

Case Study

MANUFACTURING: Hercules



A Herculean Challenge

Global chemical player uses XcelleNet to keep field specialists and customers up to date



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the Company

Hercules Incorporated is a global supplier of specialty chemicals and custom engineering solutions for effective, environmentally safe water management.

Business Pain

The issue for mobile device management was to improve the way highly mobile staff is supplied with the extremely specialized data required in order to provide customers with excellent quality consultancy services. Costs for the organization were to be kept as low as possible—at best with an effective audit track on sales activities, data updating, software requirements and devices.

The Value of the XcelleNet Solution

Around 1,000 mobile employees were upgraded to the XcelleNet's Afaria system. The results: data transmission and reliability has improved dramatically, data backups, anti-virus updates and key file updates are automatically accomplished, key corporate data is protected by comprehensive connection security, and the company has a reliable audit system for all its mobile assets.

Return on Investment

IT support costs for mobile workers have significantly reduced inside of only a few months of implementation of the Afaria package

Hercules Incorporated is a leading global supplier of specialty chemicals to a wide variety of home, office and industrial product markets. Its chemical treatment programs for water, wastewater and process systems are used in countless public buildings, office complexes and industrial plants all over the world. The company takes a highly customer-driven approach to its business, which is reflected in the large number of specialized workers dedicated solely to providing consultancy services on site at customer locations around the world.

The mobile device management solution used by Hercules for its more than 1,000 field consultants spread across nine European countries is XcelleNet's Afaria.

Information on location

The majority of mobile employees at Hercules are chemists and engineers who spend a great deal of time advising customers on complex issues that require a wide knowledge of the interaction between multiple variables. "Water issues can be highly sensitive", says Joe Houghton, Hercules Sales Force Automation Manager for Europe, "and our consultants need large amounts of information at their fingertips in order to help customers come to the right decisions about water treatment processes and assist them in implementing their projects. Efficient updating of data is vital, all the more so with our people because the data they need is constantly changing—and some of them don't get the chance to call into the nearest Hercules office from one month to the next."

Data coordination for employees who spend most of their time in the field is one of the primary goals for any mobile device management system, but it's certainly not the

only one. The costs of servicing, upgrading and simply keeping track of mobile devices can easily get out of hand, especially in a company like Hercules with over 1,000 laptops constantly on the road. This is a concern shared by many companies, as the results of a Network World Survey published in March 2001. Some of the main worries expressed in the survey were about the immense additional strain put on IT personnel by the extensive use of mobile devices and the unforeseeable service costs involved—not to mention the incalculable costs of skilled business specialists losing hours of valuable time trying to understand what has gone wrong again with their "mobile office".

All in one call

Afaria gives Hercules complete control over all necessary management functions for its mobile devices. Data is updated based on individual or group requirement profiles, software upgrades are distributed automatically, key files are backed up, system configurations checked, self-healing processes initiated where required. Afaria takes care of virus detection and eradication, tracks software licensing and ensures that Hercules always has a reliable inventory of its mobile hardware and software.

Typically, a sales consultant will initiate his or her connection first thing in the morning before going out to visit a customer. While reading the latest e-mails, they might receive an anti-virus update, a spreadsheet with the environmental risk characterization group data for one of their new customers, revised price lists relevant to their special area of work or a newer version of the laptop's Sales Force Automation application. Some outdated files on the system might be automatically replaced, and recent changes made to key data files will be backed up to a secure corporate server.



"RemoteWare has definitely improved our response times and that's critical when dealing with retail outlets.... a huge saving in time and money that has made us more efficient, effective and responsive to situations."

Andrew Leam-Taylor, Whitbread Restaurants

Joe Houghton confirms that "the ease of use is impressive. Basically, a click of the 'Give Me Everything' button delivers a targeted subset of our corporate data directly onto the field rep's laptop, so we are able to check up on key data and systems parameters." The system has become really efficient now that Afaria makes optimal use of the low bandwidths typically available to modem-based connections. "In fact, although the volume of communication has risen substantially since we introduced Afaria, our on-line time has not."

Afaria's philosophy of 'single-button systems maintenance' has meant significantly reduced end-user support requirement for Hercules' mobile employees, who are less sidetracked by irritating computer problems and can focus on the work at hand. But the advantages for the IT staff looking after the system are pretty impressive too. Despite the fact that data packages and performance parameters are optimized for each single device, the overall administration outlay required by Afaria has turned out to be remarkably low. Joe Houghton's experience agrees with this: "Taking all aspects of IT support for our mobile workforce into account, we have achieved a significant reduction in staff time dedicated to this area of our operations".

Fully Integrated Solution

Hercules has been using XcelleNet products since the mid-nineties. The relationship has evolved over the years to one of close mutual understanding. "At Hercules", says Joe Houghton, "we routinely establish strong, ongoing relationships with our customers,

and that's what we like about our relationship with XcelleNet. Our regular feedback with them has paid off, and they have listened carefully to our suggestions, many of which have been implemented in Afaria." Firmly committed to a policy of continuous improvement in all business processes, Houghton affirms that Afaria has delivered on all the main points Hercules earmarked for development in connection with the planned enhancement of their mobile network requirements.

The Afaria package is a proven and comprehensive solution, offering the broadest spectrum of mobile device management capabilities. At Hercules, the technology is now used to address the increasingly important issue of data security during dial-up connection. The risks of losing control over the total cost of ownership for their large fleet of mobile IT devices have been eradicated, and the company now has a reliable asset inventory management and tracking system. The system is also highly scalable, capable of growing to cope with large numbers of new users geographically spread anywhere around the globe.

Most importantly, the whole system has proved very simple for all involved. "Even the major upgrade from our previous software package ran smoothly. We achieved an automatic silent install of the update client software for around 500 users inside of the first 24 hours of operation without physically touching one single laptop. Our field staff just dialed up as usual and got the new client software. And that was that."

Hands on the future

Encouraged by the ease with which Afaria has done the job up to now, Hercules is looking ahead to new ways of gathering and disseminating information at customer locations. "Our mobile workers often work in hostile environments which are not very conducive to laptop usage", explains Houghton. "Take the case of a field rep out taking water samples in an open sewage plant on a rainy day. Recording the values measured or comparing them with the data on a handheld makes sense for us in a growing number of circumstances". One major investment consideration that is currently under discussion at Hercules is the integration of Portable Digital Assistants into the existing data management system. Afaria offers full functionality for all of the commonly available PDA devices on the market.

"It's all about good customer relations and how we can maintain them without losing sight of our costs. XcelleNet has grown with us over the years and come up with the answers to our growing mobile communications needs, and the latest Afaria capabilities are another great step forward. The system is easy for everyone to use, strong on security and works efficiently. We win time with Afaria, freeing up resources that we can use to generate new business with our customers."