

Fujitsu LifeBook P1510D Convertible Tablet PC Keeps Suntech Optics' Mobile Sales Force on the Leading Edge

Challenge: Improve sales force efficiency by equipping reps with a complete sales automation environment on a versatile and highly portable hardware platform.

Solution: Suntech Optics chose the 1.1 Kg (2.5 lbs.) Fujitsu LifeBook P1510D Convertible Tablet PC to put a comprehensive suite of sales tools in the hands of their mobile reps. The powerful tablet-based device is small enough to use while standing in the aisle of a store, yet provides real-time access to ordering and other sales functions, and delivers the full PC functionality of Microsoft Office.

Benefits: The tablet PC Convertible works as a traditional notebook with keyboard, or as a pen-based tablet that can be conveniently operated while standing in a store aisle.

The software solution, Inecta EZ Route, features state-of-the-art information tools that save time and help reps provide superior service to customers.

The bright and wide 8.9" screen is large enough to display route maps, product matrices and related photographs.

Extended 7-hour battery gives reps excellent flexibility on the road, and many travel for days on a single charge.

Built-in Wireless LAN (802.11 a/b/g) provides ample and simplified connectivity options.

The Challenge: Increase salesforce efficiency by equipping reps with a state-of-the-art application environment on a portable platform.

The retail eyewear sector is a tough and competitive business where market growth is slow, and success depends on highly efficient operations. State-of-the-art information tools can make the difference between a marginal performer and an industry leader.

Suntech Optics, a leading supplier of ready-to-wear eyewear to stores across Canada and in the US, has worked hard to stay on the leading edge, and their use of sales automation systems dates back to 1990. The previous system had been run on a traditional notebook, and reps felt that these had been too large and cumbersome to use in a store environment. "We wanted something smaller, more lightweight," explains Mike Chang, Suntech's Manager of IT.

Suntech began to shop for applications that would be compatible with their back-end environment. They found an ideal fit in EZ-Route, a retail application developed by Florida-based Inecta Software. Initially, the plan was to roll out the application on a PDA. But as they approached the pilot stage, reps found that PDA's were too limited.

One of the problems was the small PDA screen size. Reading glasses, for example, are sold in 10 different degrees of magnification, resulting in an order matrix that is too wide to display on the PDA. "This would have meant a lot of scrolling, and a lot of extra work," explains Change. Route maps, product photos, and multiple application windows were also impractical to display on a PDA screen.

Another factor was that Suntech reps have to be in touch with the office constantly, and often receive large files, such as spreadsheets. The PDA was judged to be not powerful enough for all of their email requirements.

The Fujitsu LifeBook P1510D Convertible Tablet PC gives reps the best of both worlds.

Suntech then began to look at tablet-based PC's to see if this would provide the fit they needed. After looking at several models from other vendors, Chang picked up a demo model of the then newly-released Fujitsu LifeBook P1510D. "We basically fell in love with it," says Chang. Suntech was also comfortable with Fujitsu's reputation as a world class vendor. "They've been in business for many years," Chang explains. "They've got a great tradition."

The model was a winner not only because of its small size, but the ergonomic design. Working in the aisles of a retail store, there is often no surface available to rest the unit on. Being able to use the stylus comfortably while holding the unit in the other hand was a critical factor. The reps can easily navigate multiple window screens and select product items with the simple touch of the stylus, and their customers even enjoyed the novelty of signing orders using the digital ink technology.

The display was also important. The Fujitsu LifeBook features a bright 8.9" wide SVGA (1024X600) touch screen that is able to present Suntech's product matrices, and allows multiple application windows to be opened. The display has worked out so well that Suntech will soon be adding Google Maps to the product mix.

Another popular feature was the extended 7-hour battery, which gives reps excellent flexibility on the road – in fact many travel for days on a single charge, without having to carry a docking station.

Suntech is enjoying higher productivity.

Reps now have instant access to 7 sales reports, which are built into the unit. "This gives them a better handle on their sales cycle, and also the routes," explains Chang. The built-in wireless interface allows orders to be placed rapidly from any wireless hot spot, or through a home wireless router. The new solution has also helped Suntech build on their tradition of providing industry reports and other market information to store managers.

Suntech's management is now able to track rep activities more closely. Reps visit stores for a variety of reasons – to check on stock, assist with merchandising, or discuss orders for additional product. Keeping closer tabs is helping Suntech ensure that customers are getting the support they need.

"We're excited about the new system," Chang explains, "because we feel that we're back in the saddle again. After 15 years of running one application, one style, we finally got into a jump on the times and a jump ahead of our competitors."

Efficiency is essential for retail distributors, and information tools can be a deciding factor. For busy reps in the field, the Fujitsu LifeBook P1510D provides full PC power in a unit significantly smaller and lighter than a traditional form factor notebook. This combination along with Tablet PC functionality makes the Fujitsu LifeBook P1510D ideal for sophisticated mobile sales automation environments.