

case study



Dairy Market Leader Sees Productivity through Employee Satisfaction

NOTE: LXE's parent company, EMS Technologies, was acquired by Honeywell in August 2011.

In some ways, computers are a lot like the people who use them. Take our ability to withstand extreme temperatures, for instance. A frigid day that arrives unannounced in the middle of a heat wave feels much colder, while we can generally get ourselves used to the cold when days get slowly and incrementally chillier. The average person's body requires time to acclimate.

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However, slow acclimatization is a luxury that no cold storage facility can afford, especially Dean Foods, a global leader in branded dairy foods and beverages. As the dairy industry leader in the United States, Dean Foods Company sells milk and a full range of related products under more than 50 well-known local and regional brands, and a wide array of private labels. Dean's worldwide headquarters, located in Dallas, Texas, supports two operating divisions: Fresh Dairy Direct, the largest processor and distributor of milk and other dairy products in the country; and WhiteWave-Morningstar, maker of an extensive line of nationally branded products such as Horizon Organic® dairy products, Silk® soy milk and International Delight® coffee creamers.

Operators in Dean's Birmingham, Alabama, and McKinney, Texas facilities routinely race from a -24°F freezer into a 70°F truck, and back again, as they move these high-demand fast-turn products along the supply chain. The mobile hand-held computers Dean's employees use to accelerate product through this

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— Rich Welling, Dean Foods, IT Director

transition must withstand this rapid and dramatic change.

Challenge

Dean originally used a competitive solution that added blankets and heated boots to enable freezer use. Those add-on heating mechanisms became hindrances in the warm outer areas, as the units quickly fell prey to condensation. The condensation would run down the unit and collect behind the keys, turning to ice when the operator returned to the freezer. According to Rich Welling, Dean Foods IT Director, "the iced keys would stick which led to constant repairs of devices with keys damaged or popped off completely."

Dean Foods runs its facilities using a warehouse management system (WMS) Telnet developed in-house. As a result,

it was important for Welling to find a manufacturer with the flexibility to fit their custom solution as well as the responsiveness to address any issues as they arise.

In addition, Dean Foods prioritizes employee satisfaction. "We're in the customer service business first and foremost," said Welling. "That service includes our warehouse employees. If they're not happy with their equipment, it will lead to a productivity drop that carries all the way through to our customers." To track satisfaction, Dean Foods created an ongoing Peer Review system that allows employees to rate processes and equipment on 15 different scales from 0-10. Prior to implementing new cold storage computers, Dean's employees ranked their hand-helds between 5 and 6 on average.

Solution

Dean Foods decided to test new hand-helds in their ice cream storage areas. They chose the MX7CS from LXE for several reasons:

- The coil-heated screen required no additional blankets or boots, improving ergonomics.
- The unit's construction allowed it to go across in-and-out freezer transitions without condensation, even in hot, humid facilities in locations like Birmingham, Alabama and McKinney, Texas.
- The device worked well both with voice-driven applications as well as Dean's in-house WMS.
- The epoxy-coated keys would stand up to operator abuse.



Results

The MX7CS scored between 8 and 9 out of a possible 10 on Dean's internal Peer Review scale, a 50% improvement over the scores received by the previous devices. While the ruggedness and ability to stand up to cold were drivers of the positive reviews, additional productivity came from the device's overall performance, as well as LXE's ongoing customer service. The response to the MX7CS was so positive that Dean Foods has begun phasing in the MX7 across all its standard-temp warehouse environments.

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Evaluating cold-ready devices

When evaluating cold-ready devices, ask the following questions:

- Does the unit require a desiccant pack that needs to be changed on an annual basis, guaranteeing at least one service trip per year?
- Is the unit's heater external to the device, requiring additional batteries and support?
- Does the unit have specialized batteries for low-temp environments?
- Is it easy for operators to use the unit while wearing gloves?
- Can the unit's thermostat allow for operation both inside and outside the freezer?

To learn more about cold storage environments or Honeywell's line of cold-ready computers, please visit honeywellaidc.com, where you can find detailed device data sheets as well as our cold storage white paper entitled "The Cold Hard Facts."

For more information:

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