

# Sharpening Beverage Distribution Performance with Descartes



Mitchell Distributing, a total beverage distributor and longstanding Anheuser Busch wholesaler, replaced its legacy routing solution with Descartes' strategic and daily route planning and route execution platform for delivery and sales resources. The solution helped Mitchell enhance customer service across six locations in three states through more effective routing, improved driver performance and better visibility into sales and distribution operations.

**"With Descartes', we have a highly responsive services and support organization and the technology innovations we need to support unique distribution requirements in multiple locations. We can strategically execute re-routes to optimize distribution and keep delivery productivity high. We have visibility into driver performance and drivers have more manageable days, which has helped retention. Salespeople are better equipped to tailor service times to account needs. It's helped operations tremendously—from drivers to senior leadership—and our customers win from us being more data-driven in route planning and execution."**

**Will Woodall**

Sales Execution Coordinator  
Mitchell Distributing

**Company Profile**

Mitchell Distributing  
Beverage Distribution

**Solutions**

Descartes Strategic Route Planning  
Descartes Route Planning  
Descartes Route Execution

**About the Client**

Founded in the 1940s, Mitchell Distributing is a family-owned beverage distributor based in Meridian, Mississippi. The company has experienced steady growth throughout the years, including through acquisitions, and today serves customers from four locations in Mississippi as well as operations in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC.

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**Quick Overview****Challenge**

Legacy System Hindering Productivity

**Solution**

Leveling Up Delivery & Sales

**Results**

- Better Business Planning
- Doubled Rerouting Frequency
- More Balanced Distribution Operations
- Enhanced Driver Retention

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## Challenge: Legacy System Hindering Productivity

Family-owned Mitchell Distributing has operations across Meridian, Gulfport, Shannon and Leland locations in Mississippi and Chesapeake Beverage in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC. The company's growing distribution network, however, began to tax the limits of existing technology. In some cases, orders were piled up at the end of the day for drivers, causing deliveries to run late and forcing long days to meet customer commitments. Sales management lacked the data to understand how to best budget account reps' time to efficiently and effectively service customers. Route planning was rooted in tribal knowledge and re-routes were a painstaking manual exercise performed maybe once a year and, in some locations, even less frequently. And, without any data to understand the implications of route changes, the company often grappled with a lack of consensus on what changes to make.

## Solution: Leveling Up Delivery & Sales

As Mitchell Distribution grew organically and by acquisition, the company needed timely visibility into route planning and route execution to better service its diverse customer mix across multiple locations. With Descartes' solution, the company moved away from "survival routing" to strategic route planning and to advanced route execution management to help sales reps, drivers and chasers (i.e., merchandisers) maximize productive time throughout the day for improved levels of customer service.

Will Woodall, Sales Execution Coordinator at Mitchell, explains: "Routing had become somewhat stagnant given how much we had grown. While there was some good underlying consistency, without looking at delivery patterns more frequently and thoroughly, imbalances and inefficiencies crept into distribution workloads. And, we had no visibility into where drivers were, whether they were making deliveries in the correct order, or if they got hung up somewhere that we didn't know about—that's when we really started looking at a more robust solution."

### More re-routes completed with fewer resources

The deployment began in Gulfport. Using Descartes' strategic routing capabilities, Mitchell ran multiple re-route scenarios to evaluate the best options before establishing master routes for the territory. On a nightly basis, orders are now seamlessly exported from the VIP route accounting solution to Descartes' route execution platform used in the field to manage the day's delivery orders in the optimal route sequence. Woodall notes, "With Descartes, we now have dashboard-based visuals of planned versus actual routes based on better data from mobile devices and our Samsara telematics. It's easy to monitor if we are on track or where adjustments need to be made. While our previous system showed where our trucks were, we lacked the ability to reliably track when drivers arrived at a stop and when they left."

Once Gulfport was operational, Mitchell rolled out one additional location per month. Operations managers and delivery supervisors from Meridian, Shannon and Leland attended the Gulfport rollout, which accelerated subsequent deployments and supported change management. Baltimore followed the four Mississippi implementations. Mitchell now re-routes consistently every six months or, in some locations, even every three months to adapt to shifts in service policies and customers—and to seasonality in the business. "More tactical changes to individual routes are now even initiated by people in the field and everyone is much more receptive to adjustments," Woodall adds.

In Washington, Mitchell required a different approach to routing. Because the smaller, craft-centered location experiences much more variability in what is sold on a daily and weekly basis, the company replaced its legacy system with Descartes' solution for dynamic route planning. Each night from Monday to Thursday, the system is used to automatically develop dynamic route plans for the next day. "We no longer need to manually look at orders at night to determine which ones can be delivered the next day," explains Woodall. "It's made route planning much faster and more seamless, and we can quickly adjust to unforeseen circumstances as they arise for drivers throughout the day."

### Enhanced driver productivity and retention

Strategic route planning has allowed Mitchell to regularly review and adjust delivery frequency to achieve higher levels of driver productivity than in the past. It's also increased route density, so drivers complete more stops and deliver to more customers on a single route—a productivity enhancer that also benefits customers. In addition, the distributor has doubled the number of runs per day for specific routes. Once trucks return to the depot, empty trailers are unhooked and drivers are reloaded with full trailers to resume the day's deliveries. "Drivers also appreciate having more manageable routes, which helps us counter concerns about overtime and long hours," Woodall explains. "And, if drivers need help during the day, we know immediately and can send chasers to get them back on target versus reacting at the end of the day."

The solution has also helped with driver retention. Given the struggle to hire and retain Class A drivers, Mitchell created “super routes” using Descartes. Super routes combine two full-size trucks per route, with one driver and two chasers each. As deliveries are made, chasers stay behind to merchandise products, which decreases service time for drivers, relieves them of physical labor at large format locations and increases the number of stops delivered. The solution has also made Mitchell’s chasers more productive, as better visibility into route execution means there’s less time waiting on a truck’s arrival to start merchandising activities.

### Heightened sales performance

For Mitchell’s salespeople, one of the biggest benefits of more sophisticated route execution lies in automatically obtaining accurate service times with customers. In the past, the company had to rely on reps manually recording when they arrived at a stop and when they departed. “We were often missing up to 30 minutes of actual work time per visit that wasn’t accounted for,” explains Woodall, “and without more precise data, we risked both over- and under-servicing accounts.”

With the Descartes solution, arrive/depart times are now automatically captured passively based on custom-created geofences around customer locations. This not only gives salespeople the ability to perform their job without interruption, but also yields highly accurate service times. With better quality data, Mitchell has been able to establish a hierarchy of accounts, which ensures reps are dedicating the right amount of time to service each customer, from more revenue-generating larger brands to smaller, independent stores. “This level of prioritization helps to ensure time spent with each and every customer is the most productive it can be.”

## The Results



### Better Business Planning

Using Descartes’ solutions, Mitchell has greater control over adapting distribution operations in step with changes in its customer base, new customer service policies, volume swings throughout the year and even potential future acquisitions. The technologies continually help keep delivery running efficiently and meeting high customer service requirements.



### Doubled Rerouting Frequency

Rerouting is no longer a full month’s effort with multiple resources exchanging and debating tribal knowledge. For each location, Mitchell now resets the distribution network at least twice a year to keep pace with demand fluctuations and ongoing growth. The Descartes solution models “what if” routing scenarios that can be evaluated and executed quickly as the customer mix grows and changes.



### More Balanced Distribution Operations

Strategic route planning better balances the workload for on-premise and off-premise customers across different work weeks at each location. Using the Descartes solution, Mitchell has increased the number of stops/route for enhanced driver performance—and saved on labor costs by pairing drivers with chasers on specific routes, instead of adding drivers to complete the same amount of work.



### Enhanced Driver Retention

Drivers’ days are much more predictable, translating into greater retention. More strategic route planning means drivers are no longer backlogged with deliveries at the end of the day or week. With real-time visibility, Mitchell sends drivers help when needed, minimizes peaks and valleys in the delivery cycle, and reduces the need for driver overtime to meet customer commitments.

## Conclusion

Descartes’ experience helped Mitchell Distributing quickly transition away from a legacy routing solution that was hindering business performance. The move to Descartes’ advanced route planning and execution solutions gave the company better visibility, agility and control, and ultimately improved productivity and the customer and driver experience.