Automated document capture improves customer service for An Post

Solutions delivered by HP Autonomy and Inpute Technologies

Industry
Distribution

Objective
An Post needed a better, less labor-intensive solution to handle over 140,000 proof of delivery (POD) cards each month for parcel and registered mail services.

Approach
Partnered with HP and Inpute Technologies to deploy an automateed document capture solution that combines technology from HP and Alchemy.

Business matters
• Streamlined POD capture and validation process resulting in reduction in time and cost to capture and index POD cards

• Improved customer service as POD cards can be quickly and easily retrieved by An Post customer service agents or by clients via An Post's website

• Deployed a scalable and robust platform that meets increased POD capture requirements of An Post and 24x7 retrieval requirements of its customers

• Created a flexible solution that can address additional An Post intelligent document capture requirements

IT matters
• HP TeleForm

• Alchemy Captaris

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– Damian O'Toole, IT Manager, Mail, An Post

The challenge

An Post's parcel delivery division needed a faster, more efficient way to process POD (proof of delivery) cards for its customers. In the past, when a customer required a signature to confirm that an item had been delivered, the customer service department would take the details and rummage through boxes in storerooms to find the original POD card and then fax it back to the customer. This was a labor-intensive and slow process and lacked the efficiency of service that An Post was trying to extend to its customers. With that in mind, the company decided to invest in an imaging solution.

About An Post

An Post is one of Ireland's best-known companies and provides a wide range of services including postal, communication, retail, and money transmission. It is one of the country's largest businesses, directly employing over 9,600 people through its national network of retail, processing, and delivery centers.

The solution

After reviewing many potential vendors, An Post selected Inpute Technologies to implement a POD solution. According to Damian O'Toole, IT Manager, Mail, An Post, "We were one of the first to introduce a document imaging system for our POD signatures." When an item is delivered by An Post and a signature is required, the postman peels a barcode from the item and attaches this to a POD card. The recipient then signs the POD card, confirming the delivery.

The bar code contains a 'track and trace' number, which is a unique number to identify and track the item through all stages of the delivery process. Each card is designed to contain up to 10 deliveries. An Post's POD system is based on HP TeleForm™ from HP Autonomy—a part of the HP Capture solution to scan, capture, and validate details contained on the POD card. Captaris Alchemy is used to store and retrieve POD images.

Each evening the PODs are returned to the General Post Office (GPO), where they are scanned using HP TeleForm software. The system reads the barcodes, stores the POD image in the Alchemy imaging database, and updates An Post's track and trace system to confirm that a signature is available for the particular delivery. The system automatically processes over 80% of POD cards. There are occasions where a bar code may be torn or damaged or where the track and trace number may have been handwritten onto the POD card. In these cases, the system automatically flags these defective transactions for verification and correction by a customer service agent.

The system has been enhanced and expanded over the past number of years. One such expansion was the capture and storage of electronic signatures obtained from personal digital assistants (PDAs). For certain services in major urban areas, An Post uses PDAs to confirm parcel deliveries. Electronic POS signatures are transmitted instantaneously to the head office when a delivery is made.

The Inpute system creates an image of the signature and associates the track and trace numbers with the transaction. The electronic signatures are also stored in the Alchemy imaging database. There are approximately 140,000 cards processed each month, and the system now contains over eight million images indexed by over 35 million track and trace numbers.

Requests for a POD signature are made through An Post's customer services team or via the web. Customer service agents retrieve POD images by entering the track and trace number on a web-based enquiry application. This system allows An Post to email or fax the relevant signature image to the customer. "Since we've installed that system we've enhanced the service. For example you can now track the item on our website yourself and submit a retrieval request via the website so you don't even have to contact customer service anymore. All you need to do is input the reference number, and you'll see the full tracking history of the package on the site and a request for signature can be on your desk within minutes," said O'Toole.

Customer service improvements for An Post

The imaging system chosen by An Post has enhanced the company's customer service and promoted better workplace efficiency. "We're quite a large labor-intensive organization, and the imaging has taken that element away from certain departments," said O'Toole. "It's improving customer service and that's really what we're trying to do. With this system we've started to drive the customer to be able to fulfill their own service delivery vis-à-vis requesting signatures using our website. It means we can take the manual aspect out of the process all the time."

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Evolving relationship

In addition to using the system to capture parcel PODs, An Post has expanded it to capture registered mail PODs. An Post also used the HP TeleForm and Alchemy platforms to amalgamate its accounts and tracking system to bill customers for its services. This allows the customer to see exactly what it has spent and where. With Special Savings Incentive Accounts (SSIA) now maturing, An Post uses the HP TeleForm auto merge publisher feature to generate the SSIA maturity form and the associated revenue declaration form.

Once issued and returned completed by the SSIA account holders, the forms are scanned, and the data is extracted and validated using a combination of HP TeleForm's ICR, OMR, and bar code recognition functionality.

The future

Having worked with Inpute on a number of projects An Post plans to go back to them again. "We've a lot of forms we're looking at such as the redirection form for people who want their post sent to a new address when they move, so we might possibly be redesigning that to be system friendly. We're always looking at different projects, and we get numerous requests each year from various departments for it. It's only now that the local managers are seeing what the technology can do for them," said O'Toole.

About Inpute Technologies

Inpute Technologies specializes in document capture, records management, and workflow solutions. Based in Dublin, the company has been implementing and supporting HP Teleform-based solutions since 1996. Inpute has developed a wide range of applications for organizations in both the public and private sectors. More information on Inpute can be found on their website: **www.inpute.com.**

About HP Autonomy

HP Autonomy is a global leader in software that processes unstructured human information, including social media, email, video, audio, text, web pages, and more. Using HP Autonomy's information management and analytics technologies, organizations can extract meaning in real time from data in virtually any format or language, including structured data. A range of purpose-built market offerings help organizations drive greater value through information analytics, unified information access, archiving, eDiscovery, enterprise content management, data protection, and marketing optimization.

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