

## CASE STUDY: CMG



### CMG ACHIEVES GOALS THROUGH DEPLOYMENT OF RUGGED COMPUTERS AND MOBILE BROADBAND

Contrary to popular opinion, magazine readership is growing and remains an important driver of retail sales and profit. With more than 4,000 titles in the market, it's difficult for any publisher or title to stand above the rest.

Since 2001, Comag Marketing Group LLC (CMG) has helped the world's leading magazine brands stand out with comprehensive sales, marketing and promotional services through a network of sales venues. Headquartered in Princeton, NJ, CMG employs roughly 400 people, including a mobile workforce of over 180 in the United States and Canada.

This mobile workforce—CMG's merchandisers—is required to perform in-store checks, ensuring magazines are properly presented at thousands of retail establishments. It also provides merchandising services at airport newsstands throughout the United States.

In 2003, CMG deployed Symbol handheld devices to support its airport staff, which did not prove to be a robust long-term solution. The closed nature of the device lacked flexibility and the ability to directly integrate with CMG's corporate systems.

The remaining merchandising staff used either a "bubble form" to collect in-store data—mailing forms in on a weekly basis—or performed manual checks, entering the data into spreadsheets on consumer-grade laptops and emailing them for processing. Due to poor ergonomics and functionality, these laptops were not taken into the stores. Even though the notebooks were not being used in a true mobile capacity, CMG still dealt with a significant amount of hardware failures, requiring the company's IT Department to stock 15-20 spare devices.

Data collected in the field took several weeks to be processed and reviewed. For CMG, the latency between data collection and actionable use was no longer acceptable. To be a better partner to its customers, latency needed to be reduced from weeks to hours.

In an effort to create a new solution that would radically improve this process, CMG began its "Remote Data Collection" project. Primary objectives included replacing the three disparate data collection processes with one, eliminating the need for dual entry or additional steps in the data collection process, aggregating and exposing relevant in-store product information, and reducing the reporting lifecycle from weeks to hours.

CMG worked with Trac2Mobile, a strategic mobility solutions provider with a focus on mobile workforces, along with other partners to help define and deploy the new solution.

The team evaluated a number of devices, including Lenovo and HP laptops, Symbol handhelds and Motion tablets, but none of them offered the right combination of flexibility, durability, mobility and connectivity. Trac2Mobile then introduced Panasonic's Toughbook® U1 rugged handheld device—a perfect fit.

The U1 is a small and rugged handheld computer with a host of integrated features, including a barcode scanner, camera, GPS and mobile broadband. The device offers full-shift battery life and a touchscreen display that can be viewed in varying lighting conditions. Despite being a handheld, the U1 runs a full Windows OS, making integration with CMG's corporate system much less complicated.



Toughbook U1



#### CHALLENGE

Comag Marketing Group LLC (CMG) needed a lightweight, compact and mobile broadband ready solution to improve on-site remote data collection.

#### SOLUTION

Offering the required combination of flexibility, durability, mobility and connectivity, the Panasonic Toughbook U1 and Toughbook T8 made for easy integration and improved reporting times.

#### RESULT

With the rugged mobility solutions in place, CMG's sales and marketing teams gained a tremendous advantage in the allocation of their mobile workforce—maximizing the publishers' financial investments and making CMG a more valuable business partner to its customers.

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The U1 was, however, not the appropriate option for the merchandising staff servicing retail locations. This group needed a standard laptop, and after being introduced to the Panasonic Toughbook T8, the complete solution was clear. The lightweight T8 offers exceptionally low failure rates, embedded mobile broadband, long battery life, an integrated hand strap and a touchscreen display.



To improve reporting times from weeks to hours, CMG needed its users to be able to synchronize data in near real time. Therefore, both devices needed to be connected via mobile broadband. Previously, CMG had used carrier-specific external mobile broadband cards, but they often broke, failed or were simply lost.

After selecting the Toughbook U1 and T8, Trac2Mobile recommended Qualcomm's embedded Gobi™ technology. It allowed CMG to have a single modem that would work with all major carriers. The solution would virtually eliminate many of the past problems CMG had faced, and allow the company to address potential issues as it connected the mobile workforce. Gobi gave CMG a single stock-keeping unit (SKU) for its mobile computers, regardless of the wireless carrier being used. From a device management standpoint, this greatly simplified CMG's workload and reduced its support costs.



As part of the "Remote Data Collection" project, CMG began creating a custom application for

use by its entire mobile workforce. It would embrace improved workflows, simplifying adoption and unifying the three different processes being used in the field.

Having a single application was another critical component in reducing IT management issues. CMG turned to Eastridge Technologies and Customer Effective to help develop the solution, while Trac2Mobile addressed both connectivity and application support to make sure bugs were fixed in advance of the rollout.

CMG began developing training materials for the new solution while relying on Trac2Mobile to successfully plan and manage the logistics for the deployment. By covering all the logistical needs, including shipping new units out and receiving all of the old computers, Trac2Mobile allowed CMG to focus on core issues that were central to the success of the project.

Once the solutions were in place, CMG's sales and marketing teams had a better view of what was happening in the field—providing a tremendous advantage in managing the mobile workforce. The company was also able to drive major business decisions from a more comprehensive and actionable set of data, allowing the team to increase revenue.

For CMG's customers, access to near-real time data at the in-store level helped to maximize financial investments, making CMG a more valuable business partner. In the publishing market, access to this type of business intelligence is critical to success.

Shifting data access time from weeks to just hours sets CMG apart from its competition. Before deploying the Toughbook solutions, information was only available for historical trending, because titles were often off the shelf by the time the information was available. Now, CMG has the ability to help customers improve revenue by

turning restocking into a more viable possibility.

Also, through the company's Remote Data Collection platform, a single application easily integrates with the corporate CRM System, making management much easier for the IT team.



**Toughbook T8**

The reliability of the Toughbook solutions has been one of the key benefits for the successful deployment. CMG no longer keeps a replacement inventory. The company only has one Toughbook mobile computer per 100 field users in reserve and no spare mobile broadband cards. Compared to the 15-20 laptops and broadband cards they previously had to keep on the shelf, this is a significant reduction that eases IT management needs.

In the first seven months of deployment the field workforce had not experienced a single hardware failure.

Additional benefits CMG has realized through its Toughbook-based solution include:

- Improved remote training capabilities via wireless broadband
- Increased visibility into wireless data usage—to help maximize field use
- Enhanced connectivity through Gobi—eliminating unpredictable costs associated with usage of Wi-Fi hotspots and home DSL
- Improved ergonomics—for easier handling, travel and transport
- Extended battery life—to enable full-shift use without recharging

With this new solution in place, CMG is well positioned to help its customers stay competitive, making the company a valuable business partner in a very competitive market.

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