



2011  
ProSales  
Excellence  
Awards  
Winner  
Technology

Bob Sanford  
president

Ty Wellspeak  
IT system administrator

# Healing Tablets

Sanford & Hawley's revamp of its IT system saves time, frees personnel, and opens up new opportunities.

It used to be that the only tablets found at a lumberyard were for heartburn, and scanners were used solely to take care of mounds of paperwork. That's not so any more at Sanford & Hawley.

As a company that has long been ahead of the technological curve (it

computerized in the mid-1970s), the dealer took its capabilities to a new level when it introduced a point-of-sales tablet device at its drive-through lumberyard in Unionville, Conn., its flagship location.

The tablet allows customers to get in and out quickly and efficiently with

little paperwork. To start, customers set up a house account with the dealer that includes an identity card used like a charge card. When the customer arrives, a tablet-wielding Sanford & Hawley yard worker scans the card. The customer then is free to pull the materials he needs. Upon finishing, those goods

are scanned with the tablet and an invoice is created.

The beauty of the ID cards and bar code labels is that Sanford & Hawley staff do not need to remember or search for product or customer codes, the company says. All is done with a couple of quick points and clicks. Meanwhile, contractors save some of their most valuable commodity: time.

While it is currently found only in the Unionville yard, Bob Sanford, company president, says the tablet technology will eventually reach the fourth-generation dealer's three other yards.

The addition of the tablet was part of a larger software implementation that the dealer carried out in early 2009. Along with the tablet, the new software

included an online store, online customer portal, and a new dispatch-delivery system.

The decision to upgrade occurred in late 2008, when the dealer realized that it couldn't progress with the 30-year-old software it had. Sanford says the company decided it wanted to implement something cutting-edge.

## Multiple Needs

"We knew that we wanted to move to a system that offered new technologies," the company's Excellence Awards entry says. "As we looked at systems we also determined that we wanted a fully integrated system as opposed to one with 'bolt on' modules." In addition, the company wanted software that could help it cut costs, handle paperwork moving between its locations (Unionville, Avon, and Manchester, Conn., and West Springfield, Mass.), and improve customer service.

Sanford & Hawley settled on bisTrack software by Progressive Solutions of Vancouver, British Columbia. The dealer felt it was a modern platform based on a well-known format—Microsoft Windows—and could easily link with supplier programs.

The decision and implementation process took only three months to complete, reflecting IT system administrator Ty Wellspeak's desire to avoid having procrastination set in. The software selection was made in November 2008, implementation began the next month, and the entire system was in place by spring.

While developing the program, Progressive Solutions was able to work around two programs Sanford & Hawley wanted to keep: the ones governing its dispatch-delivery and document management activities. Progressive Solutions was able to integrate both technologies into its software, making the whole system more efficient and reducing maintenance costs for the dealer.

The integration into one system created consistency across the board. For example, the tablet—a 7-by-10-inch "ruggedized" device with a built-



in barcode reader—runs on Windows and operates the same bisTrack software as all the other computers within the company. It even shows the standard screens that the counter salesmen see. The device is made to handle the wear and tear of life in the lumberyard, as well as do its job even in cold New England winter mornings.

Wellspeak oversaw the integration of the tablet into the dealer's systems. He says the idea arose from ownership trying to think of ways to make things easier for customers. He saw it used in other retail operations and thought it would work at Sanford & Hawley.

## 24/7 Service

The dealer didn't stop at the physical devices, either. It also created a customer web portal and online store using its new software. The online store grants 24-hour, seven-day-a-week access to the dealer's inventory for builders and contractors. Customers can use the portal to view past invoices, check the status of current orders, view statements, and get proof-of-delivery featuring both photos and signatures.

"It's a valuable service for our contractors to be able to do their planning, estimating, and billing overnight and on weekends without having to wait for out offices to open in the morning," the company says.

Another area of improvement was to the dealer's dispatch system, which

**Tech Toy:** Sanford & Hawley's portable data collection and retrieval tablet makes it easy for customers to get in and out of its Unionville, Conn., yard.

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# Healing Tablets Sanford & Hawley



**Keeping Tabs:** Sanford & Hawley systems administrator Ty Wellspeak saw tablets being used in other retail settings and thought they were a good fit for the dealer.

now operates through bisTrack's "Journey Planner" module. Journey Planner allowed the dealers to streamline operations from three dispatchers to one and combined operations into one program. The program also enables salespeople to check the status of customers' orders rely than rely on back-office resources to do that chore.

As part of the Journey Planner software, Sanford & Hawley outfitted all its delivery trucks with GPS tracking,

On the evening of the implementation, Sanford & Hawley staff figured they'd be working well past midnight. They were home by 10 p.m.

delivery reporting software, and Garmin navigational devices. With the navigational software, dispatchers can track truck movements, delivery routes, and vehicle speed. The system also helps drivers find their way to delivery sites.

The GPS software generates reports that cover how much fuel drivers were

putting in their trucks and the amount they were actually consuming. The system paid for itself within months just by reducing the amount of time spent idling and by getting deliveries to jobsites faster, Sanford says.

Sanford & Hawley also gave each driver a camera phone with the bisTrack mobile delivery app preinstalled. The application sends photos of delivered loads and captures customer signatures. As soon as the photo is taken and sent, the application marks the order as "delivered," letting the dealer know where and how the goods were placed.

The software, integration, and training came to \$300,000. The various devices, such as the tablet, ID cards, wireless network, GPS units, phones, and add-on software, totaled another \$30,000.

With all these new additions, it was only a matter of time before Bob and his brothers would question their business practices and processes. It appeared natural that their processes would have to change with the new software and applications.

## Better Ways To Operate

"One of the things we did moving forward—and Progressive allowed us to do this—was look at a number of business processes based on some best

practice ideas that they shared with us," Sanford says.

Out of that review grew the idea for the GPS integration, but for the most part it was Sanford & Hawley that came up with the main improvements, such as the use of the tablet. For instance, it was Wellspeak who created

custom dashboards, or viewing displays, showing information that the Progressive software collected. It was just a matter of creating what staffers wanted to see and how they wanted to see it, he says.

## Quicker Service

Sanford says the ability to sift through the database and get information and have it organized improves customer relations. It makes it easier to Sanford & Hawley to gather data should a customer want past records. It also reduces the amount of paperwork the dealer sends out.

"What used to take an hour now only takes a minute," he says.

Implementing a new software system may appear to be a daunting task for many dealers, especially those with little sense of technology. Wellspeak says the implementation was actually the easiest part of the process. Progressive was able to keep and integrate all the processes and programs Sanford & Hawley already had into the software. Once the time arrived to actually begin using it, there was little that needed to be added or fixed.

On the night of the implementation, Wellspeak, Sanford, and a small team of coworkers assembled to complete the changeover. They all planned on working well past midnight, but were home by 10 p.m. that night.

A bigger challenge lay in educating workers the next day and in the coming weeks about the advantages and abilities of the new software. "We knew our old system forwards and backwards and moving to a new system was pretty traumatic for us in the early stages," says Wellspeak. "Once they adapted, everything worked really well."

The company says it plans to improve its network infrastructure and disaster recovery capabilities. The company also upgraded its routers and VoIP phone server in 2011.

And now, it says, it's looking for even more ways to harness technology.—Brendan Rimetz