



Ferrellgas, the second largest marketer of propane in the U.S., chooses Velociti to manage its extensive mobile technology integration and installation needs

The Challenge

Having grown since its inception in 1939 to a company with more than 650 outlets serving more than 1 million customers in all 50 states, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Ferrellgas is a true success story. Today, the Overland Park, Kansas-based company is the second largest marketer of propane in the United States with over \$1.5 billion in annual sales. Its nationwide supply network includes a fleet of 4,500 delivery and service vehicles.

Driven by a company-wide effort to enhance competitiveness by addressing inefficiencies and reengineering business processes, Ferrellgas undertook a wide-ranging approach to making its operation more efficient and productive. “Previously,” relates Drew Mazeitis, Director of Mobile Technology, “much of the information about our customers, stops and deliveries was only known by our drivers. We needed to make a change, so we designed a comprehensive information system to capture and deliver the information that was critical to our business including, orders for products and services, demand forecasting, delivery planning, scheduling and routing.”

To accomplish that goal, according to Mazeitis, Ferrellgas needed to adopt a number of onboard and hand-held technologies linked to a centralized enterprise system. “The ultimate challenges for us became how to integrate all of these items and multiple vendors into one software system,” he stated, “and how to install them on more than 4,500 vehicles in a timely and cost-effective manner.”

The Solution

To address the questions about integration and installation, Ferrellgas turned to the country’s leading expert in mobility rollout project management, mobile installations and technology deployment-- Velociti Inc.

“The challenge of designing hardware, kitting the equipment, delivering to our installation sites, and installing the components in our trucks is where Velociti’s role was highly beneficial for Ferrellgas,” says Mazeitis. “In a number of cases, including the design of fuse protected custom length wiring harnesses for each vehicle type in our fleet, Velociti helped us solve problems we didn’t even know we had until we started discussing our deployment.”

Onboard technology chosen by Ferrellgas included Intermec handheld computers and printers, Wireless Matrix satellite antennas, Garmin GPS units and Agentek software. Velociti was chosen by Ferrellgas to install mounts for the satellite domes, specially designed mounts for the Intermec handheld units and printers and integrated main power harnesses. The company has completed installations on 2,700 trucks and is now working to complete the final 1,800 vehicles.

Velociti's service to Ferrellgas also included working with suppliers to specify and design specialized brackets and cradles for installation in four basic vehicle types using both satellite and cellular-based systems. The brackets and cradles, which hold the onboard technology on a single base, are designed to isolate the handheld units and printers from shock and vibration and are fully integrated with wiring harnesses.

Another special effort by Velociti was made to address a Ferrellgas concern about maintaining the image of its vehicles. In particular, the company did not want the satellite dome and its mounting bracket or wiring to be noticeable. Velociti, which was already designing a plastic base mount for the satellite units, worked with a fiberglass component manufacturer to design a customized dome cover for each roof style—one flat and one curved-- in a color to match the company's royal blue trucks.

To manage the mobility rollout for the nationwide fleet, Velociti worked closely with Ferrellgas to establish centralized locations where groups of vehicles could be brought to Ferrellgas outlets in for the installation process. Utilizing this hub and spoke model, Velociti sent three husband and wife technical teams to each location, where the work was completed on anywhere from 6 to 50 trucks. These highly trained technicians take from one to two hours per vehicle to complete the process, depending on the model.

The Benefits

“Working with Velociti has been a tremendous experience,” states Mazeitis. “We had talked to other companies before choosing Velociti and no one else wanted to take on such a long and complicated mobility rollout. Velociti not only rose to the challenge, they have done everything we asked, including special requests for technology and integration solutions.”

“Velociti also helped us meet a very aggressive development and installation schedule,” Mazeitis continues, “and if we have a question, their technical support is available to us. As we continue to grow, we know that Velociti will be there to support us. This is one part of our business we do not have to worry about because Velociti continues to meet our needs.”

The Ferrellgas systems being installed by Velociti utilize satellite, cellular and 802.11b radio technology to transfer route and delivery data between the mobile units and the main enterprise solution used at company locations. Units not equipped with Wireless Matrix domes utilize a separate device to capture GPS data. Agentek applications on the Intermec units include stop information, delivery information, and driving directions.

Using the onboard components installed by Velociti, Ferrellgas is able to greatly enhance its productivity and efficiency. As many as 5,000 different activities can be scheduled and recorded so drivers know exact delivery locations and details. In addition, onboard printers allow Ferrellgas drivers to print invoices and proof of delivery receipts.

Conclusion

The mobility rollout service for 4,500 Ferrellgas trucks nationwide, according to Drew Mazeitis, demonstrates clearly that Velociti is much more than just an installation provider. For Ferrellgas, he notes, Velociti developed specialized components, worked with schedules to streamline the installation process and greatly helped integrate and test chosen components from multiple vendors.

“When it comes to project management, Velociti is not like any other company,” Mazeitis concludes. “They took on the many challenges of developing and implementing a customized integrated solution involving multiple software and hardware suppliers. Only Velociti was willing and able to do that for Ferrellgas.”

About Velociti Inc.

Kansas City-based Velociti Inc. was founded in 1989 as a division of Central States Thermo King. The company was created to provide mobile installation and service technicians that perform all aspects of technology deployments for the transportation, retail and warehousing market sectors. Velociti clients include many Fortune 500 companies from wide variety of market segments, including transportation, technology, retail, food service, distribution and manufacturing. Velociti has achieved double-digit sales growth every year since 1995 and now offers service in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Western Europe. For more information visit www.velociti.us or call 913-233-7227.

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