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Grow Your Business By Guaranteeing Implementation Success

This integrator's presales business process review leads to a successful installation of a rugged handheld mobile computing solution.

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TouchStar Solutions brought its products and services to the United States from the United Kingdom in 1997 when it was purchased by MAPCO, owner of Thermogas, a propane company seeking to automate the delivery of its products. TouchStar Solutions, in four North American sites, customizes mobile computing solutions for the route accounting, merchandise, service, and energy markets.

TouchStar Solutions has completed more than 300 projects with no failures. It attributes this success to its pragmatic approach to mobile computing. One aspect of this approach is the performance of a business process review, otherwise called a needs analysis, for each customer prior to implementation. "This review displays how the customer's business will change after implementation, quantifies the ROI, and recommends process improvements for each customer," states Claude Alexander, sales and marketing VP at TouchStar. "We underwrite the project's success; we provide a guarantee that if the solution doesn't deliver what we collectively agree to with the customer, it will be removed and the cost refunded." The guarantee is based on a set of success criteria for each pilot test, including the solution working as designed, buy-in from stakeholders — management, employees, and customers using the solution — and achieving predetermined ROI. Since TouchStar began focusing on service, value, and benefits to each customer's business more than on its products, it landed sales from approximately 65% of the companies it targeted. Most of its customers receive a return on their investments within 12 to 18 months.

Blossman Gas and Appliance in Ocean Springs, MS, a propane delivery company, contacted TouchStar Solutions seeking to automate its delivery fleet. Blossman provides three types of propane services via 175 trucks from 74 locations. The first is a cylinder exchange program, which includes flatbed trucks carrying 15 to 200 cylinders to companies exchanging empty and full cylinders. The second is the delivery of bulk propane via a fleet of tanker trucks that fill stationary tanks at homes and businesses. The third is a service program providing maintenance and inspection services on propane tanks at customers' locations.

Calculate Expected ROI On Mobile Computing Deployment

Blossman had attempted technology implementations in the past with mixed results and was testing a solution that was not meeting its needs when it turned to TouchStar. To fully understand Blossman's needs, TouchStar employees rode along with Blossman employees, observing their actions while delivering products and services. After conducting time and motion studies and incorporating salary and benefit calculations, the integrator provided Blossman with estimates of potential time saved by each employee with an automated solution and what kind of ROI the customer could expect.

The solution TouchStar implemented includes TouchPC CEagle rugged handhelds, cradles, and **Cognitive Blaster vehicle-mounted printers** from [buytoughpc.com](#), plus FuelWare, an off-the-shelf software package developed for the propane industry. The software captures and manages data pertaining to the fuel distribution sector. In addition, The EasyLink Suite software, from TouchStar, was installed at Blossman's offices to manage

data not handled by its enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, such as vehicle inspection reports, as well as a database storing all documents produced at the vehicles.

The solution can handle all three types of Blossman's propane services. For cylinder delivery, an inventory of empty and full cylinders is tracked. For bulk propane delivery, the handhelds interface with electronic registers that meter the release of propane from the delivery trucks to the stationary tanks at customer sites. Drivers use cradles in each truck to transfer data and print invoices for customers. The EasyLink Suite interfaces with the company's ERP at Blossman's offices and provides reporting for all propane services. Blossman is considering future upgrades such as wireless and GPS (global positioning system) activities, since the solution is capable of plug and play functions.

TouchStar and Blossman agreed upon a location for an initial implementation of the proposed solution, which started in mid-2004. TouchStar completed the implementation and provided user training, as well as hardware and software installation training for select employees. Blossman completed all installs at other locations itself through August 2005. Blossman plans to automate its service program next; TouchStar begins business process reviews for that phase in early 2006.

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