers were fairly large and used special 8.5-by-11-inch paper to print customer invoices on-site. Once the invoices were printed, customers would sign the paper copy and drivers were expected to bring them back to the distribution center to be filed.

"Each distribution center (DC) had its own filing system," says Nicolas Gogotsis, business relationship manager for Labatt in Quebec. "In some cases, the DC had nowhere to store the invoices."

Paperwork was difficult to manage and sometimes got lost. A bigger problem was that customers would occasionally forget to sign the invoices. With no signature, there was no proof of delivery, and that made it difficult for Labatt to manage its billing when customer disputes arose. Labatt decided to upgrade its delivery system to automatically capture customer signatures electronically and institute business rules so that drivers couldn't complete their delivery transactions without those important signatures. Gogotsis says the company also needed to upgrade its printers to reduce costs and improve delivery operations.

would have to have the printers in a matter of weeks. Unfortunately, the new models from Datamax-O'Neil were not yet available in production quantities.

By understanding the urgency surrounding the implementation, Datamax-O'Neil was ultimately able to deliver the 300 printers by working out a segmented delivery schedule with Labatt. Labatt planned to deploy the system on a few routes at a time, so the company provided

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Datamax-O'Neil with a breakdown of its rollout schedule. The vendor knew exactly how many printers the company needed each week. "They provided us with the number we needed on a daily basis," Gogotsis says. "We got six or seven shipments from them in different quantities so that we wouldn't have to delay the rollout."

## Results ■ ■ ■

With the new solution, delivery drivers print out all of their route documents and inventory sheets each morning and set out to deliver beer to Labatt customers. At each delivery, they use the handheld computers to confirm the invoice amounts and their inventories. They also pick up any product that needs to be returned.

The customer then signs off on the invoice using the signature pad on the computer. The driver connects the handheld to the PrintPAD CN3 printer and prints off a copy of the invoice to leave with the customer.

At the end of the day, the driver closes out the route on the handheld computer and prints out an information sheet for the supervisor. The mobile computers are placed into a docking station each evening, and the invoices and signatures are uploaded into the route solution and Labatt's homegrown ERP (enterprise resource planning) system. All of the invoices are electronically archived so that if there is a question about a delivery later, staff can easily pull up the invoice and signature.

"We solved the issue of lost invoices by implementing a system which automatically archives invoices for us," Gogotsis says. "We also made sure that invoices were signed, because with Route Partner it is impossible to print the invoice unless the customer signs on the handheld computers. We built some business logic into the application that only allows invoice printing once there is a signature."

The new printers also saved time and money by improving driver productivity and reducing Labatt's materials cost. "The old paper had special holes in the side so we could tear it off, and it was very costly," Gogotsis says. "With the new printers' 4-inch paper rolls, we're saving close to \$75,000 a year in paper costs."

Since the new printers are thermal, they don't require a print ribbon, which has led to even more savings as Labatt prints more than 800,000 invoices per year. Labatt is using less paper overall, which has provided environmental benefits as well.

The printers also allow the drivers to do their jobs faster, because they don't have to print a second copy of the invoice. The printers are smaller and lighter (the drivers carry them with a shoulder strap) and easier to handle than the old, bulkier units. "The new units provide lightning-fast printing, which allows us to save time and be more productive," Gogotsis says.

The entire project, including mobile computers, mobile printers, and software, cost less than \$1.5 million (Canadian), and Gogotsis says the return on investment was quickly realized through savings in materials, added productivity, and the implementation of new business rules that helped improve the billing process.

"It has improved our customer service by allowing us to serve more customers with the time we save using the new devices," he adds. "We also now have a uniform invoice along with the rest of our competitors in the industry."

Labatt is currently deploying an SAP solution to replace its existing ERP system, but Gogotsis says he doesn't expect any major changes to the route system other than new interfaces. Eventually, Labatt will take advantage of the magnetic card swipe technology on the printers to

accept customer payments at the time of delivery (see sidebar). Gogotsis also hopes to leverage the GPS technology in the Intermec computers to provide real-time location data on the delivery trucks.

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### Multiple Mobile Printer Connectivity Options Improve Operations

*When Labatt Breweries was considering which new mobile printer would be the best fit for its route accounting application, there were many factors that played a part in the company's decision-making process. One of the things Labatt liked best about the PrintPAD CN3 portable printers from Datamax-O'Neil was the fact that the devices provided multiple connectivity options and other additional functionality the company can utilize in the future as its application needs change. "The Bluetooth connectivity capabilities and magnetic card reader on the printer will allow us to be ready for any future application requirements," says Nicolas Gogotsis, business relationship manager for Labatt in Quebec. Labatt drivers currently connect their Intermec CN3 mobile computers directly to the PrintPAD printers via a special docking component attached to the printers, but Bluetooth short-range wireless connectivity is available if they need it. "We use the Bluetooth connectivity as a backup," Gogotsis says. "The direct docking connection allows us to print faster, but the option is there when we need it." The printers have a magnetic stripe card reader option, which will eventually allow Labatt customers to pay at the point of delivery using a credit card. The PrintPAD printer also supports printing of 1-D and 2-D bar codes and includes 4 MB of flash memory and 2 MB RAM. In addition, the PrintPAD features an external DC charge port, LEDs, and an enhanced battery compartment for easy battery removal.*