

DELIVERING THE GOODS

For Woody's Express Parcels, reviewing their communications technology was the key to providing a first-class delivery service to Scotland's Highlands and islands

PHOTOGRAPHS / MARK READ WORDS / ARIF MOHAMED

NEW HORIZONS: David Wood (opposite) identified a gap in the market for a delivery service in the Outer Hebrides, and has focused his service on reliability and affordable pricing



THE STUNNING, wild landscape of Scotland's Outer Hebrides may frequently be bathed in glorious sunshine as shown here, but more often than not it is battered by high winds and North Atlantic storms. Imagine then a fleet of lorry and van drivers braving the weather and the terrain to deliver parcels to remote locations such as the Isle of Lewis.

For more than two decades, Woody's Express Parcels has done just this. From time to time formidable weather and disrupted ferry services may make it hard to maintain a next-day parcel

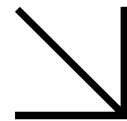
service, but for the experienced drivers at Woody's, it is all in a day's work.

Woody's delivers parcels for the likes of Phoenix Healthcare – a major pharmaceutical distributor used by chemists, GPs and hospitals to stock up on vital medical supplies – high street retailer, Argos, as well as big-name delivery companies such as DHL, TNT, and CitiLink.

Around 90 per cent of the company's work comes from business deliveries with the remaining 10 per cent from home deliveries to mail order and internet customers.

The firm recently received a huge boost to its operations when it overhauled its communications systems, introducing technology that provides staff with vital up-to-the-minute information on orders, deliveries and warehouse consignments. It was a move which managing director, David Wood, describes as 'phenomenal' for the business.

'Good communications between staff and customers is essential,' he says, 'and something upon which we've built our reputation. So this move, which paves the way for more sophisticated communication, is a huge boon for the business.'



Woody's' drivers, many of whom have been with the company for more than 20 years, have built up a familiarity with their customers through close communications. And, according to Wood, it is this that sets the firm apart from its competitors.

'For us, good service and customer care are paramount, and we rely totally on repeat business. For instance, some of our contracts have been running for upwards of 10 years. As an organisation, we talk to each other and value each other. We are all on the same level here, drivers and managers, and we respect people. Drivers are a huge part of our business.' As a result, Woody's has been very successful in retaining not only its customers but also its staff.

A MAN AND A VAN

In 1986, having recognised a lack of affordable delivery services to some of the more remote parts of western Scotland, Wood founded Woody's Express Parcels. Using a single delivery van, he ran a twice-weekly delivery service from the mainland to the western isles, establishing a next-day delivery service that still exists today. Since then the firm has expanded, and now runs 27 vehicles – a mixture of lorries and vans – and employs around 40 staff: drivers, administration, warehousing and maintenance. It delivers 1,000 consignments a day and delivers daily to locations that it originally served just once a week.

To meet the growth in deliveries, Woody's set up two permanent depots. The first, at Stornoway, is the main service centre for the Outer Hebrides and also houses the company's head office. It is from here that the schedules of daily deliveries, which go throughout the Outer Hebrides, from the Isle of Lewis right down to Barra, are managed.

In 2003, they built a second depot, this time in Inverness; the capital of the Scottish Highlands. The substantial modern warehousing facilities include a large yard area as well as an area where drivers can shower and change.

The Stornoway office is also the only Argos distributor in the Outer Hebrides. Orders from the popular retailer can be placed at the depot office where they are processed daily, with items delivered direct to Stornoway ready for customer collection.

'We've built up a rapport with Argos, and worked hard with them to create a good service for the Western Isles. Argos approached us, knowing that we were delivering for Index, with



“The difference between before BTCC and after is night and day”

DAVID WOOD, WOODY'S EXPRESS PARCELS

whom we had been quite successful. When Index shut down, we felt that moving to Argos, which was a bigger company, was a great opportunity.'

A SINGLE TECHNOLOGY

To keep in touch with staff and customers, Woody's was using a number of communications technologies from different suppliers. But they found that when things went wrong they suffered, as nobody was prepared to take responsibility. In the early days the firm had been very BT-oriented, but pursued other options until summer 2008, when it returned to BT as a major customer. 'At the time, we felt we may get a better service elsewhere. But, after years of headaches and heartache, we decided to go back and have now been back with BT for six months,' says Wood.

One major attraction of returning to BT was the BT Communications Complete (BTCC)



solution, which was recommended to Wood. Based on the Cisco UC500 communication system, and using BT Broadband and ISDN services, BTCC brings together all forms of communication: telephony, mobile, video, internet, email, fax and instant messaging.

For Woody's, it meant the opportunity to use fast broadband links to connect its Stornoway and Inverness offices. It also offered better call control and routing options, as well as more advanced messaging facilities. However, for Wood, this was just the tip of the iceberg as the solution also enables tele- and video-conferencing, as well as mobile and remote working.

The firm has made a quantum leap in the quality of its communications technology. Says Wood, 'We moved from something quite basic, which was not a very good system, to one where we can network the depots through the phone system.'

Installation of the server equipment and cabling took just a week to complete, with two BT engineers and one Cisco engineer remaining on-site for the period. 'The new Cisco system is absolutely brilliant, and is the first UK implementation of the Cisco UC500, which has meant we have worked closely with Cisco and BT. We were originally concerned about the remoteness of the installation, but the system has been faultless and we have also had a Cisco engineer on the other end of the phone offering excellent service. The difference is that whereas

we had multiple service providers, now BT provides a one-stop shop for us with a single number to call,' says Wood.

As well as the Cisco communications platform, the BTCC package also includes IP phones, which use the broadband network to make and receive calls, and are linked into Woody's desktop applications. As a result, employees benefit from numerous time- and process-saving tools. For example, the phone system can store and display call times and other vital call information, and show all the occasions on which the firm has spoken to particular customers.

The depots are linked via broadband, which means that staff can access live data on deliveries and consignments – information that was previously recorded on paper. 'We've tightened up right across the business,' says Wood. 'We have a lot of live information running from the depots, and the ability to access it has speeded up processes and saved time for our staff.'

SERVE YOUR CUSTOMERS BETTER

Customer services has also received a boost as call agents can give more detailed information to customers about their deliveries, taking data straight off the digital manifests. 'The new system is allowing us to move forward in leaps and bounds, and is far more sophisticated than the one we had before. In terms of technology, it's a huge step forward from where we were three or four

AT A GLANCE: THE TECHNOLOGY

BT Communications Complete (BTCC) is designed for small businesses, allowing them to access critical information via email when out of the office, or make lower cost VoIP calls on the move. It also provides a 24/7 help desk for faults and support. Users can set their availability to receive calls based on their current activity, so no more time is wasted playing telephone tag.

Voice messages can be delivered straight to a person's email inbox, or accessed by touchscreen display. The technology will recognise the caller and greet them by name using a 'screen pop' display.

In addition, Woody's is using BT Broadband and ISDN services from BT, which gives them a fast link between offices and depots, and allows them to access live business data. It has also implemented Cisco IP phones, which plug into the network and offer advanced telephony features to staff.

The firm is currently trialling a mobile communications system based on technology from Masternaut 3X. This allows drivers to access delivery data from their vehicles, and communicate more closely with customers.

GOING PLACES: Woody's Express Parcels has expanded to two depots, 27 vehicles and 40 staff and prides itself on long-standing customer relationships

months ago. There are so many new features that we are still learning about them. The difference between before and after is like night and day.'

With the BTCC solution already making an impact, discussions are under way to integrate mobile communications into the phone system and potentially extend the solution to serve other Woody's Express Parcels offices.

The firm is currently running a trial with Masternaut 3X and BT, which allows drivers to use mobile computers while out and about. 'It means we won't have drivers leaving the depot with fistfuls of paperwork as we can send data from UPS or DHL straight to them. They will scan everything onto their computers, and customers will be able to log on and download their own manifests,' explains Wood, who hopes the system will be in use early 2009.

The pre-Christmas period, when the roads to the remote Western Isles can be at their most hazardous, is also Woody's busiest time of year with deliveries increasing by around 50 per cent. The new communications system should smooth the whole process. 'It will allow us to receive and transfer a lot of live information at incredible speeds and communicate with customers much more closely. Going forward, that's really going to keep us ahead,' says Wood.

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