

RouteSmart Secures Home Delivery Routing Automation for San Diego Union-Tribune

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Background

The San Diego Union-Tribune (SDUT), a daily newspaper with 400,000 home delivery subscribers and 1,800 carriers, faced numerous challenges managing its daily distribution operations. First off, the scale of the problem and the dynamic nature of the home delivery environment tied up management resources who, with few automated tools, were constantly engaged in route management. Second, customer service – a critical success factor for SDUT – was jeopardized each night if regular carriers did not report to carry out their contracted obligations. Since SDUT staff was only able to provide alpha-street listings from SDUT's circulation operating system for each delivery route, replacement carriers often struggled with meeting service requirements – especially if they were unfamiliar with the neighborhoods. "The bottom-line is our previous route management process took a lot of time, caused delays in getting papers to customers, and used field personnel inefficiently," explains Division Manager David Fischer.

A better way

Desiring better tools and standardized procedures for managing home delivery operations, SDUT engaged RouteSmart Technologies – developer of the RouteSmart Route Optimization System, a geographic information system (GIS) based application used extensively by newspapers who desire a competitive advantage in customer service and home delivery distribution management. "We liked RouteSmart because it was GIS based and could totally automate the process of providing route lists with detailed turn-by-turn driving directions that were updated daily," comments SDUT Project Manager Larry Bernstein, who coordinated the SDUT implementation of RouteSmart. "The initial set-up with RouteSmart was also much less labor intensive than other software packages we evaluated. Instead of requiring us to manually input and define the delivery order listing, the software does it automatically for each route, taking into account variables such as apartment unit sequencing, street network driving conditions and side-of-street delivery constraints."

The deployment challenge

Working closely with SDUT staff, RouteSmart Technologies configured and deployed a multi-site, 28-user application that automatically serves each of SDUT's 10 distribution centers. To implement and maintain the software, geocoding kickouts – subscriber addresses that do not match the digital map database integrated with the RouteSmart system – were resolved and a feedback-loop for advising RouteSmart's data partner Navigation Technologies (NavTeq) was put in place for communicating any inaccuracies with the digital street data. Accessing the application via SDUT's existing CITRIX application server network, each distribution center is automatically updated with sequenced delivery lists detailing street-by-street, turn-by-turn driving directions that reflect subscriber activity from the previous day. New subscribers, alternate publications, and vacation stops/starts are accounted for by the RouteSmart software that runs unattended each night and works in conjunction with SDUT's existing circulation system.

In addition to route sheets and maps, each distribution center has the ability to perform route-splits instantly in the event carriers do not report to carry out their contracted obligations and the route needs to be split among distribution center management staff or other carriers. Routes that are split are automatically balanced into a user specified number of sub-routes in sequential delivery order with turn by turn driving directions based on delivery time. SDUT's 30 independent distributors can

also access the updated route sheets remotely via their home computers. “The ability to provide the independent distributors with remote log-in capability is especially helpful as our service area covers a large geographic region of Southern California,” comments SDUT’s Bob Sigler, who worked closely with RouteSmart on the system requirements and design as well as resolving installation and implementation issues.

Results delivered and more to come

Manual management of route lists is now becoming a thing of the past for SDUT. RouteSmart software is now an integral part of ensuring efficient distribution operations and customer service for the paper. In addition to automation of the daily routing process, RouteSmart software will also be used to evaluate strategic distribution management issues as well as aid in sales planning for targeting non-subscribers with special offers. Plans for evaluating GPS-based dispatching systems for re-delivery operations are also underway. “RouteSmart was great to work with; they were responsive to our requests and collaborated closely with us on approaches for handling some of the unique carrier delivery constraints as well as issues we encountered in installing and implementing the System in a CITRIX environment,” recaps Sigler. “Their responsiveness to working with us has given us a great base of core functionality for applying RouteSmart to many aspects of our company beyond daily delivery list routing,” concludes Bernstein.