

Customer Success Story

Relyon

Descartes Puts Relyon's Routing and Planning Worries to Bed

Relyon Limited is the UK's largest bed manufacturer, whose brand name has become synonymous with the very highest standards of product design and manufacturing quality. Today, Relyon employs 500 people and has two manufacturing facilities in Somerset and Devon counties. In addition to its own products, Relyon has expanded its product line in recent years to include bedroom furniture designed in the UK but imported from the Asia Pacific region.

All distribution is managed through a main operating centre/storage facility in Somerset. Deliveries are made to more than 500 bedding companies and retail store customers throughout the UK and Ireland, including Bensons for Beds, Mothercare, House of Fraser, SleepMasters, Cargo, and Marks & Spencers. Relyon's fleet of 23 trucks is managed through a third party supplier.

Changing with the Times

In 2005, after a period of rapid growth, Relyon set out to overhaul its delivery fleet to bring it in line with the company's multi-purpose needs. Shortly thereafter, the decision was made to find a solution to automate its manual routing and planning processes, and reduce overall costs and complexity in its delivery operations.

According to Chris Vaughan, Logistics Manager at Relyon, "Although we were using spreadsheets and filters to arrive at the base information we needed to map our routes, that still left a huge amount of manual planning that had to be done to manage our logistics processes."

An added challenge was the fact that delivery requirements were variable. Relyon's business was split between major and independent retailers, each of which had their own delivery demands. "Deliveries to distribution centers is generally a one-stop exercise, but could require single or multiple truck loads per day," says Vaughan. "Since independent retailers buy smaller quantities, that could entail several special trips a day. Depending on the schedule, a driver could do anywhere from five to 18 stops in a day."

“ Descartes not only met our criteria – they were also able to show us how their solution would help us improve our business and save costs. ”

Chris Vaughan,
Logistics Manager, Relyon

He adds that many of the major retail customers were on static routing schedules, with guaranteed lead and delivery times. “The variables are infinite for independent retailers, and very much depend on their lead time and when an order comes in,” notes Vaughan. “No two days are ever the same.”

The biggest challenge was keeping pace with integrated production and delivery schedules. “Beds are ordered individually, so to schedule production you have to schedule delivery. As a result, planning is a constant process.” One Relyon dispatcher would spend a majority of their working week just planning vehicle routes for the following week. This was especially challenging during peak delivery seasons when weekly truckloads almost doubled.

Looking for an Answer

Relyon established several criteria when seeking out a supplier. “One priority was ease of operation and ease of understanding,” says Vaughan. “There are all sorts of systems out there, but some of those require tremendous IT expertise and endless training to use them.”

Another critical requirement was the ability to create ‘what if’ scenarios. “There is always a need to look at variables and the impact on the company and our facilities,” explains Vaughan. “If we wanted X number of additional units to be manufactured and delivered to a particular distribution centre, we need to know the effect on our fleet and related costs. Can we handle that type of volume and cope as a business? Does the existing fleet work, or do I need additional resources? Doing that manually can take an inordinate amount of time.”

Since Relyon also wanted a tracking system for its vehicles, the decision was made to look for a single source supplier for all its needs. “We quickly decided that we would like to go to a one-stop-shop. We have had too many experiences where using two or more suppliers simply didn’t work. We wanted one person, one contact, one company.”

On the Road with Descartes Routing and Planning

After a comprehensive search, Descartes was selected as Relyon’s single source supplier for its routing, planning and tracking needs. “Descartes not only met our criteria – they were also able to show us how their solution would help us improve our business and save costs.”

The Descartes implementation was rolled out in stages, beginning with sales and territory planning, followed by route planning, and finally tracking using personal digital assistants (PDA).

Planning and routing functions are already much easier and quicker, says Vaughan. Rather than spending an entire week on route planning for the following week, Relyon can build each day’s route in less than five minutes. Last minute modifications – such as added routes or a single client request for a specific delivery time – can also be made easily. “This cuts out a huge amount of time so our team can be proactive rather than reactive to situations,” says Vaughan. He estimates that the company has already realized a 10% reduction in mileage.

Once the final phase of the initial implementation plan is completed (i.e. integrating the tracking system), Relyon dispatchers and customer service agents will have real-time visibility into vehicle and driver activities on the road. “When the tracking system is up and running, we will be able to pull up a screen, pick a route and know where a driver is, what deliveries they made and what they will be doing next,” explains Vaughan. “That will lead to a major reduction in workload.”

“Now that the system is in place and addressing our immediate priorities, we can start looking into the additional features we can add to make our business run even more efficiently,” says Vaughan. Future plans include advanced reporting features. “There are many more ways we can streamline our delivery operations, and we know the system can do it. With Descartes, we’re on the right track to major savings.”

Summary

Challenge:

Relyon was using labor-intensive processes for managing a variety of delivery schedules for its fleet of 23 vehicles. Having undergone significant growth in recent years, the company needed a more efficient way to manage planning and routing functions and ultimately save costs and streamline its operations.

Solution:

Descartes provides a full range of routing, planning and tracking solutions to support Relyon’s delivery operations.

Benefits:

- A single-source supplier to address Relyon’s current and future needs
- Route planning functions reduced from one week to five minutes
- Ability to implement last minute additions and route changes quickly and easily
- Estimated 10% mileage reduction
- Real-time visibility into deliveries on the road once tracking functions are implemented