

RouteSmart Delivers Smart Service Solution for The Virginian-Pilot

Daily newspaper implements RouteSmart route planning software—a cost-effective move that has enabled them to streamline home delivery operations and improve customer service.

The Challenge

At The Virginian-Pilot, a Norfolk-based newspaper (196,000 daily, 232,000 Sunday) with 900 home delivery routes, operational inefficiencies were causing customer service issues with respect to reliable delivery of the paper. Pilot area managers and carriers were responsible for manually administering route updates each night and worse yet, each district had its own way of performing updates. This time-consuming and error-prone process resulted in ongoing delivery errors and the paper found itself with few accountability tools for improving the situation.

To add to the matter, like many other newspapers, The Virginian-Pilot wrestled daily with the problem of maintaining delivery reliability for its subscribers when the regular carriers were absent and area managers or replacement carriers had to cover routes. Replacement staff had little to work with in terms of accurate delivery sheets detailing driving directions on how the carrier should deliver the route when the regular carrier was absent. Replacement carriers often had difficulty navigating through their temporarily assigned territory and they often mis-delivered papers or, even worse, simply could not find their way through the maze of streets in time to meet Pilot commitments on delivery times to subscribers.

The Virginian-Pilot realized that its manual routing process was inefficient, staff-intensive, and simply incapable of maintaining customer service levels the paper desired. They needed to find a way to automate the process, increase efficiency, and improve customer service.

The Solution

The Virginian-Pilot turned to RouteSmart Technologies, a company that specializes in providing highly precise and detailed geographic information system-based routing solutions that model unique newspaper industry routing constraints, to help them reengineer their entire home delivery routing process. "RouteSmart began by creating a custom program that each night automatically imports a file created on our circulation system with all active subscribers," explains Roger Berry, The Virginian-Pilot's Circulation Information Systems Manager. "Once the file is updated, the program then creates individual route delivery lists that itemize the specific customers to be serviced the next morning. This gives us accurate delivery lists each day."

"The RouteSmart system also takes every active subscriber (regardless of service level) and creates a route list that we use for delivery on "Bonus Days" such as Thanksgiving, when we deliver a free copy of the paper to every active subscriber. This list serves as a back-up, as well."

"RouteSmart has been a big time saver," says Berry. "It automatically outputs routing solutions and distributes them via our network that enable us to print route lists for any particular day, district, and route. Early in the morning managers simply log onto the network and print out the routes that they need. All 900 routes take less than two hours to compute and make available for printing. Since there is such a short window of opportunity for delivering newspapers, this improvement is a huge benefit to us and our customers."

The Results

“Prior to a circulation field staff reorganization, we had 33 area managers. Now we have 19 — a 42% reduction. We’ve reduced our distribution centers from 8 to 5, resulting in more carriers in each center. Through all this change, RouteSmart keeps our delivery lists up-to-date and we have decreased the number of customer complaints even when our regular carriers are absent.”

In addition to efficiency improvements, RouteSmart has helped The Virginian-Pilot expand its product delivery capabilities due to better quality route lists. For example, as part of the distribution redesign, Virginian-Pilot carriers have taken over the delivery of the Hampton Roads Savings Weekly, a Total Market Coverage (TMC) product that is delivered to non-subscriber households.

“RouteSmart has allowed our staff the ability to redirect their energies towards more customer-focused activities. As we further integrate the RouteSmart system, we will continue to reap additional benefits,” says Mark Quan, Home Delivery Manager.

“In the future, we plan to use RouteSmart for delivering single copy targeted publications,” says Berry. “We also will use the street network data and GIS analysis component of ArcView (which comes bundled with RouteSmart) with our marketing database for mailings and other marketing projects.”