



Alan Manly of Transoft: 'Vax was what was needed'

Barcode road leading to profits

Geoff Ebbs surveys how the use of barcodes put a big freighter into top gear

Riteway is an express freight company with 500 staff and contractors in depots around the Australian coast using Micro Vax II to offer sophisticated customer service.

The software developed by the transport software specialist Transoft, provides information on delivery, driver payments and billing for any consignment within seconds. Six years ago Riteway processed all consignment notes manually. It sent bundles of paperwork to a data processing bureau that returned weekly reports, invoices and payment schedules.

Data entry was eventually brought inhouse with peripherals at Riteway connected to a bureau computer.

Still the paperwork piled up.

At the end of each week drawers were full of unprocessed documents, each worth an average of \$25 and meaning substantial earning losses.

Transoft was contracted to develop an accounting system. It wanted to upgrade the hardware to a MicroVax computer and had to sell the idea to Riteway's board.

Alan Manly, sales manager at Transoft, said it was possible have upgraded the system then in use, but it wanted to be an innovative software company and felt that Vax equipment was what was needed.

A general ledger system was the next requirement and has caused some problems.

Scrapped

The first general ledger system written for Riteway cost \$30,000 and had to be scrapped within a year.

The auditors recommended a micro based system but were working on the previous years figures. Riteway was growing rapidly and the system was overloaded from the start.

The big innovation at Riteway was the introduction of barcoded consignment notes.

These enable delay-free access to all consignment information. Immediately a call is placed the details of the consignment are entered and the computer prints a barcoded consignment note.

The pick-up driver leaves a copy with the sender and returns another to the depot with the freight.

Informed

A sweep of the barcode reader records the pick-up and enters payment details. Upon reaching the receiving depot the note and freight are given to a delivery driver.

A signed proof of delivery copy is returned and a barcode reader notifies the computer of delivery and authorises the payment.

Customers can be instantly informed of the status of freight, information that sometimes took weeks in pre-computer days.

The customer service staff has been reduced from eight people to three, while a greater volume of freight processing query answers have been achieved.

Riteway needs access to data indicating if freight has been picked up or delivered rather than where it is en route.

The initial choice to use DEC equipment was taken on a combination of well backed advice and manufacturer reputation.

Riteway has a policy of using contractors and deliberately chose a bureau rather than inhouse dp.

Manly believes that a transport company is no place for dp professionals.

He noted that trucking has only altered gradually in the past 20 years while the computer industry is constantly undergoing change.

Data entry and customer service staff at Riteway have a transport background.

The bureau supplies services the transport experts say they want.

Before the bureau can

sway the board on an alteration to the system a prototype that can actually be seen and touched must be presented.

The system at Transoft is one of the largest configurations of a MicroVax in Australia.

The MicroVax II performs bureau services for a number of firms as well as being a development system at Transoft.

It is configured with 48 ports, 30 to peripherals on user sites.

Most of these are enquiry terminals. If they were all processing concurrently Manly is sure the system would grind to a halt.

Transoft will eventually reach the performance limits of the Microvax, but feel that event is some way off.

Geoff Ebbs is a freelance writer