G&J Pepsi bubbles up good ideas by equipping field workers with secure, managed mobile devices

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Eric McKinney, Cloud Services Manager, G&J Pepsi

When you grab a cold Pepsi out of a convenience store cooler, you probably have no idea the level of thought that went into how that bottle was placed and positioned in that particular store. Yet, dozens of people likely spent hours analyzing data and conferring to arrive at the optimum way to present that bottle to you—and encourage you to reach for it.

Bridge the digital divide

Welcome to the world of G&J Pepsi-Cola Bottlers, the largest family-owned and -operated Pepsi franchise bottler in the US, serving Ohio and Kentucky. Two-thirds of its 1,600-person workforce are field workers—factory workers who mix and bottle beverages, truck drivers who deliver them to stores, and merchandisers who make sure the beverages are displayed irresistibly.

While their colleagues at the Cincinnati headquarters were enjoying the fruits of the digital age—using the latest computers and software to make decisions and operate more efficiently—field workers were floundering in paper. Drivers, salespeople, and merchandisers were handed paper marching orders each morning regarding delivery routes, promotions, and displays. Over time, these paper instructions became veritable books that field people lugged around and scoured for information.

There was a deep digital divide between office and field workers, and this was a big problem for the business. Cincinnati workers in marketing, accounting, and sales couldn't make the best decisions without fresh, accurate data from the field, and people in the field couldn't do their best without real-time input from headquarters and one another.

If an order changed and a driver needed to make a new stop, or if a competitor offered a weekend special (chips, half price!) that affected Pepsi sales, there was no way to reroute the driver or quickly get new display instructions out to hundreds of merchandisers.

Establish a digital link between office and field

To bridge the digital divide, in 2014, G&J Pepsi equipped its nearly 1,200 field workers with company smartphones (Android) and purchased Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions for all 1,600 workers. Suddenly, field workers had company email and could share documents with headquarters staff and one another using Microsoft SharePoint Online and Microsoft OneDrive for Business (Office 365 services). If a customer order changed, headquarters staff could send an email to the driver to reroute him, eliminating wasted time and averting potential out-of-stocks.

Microsoft OneNote was an unexpectedly powerful unifier. If a merchandiser designed a particularly effective display for a new product and wanted to share it, he or she could sketch it out in a OneNote notebook, embed photos and voice notes, and share it with colleagues on SharePoint Online. Other merchandisers could replicate those steps, with instructions they read on their mobile devices.

Factory floor managers could suddenly share best practices with other factory floor managers. They could also access human resources and other corporate applications to check payroll data, policies, and procedures.

However, while field and office workers were celebrating a newfound level of

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togetherness and collaboration, the IT team was grappling with a new problem: managing and securing a sixfold increase in devices. Almost overnight, the IT staff went from managing 450 devices to managing 2,700 devices (many office staffers used multiple devices). There was also the challenge of simplifying authentication for 1,600 versus 450 users to a growing number of on-premises and cloud-based applications.

The IT staff required field workers to bring their smartphones into the office whenever they needed to have a new app installed or operating system updated. This was onerous for the workers and also hurt the business. "Whenever our field workers are not in the field, they're not making money for the business," says Eric McKinney, Cloud Services Manager at G&J Pepsi.

Then there was the problem of security. The company suddenly had more than 1,000 new digital conduits to its business floating around in pockets, purses, and vehicles that represented security vulnerabilities. How was G&J Pepsi to secure, protect, and manage a sixfold increase in the number of devices without increasing IT footprint?

Secure the digital link

G&J Pepsi turned to longtime technology advisor Interlink Cloud Advisors, a specialist in Microsoft cloud solutions, for help. Interlink had helped G&J Pepsi deploy Office 365 and suggested that the company look deeper into the Microsoft cloud services it was already licensing.

Interlink was referring to Microsoft Enterprise Mobility + Security (Microsoft EMS), a suite of products for managing identity, mobile devices, and security. G&J Pepsi was already using Microsoft Intune, a cloud-based device management product that's part of Microsoft EMS, to manage its 450 office PCs. Interlink worked with G&J Pepsi to extend its use of Intune to include mobile device management (MDM) to manage the 1,200 smartphones and some iPad tablets. In fact, using Intune, G&J Pepsi enrolled all 1,200 smartphones—which were in constant use and never in one place—in about four months.

The company also began to use Microsoft Azure Active Directory Premium, another part of Microsoft EMS, to manage the authentication of all 1,600 employees to all company applications. It used Azure Active Directory Premium to provide cloud-based, single-sign-on (SSO) access to a wide number of applications, including Concur, Oracle, ADP, and Meraki, with more to come. By providing access to multiple resources with just one set of credentials, G&J Pepsi made life orders of magnitude easier for workers and IT staff alike. Plus, G&J Pepsi can support interesting scenarios such as granting guests access to its wireless network by using SSO credentials.

Drive operational excellence

By using Microsoft EMS, G&J Pepsi set the business free to innovate, collaborate, and grow. "We had a lot of good ideas percolating at headquarters and a lot

of good ideas percolating in the field, but the two could never join forces before," McKinney says. "By using Office 365 and Microsoft EMS to connect these two groups and to connect field folks with one another, we're seeing an explosion of collaboration."

There are the merchandising and factory floor examples mentioned earlier. But there's also the value of ensuring that both sides of the business—office and field—are operating from the same set of accurate, up-to-date information.

Now, when an order changes midday, office staff can send drivers an email or text message with a link to a OneNote notebook that has the updated delivery and order information. It's a single point of truth, and it's accessible instantly, from their phones, wherever they are.

"This instant access to one version of the truth eliminates errors that cost us sales," McKinney says. "It helps us execute better. Stores penalize suppliers that make execution errors that result in out-of-stocks. They'll decrease your space or keep you out of ads. So we have to get stocking decisions right. Stores reward suppliers that execute better, and the Microsoft cloud helps us do that."

Cloud-based services such as Intune and Office 365 also allow employees to stay in the field, where they add the most value to the business. "By using Intune, we can deliver security and application updates a lot faster and keep our field folks in the stores so they don't have to come back in," McKinney says. "As long as they have

an Internet connection, we can push updates to them wherever they are."

Do more with less

By using Intune, McKinney can provision, secure, and control mobile devices, and authorize employees for Office 365 and other needed applications from the comfort of his office, in far less time than before.

"I'm one guy managing two datacenters' worth of infrastructure and services," McKinney says. "Microsoft cloud services, including Azure services, allow us to do much more with a much smaller staff. I'm no longer managing backups and making sure SANs and firmware are upgraded. Microsoft is doing that, so I can focus on delivering services to the business. If it doesn't bottle Pepsi, we don't want to do it. By offloading routine datacenter tasks to Microsoft, IT can focus on what's critical to the business."

Transform products and boost revenues

In fact, McKinney's team members have done a creative mashup between Office 365 and Microsoft Power BI to enhance G&J Pepsi's business and open up new business opportunities. The team created a Power BI application that pulls data from the company's stock management application and adds a Yammer social networking element so that merchandisers can check on stock levels in real time, view historical sales statistics as easy-to-read charts, and participate in Yammer

conversations about a product's sales. "This app provides people with statistics plus social; people need both to make good decisions," McKinney says.

This app has been so successful that G&J Pepsi is thinking about marketing it to new customers, to help them improve stocking and product placement decisions. "We want to provide an 'IT as a service' offering," McKinney says. "We already have employees in stores capturing data and employees at headquarters turning that data into actionable intelligence. We want to be able to offer that same data transformation service on other products in that store. Suddenly, IT is offering a revenue stream. That's unheard of and pretty cool. Microsoft EMS and Office 365 have opened up these new business opportunities."

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Software

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    - **Microsoft Intune**
- **Microsoft Office 365**
- **Microsoft Power BI**

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