

Wi-Fi and Mobile Computing Specialists

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CASE STUDY: Fullers Brewery



Ensign Delivers an Ullage Management Application to One of the UK's Most Historic Breweries

Beer has been brewed on Fuller's Chiswick site for over 350 years - as far back as the era of Oliver Cromwell. Over the years Fuller's has built up a reputation for running great pubs and brewing outstanding beers, with the likes of London Pride, ESB and 1845 all winning numerous awards. Three of Fuller's beers - London Pride, ESB and Chiswick Bitter - have been named Champion Beer of Britain, a feat unmatched by any other brewery. In 2005 Fuller's added its first year-round cask ale for more than 20 years, Discovery Blonde Beer, and purchased George Gale & Co of Horndean, adding a further 111 pubs to its estate, making a total of over 360.

The Challenge

- To design a system through which ullage (unfilled container space) could be tracked in real-time.
- To combat difficult RF conditions, characterised by rugged components and metallic barrels.

The Solution

- A real-time, modular, GPRS tracking system supported by a robust wireless network.

The Results

- Highly improved levels of efficiency and accuracy.
- Improved on-site destruction.

Ullage Tracking

Ullage refers to the unfilled space in a container of liquid, especially those carrying wine or beer, such as barrels and bottles. The term now commonly refers to beer which is unsalable due to quality or container issues which are deemed as justifiable returns to the brewer. Due to on-going investment in new plant and quality processes, ullage returns to Fuller's have declined year on year. However, tracking ullage is very important in the beer making industry as duty has to be paid when the beer leaves the brewery. If a problem is found after the barrels have been delivered, allowing the beer to be returned, the duty may be reclaimed, and the customer refunded.



The Business Opportunity

In 2006, Fuller's existing batch Palm Pilot system was coming to the end of its life. The terminals had been in use for seven years and were becoming unreliable and difficult to repair. When a pub landlord phoned the brewery about a problem barrel of beer, the brewery would send back a barcode via post to be attached to the faulty barrel, the barrel would then be picked up at the next delivery time. Fuller's used Palm Pilots to record in batch details of the customer's problem descriptions and quantities of beer to be returned. However, frequently the beer barrels were returned to the brewery before the field service operatives had had enough time to download the information from their data terminals back at the brewery, thereby causing delays in data transfer and errors.

In June 2006, Fuller's commissioned Ensign to update the system to run on a single unit which supported GPRS replacing batch transactions with instantaneous updates.

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The Ensign Real-time Solution

Staff at Ensign analysed the business problem and designed a solution using GPRS hand held terminals, to enable ullage to be tracked in real-time, thus eliminating the mismatching errors caused by the batch processing.

The solution was rolled out early in 2007 and has proved to be a great success. Customer records, fault codes and product records are downloaded into the terminals from the head office server. Field service operatives can collect all the required ullage tracking information and transfer it back to the brewery over the GPRS. A printed receipt is generated Fuller's beer bottled on a wireless printer and given to the customer. The same terminals can now be used at the brewery for dealing with the receipt of ullage.

Improvements to Fullers' Critical Operations

Previously each of the five field-based auditors returned to the Chiswick based brewery three times every week. With the instantaneous data transfer over GPRS these visits have been reduced to one per week thus saving staff time and travelling expense. With Fuller's Managed Houses, stretching from Birmingham to Bristol, these savings can be significant. Dennis Royale, Technical Services Manager at Fullers, said of the new tracking solutions: "We have improved efficiency, field based operations and customer satisfaction"

Destroy on Site

With the sanction of a Fuller's Trade Quality Auditor, Fuller's landlords can destroy problem beer on site, this information is immediately transferred to the brewery giving the pub landlord the reassurance that their account will be credited. The user-defined ullage tracking codes allow the brewery to provide due-diligence to the Inland Revenue in order to reclaim excise duty.

Solution Benefits...

- Improved service levels and efficiency gains with real-time transfer of data
- Easy to use - user defined screens and look ups
- Two-way communication via the GPRS Wireless network
- Improved on-site destruction
- Modular solution which can be added to in the future

Why Ensign?

Fuller's particularly wanted to use an industry standard product which would transfer simply between different manufacturer's makes of terminal. Ensign being device agnostic could offer the expertise in Hand Held Terminals needed whilst having the flexibility to work as a partner to deliver Fuller's a fully functional solution.

"The new system is now more elegant, more reliable and saves time." Bronwen White, IT Development Manager, at Fuller's

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