



Xicon at Work

“Xicon understand our business and we were able to work comfortably in partnership”

Elaine Boyle
Customer Services Manager
Business Express



In a competitive market, offering good customer service is always essential. For Business Express Network Ltd, the nationwide parcel carrier, handling customer queries relating to deliveries was proving time-consuming and costly. Thanks to a new system developed by Xicon, Business Express is set to save £1.7 million over three years as well as improving efficiency, creating visibility and enhancing customer service.

Business Express Network Limited is part of the Littlewoods group. The company delivers 50 million parcels annually to homes across the UK. With 33 depots, 2,000 employees, and 1,500 vehicles, Business Express has an annual turnover of £131 million. Trading customers include Littlewoods, Index, JD Williams, Next, and Bid-up TV.

One innovation introduced by parcel carriers in recent years is online parcel tracking. By visiting a web page, senders can find out where their parcel actually is within the delivery cycle. Unique parcel identifying barcodes read by scanning equipment helps monitor the entire collection, transport and delivery process.





Information overload

In 2001, Xicon developed a parcel tracking system for Business Express. Built using an Oracle database, it's a web-enabled system accessed from the company's home page or intranet. But parcel tracking alone was not enough to provide good customer service. The company had a call centre in Liverpool costing £650,000 annually to handle parcel enquiries and claims from customers.



According to Customer Services Manager Elaine Boyle, parcel status might be as simple as 'received into depot'. If a customer then telephoned to ask about delivery, that request was collated onto a spreadsheet and e-mailed to the depot. Any responses were then grouped and sent back to customers twice-daily which proved a slow and protracted process. It was a constant merry-go-around of phone calls, e-mails, and faxes as well as keying and re-keying information. Claims for missing parcels took even longer while parcel recalls just added to the burden.

"We did not have a query handling system. The process was time-consuming with queries coming from different people asking about the same thing. The whole process was all wrong. We wanted a seamless system from customer query to resolution and to add real value." said Elaine Boyle.

In October 2003, it was decided to relocate to more cost effective offices, downsize the call centre and deploy an online customer-facing query handling system. A major goal was to give all clients and employees online access, making the query handling process visible to everyone. At the same time, Business Express realised that a web-driven query handling system also offered a competitive edge in the parcels delivery marketplace.

Working in partnership

The technical objectives were simple - any new system had to integrate with the existing Oracle-based parcel tracking system. Comprehensive management queries and reports were also required and everything had to be accessible for customers and staff alike. Thanks to a long relationship with the Littlewoods Group, Xicon was already a preferred supplier and an obvious choice for the project.

Business Express - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Littlewoods

Address: http://k3stprod7777/symbolprq/ms/BE_REPORTING_NEW_depot_query_list-view?tp_depot_selected=009&tp_customer_selected=lip_date_selected=lip_assign_selected=lip_px

Welcome to Business Express
Open Query Summary Screen

Depot No: 303 Raised By: All

Archive Advise Customer

Date / Time	Customer	Priority	UPI No.	Reason	Status	Assigned to	Depot No.
05-OCT-04 10:04:25	mmsports	1	BMM15408310A-3	Stop & Return	New	N/A	9
04-OCT-04 08:44:57	mi	1	BMS_101029472-1	Complaint	Under Investigation	Silver on holiday until 08-10-04	9
01-OCT-04 09:13:56	GM Mail 016224	3	BMM1A117650A-1	Depot Query	New	N/A	9
04-OCT-04 09:28:46	Mothercare 548POD	3	BMT10006731A-1	Complaint	Closed	Yvonne	9
04-OCT-04 10:05:16	express	3	9030124474592-1	Received into Depot	Closed	Steve	9
04-OCT-04 10:09:34	express	3	9030125843200-1	Depot Query	New	N/A	9
04-OCT-04 12:10:19	Mothercare 548POD	3	BMT10006731A-2	Complaint	Closed	Yvonne	9
04-OCT-04 13:10:25	mmsports	3	BMM15416301A-1	Received into Depot	Closed	Nicki	9

Back Update History Reassign

"Xicon understand our business and we were able to work comfortably in partnership. They listened to what we wanted and we worked together to come up with the right process" said Elaine Boyle.

Xicon: Delivering Results

Facing a March 2004 deadline, the two companies set to work on the design, development and implementation of a query handling system. A final specification recommending the use of Business Objects was completed by February 2004.

Xicon then set up a test application, enabling head office and depot staff to undertake thorough trials. A suggestion from Xicon saw Business Express' sales representatives demonstrating the new query screens to customers, helping with a successful roll out.



On 22nd March, the new system went live without a hitch and customers telephoning Business Express about parcel queries are now the exception. A smaller customer care team works from more cost effective premises to handle escalated queries and other centralised processes. They also support the 'returns' procedure for parcels being sent back to customers.

Although customers can enter free-form online queries, the system encourages the use of simple drop-down menus with some query screens personalised to particular customers. Offering much faster feedback, all queries are then routed instantly to the right depot and automatically escalated as necessary. Any Ad-hoc queries or management reports are available through Business Objects.

Efficient query handling

There have been some all-round improvements including the ability to meet tough service level agreements and solve problems quickly. Queries, claims, and parcel returns are dealt with far more efficiently while eradicating the need for telephoning. According to one major client, The Book People, the query parcel and returns processes are "quicker, easier and more user friendly" while "depots seem to be more organised, more responsive and quicker to action our requests than was ever possible in the past." Such comments are echoed by customers and employees alike.

Key Facts

Solution Summary

New online query handling system based on an Oracle database and application server to generate web pages for internet and intranet access.

Key Benefits

- Cut operating costs
- Improved efficiency
- Enhanced customer service

Software

- Oracle8i Enterprise Edition database
- Oracle9i Application Server
- Business Objects

Number of Users

1400



For those working inside Business Express, there's better task allocation and management information available too. Any bottlenecks or weaknesses in delivery processes are swiftly identified and eliminated. The company has gained much tighter control of its delivery network while ensuring the depots resolve queries quickly without over-reliance on head office staff.

With customers querying via the desktop rather than picking up the phone, Business Express is now saving substantial sums

The new query handling system is ahead of target to deliver financial savings of £1.7 million in three years. But none of this would have been possible without the right supplier.

"Xicon are very easy to work with and this was key to the project in the timescales we had. Xicon are very willing and prepared to listen to what you want and then work with you to deliver the right solution," said Elaine Boyle.

There are some big changes ahead for Business Express. In 2005, a merger with another parcel carrier, Reality, will be fully completed. Although the new company name has yet to be announced, the parcel tracking and query handling systems will be extended to cover the expanded network of depots. Xicon will be helping ensure that Business Express is the parcel carrier everyone can trust.



About Xicon

Xicon was founded in 1991 as a systems integrator and IT solutions company. Xicon helps its customers maximise their business advantage by providing a total solution as a strategic technology partner. Xicon does this through exceptional service delivery, which is only possible due to the high quality of its people and the culture in which they operate.

For more information on Xicon's solutions or to arrange a meeting with one of Xicon's Principal Consultants please initially contact Nancy Handley on 01925 248224.

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