

PIERCE MANUFACTURING DEPLOYS TOUGHBOOK H1 FIELD RUNNING EPICKUP APPLICATION TO STREAMLINE FINAL EQUIPMENT INSPECTIONS ON FIREFIGHTING APPARATUS



CHALLENGE

Shift from a pen-and-paper-based solution to increase efficiency and communication in the final inspection of fire and emergency apparatus.

SOLUTION

An interactive mobile-based customer inspection application called ePICKUP. The application is custom developed and runs on a rugged, wirelessly connected Panasonic Toughbook® H1 Field tablet.

RESULT

The Toughbook H1 Field/ePICKUP application has allowed Pierce Manufacturing to shorten inspection times by 50 percent, getting more done in a shorter period of time.

Pierce Manufacturing, an Oshkosh Corporation company based in Appleton, Wisconsin, is the country's largest fire and emergency apparatus manufacturer. Through an international dealer network, Pierce delivers mission-critical firefighting apparatus throughout the world.

To maintain its leadership in the market, Pierce is continuously innovating with firefighter safety and performance in mind. Pierce designs its own foam systems and was the first company to introduce frontal airbags and the Side Roll Protection system to fire apparatus in order to protect vehicle occupants. Pierce is recognized as a quality leader in the industry and applies this standard to all aspects of its business.

It is customary for Pierce's customers to visit Pierce facilities to conduct a final inspection of their fire trucks before the product ships. This visit allows them an opportunity to test their equipment and determine if there are any changes they would like made before the truck leaves the factory. Recently, the company improved its final inspection process through an innovative electronic inspection procedure.

Like many companies that perform field inspections, Pierce was using pen and paper to collect data when customers and dealers would visit the plant for their final equipment inspection. Pierce's dealers would manually capture data and then transcribe it into a Word document after the physical inspection took place.

The lack of real-time and standardized data made it challenging for Pierce manufacturers to accurately analyze information from the field. It also allowed for potential errors and miscommunication.

Realizing how labor intensive and inefficient the paper-based system was, Pierce decided to implement a digital process. The company designed an interactive, mobile customer inspection application called ePICKUP, which was custom developed on an enterprise software platform that requires no coding or programming to create and deploy sophisticated mobile applications. The application was designed to capture the thoughts and concerns of customers, store photographs and identify adjustments through pre-selected options in order to standardize terminology and then apply the information back into the manufacturing process in an effort to eliminate repeat issues.

Pierce was looking for a mobile, yet rugged, computer with as few moving parts as possible to run the ePICKUP application. The device needed to be lightweight, have touchscreen capabilities an integrated camera and be durable enough to survive accidental drops.

Pierce's barcode systems integrator, Miles Data Technologies, identified the Panasonic Toughbook® H1 Field as a possible fit due to its ergonomic tablet design and integrated camera. Pierce did evaluate some small tablet PCs and other consumer-grade laptops with lower price points, but found the devices lacked the necessary battery life and durability.

Miles Data and Panasonic provided Pierce with an evaluation Toughbook H1 Field computer to test in the field with the configured software. During this demo, Pierce found it necessary to disable some of the camera functions on the Toughbook H1 Field to meet its application requirements. Pierce then worked with Panasonic engineers to create a custom-built camera application on the Toughbook H1 Field that met Pierce's workflow needs.

Pierce's dealers were provided 45-minute instructor-led training sessions prior to deployment of the application. The training was designed to be hands-on and to convey that the application was "as easy to use as an ATM," according to Pierce. The company received positive feedback from its dealers. Then, in July 2010, it rolled out twelve Toughbook H1 Field mobile devices loaded with the ePICKUP application to the customer acceptance areas in two manufacturing facilities.

Now, when customers and dealers arrive at Pierce for their final inspection, they are given a Toughbook H1 Field that is theirs to use for the duration of their visit. The ePICKUP application allows customers and dealers to easily enter items on the inspection list by selecting from a dropdown menu. Digital photographs with an automated editing feature are also linked directly to each item on the dropdown menu.



Once the inspection is complete via the ePICKUP application, the Wi-Fi equipped Pierce facility enables automatic emails to be sent to Pierce support staff advising that the customer has completed the inspection and is now ready for a final truck-side meeting. An electronic report of the inspection is also automatically emailed to the dealer.

The feedback from both customers and dealers has been extremely favorable. The Toughbook H1 Field has also proved to be the ideal device because firefighters are familiar with Toughbook computers, understand how to use them and know them to be tough and durable.

Since deploying the ePICKUP solution, Pierce dealers have shortened their inspection times by 50 percent, getting more done in a shorter period of time. Pierce has been able to obtain more accurate customer feedback and streamline the communication process between customers and manufacturing. Pierce also found that photographs provide a better way to capture and document changes made to the trucks and equipment.

Due to the success of the ePICKUP application, in combination with the Toughbook H1 Field, Pierce is currently working on the second phase of the rollout, which is targeted toward streamlining the internal workflow that occurs after an inspection list is submitted by a customer.

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