

Case Study

Safelite AutoGlass® Sees Clear Advantages with LXE



In just over sixty years, Safelite AutoGlass® has

grown from a single store in Wichita, Kansas, to a national vehicle glass provider, serving nearly four million customers per year. The company offers complete aftermarket vehicle glass service for retail and wholesale customers, from manufacturing through installation and repair, even managing the insurance claim process. The company's goal is to become the natural choice for vehicle glass repair and replacement services, by delivering superior customer service, value and quality through industry-leading 24-hour instant scheduling, convenient in-shop or mobile service, top-of-the-line materials and SafeTech certified technicians.

As soon as possible is the priority for most customers when they realize they need to replace glass in a vehicle. So Safelite must ensure its stores are stocked with just the right assortment of replacement windows and parts to serve customers at a moment's notice. Stores are served by two distribution centers, a 150,000 square-foot DC attached to a manufacturing facility in Enfield, NC, and a 282,000 square-foot DC in Ontario, Calif. Until 2009, Safelite ran distribution operations using a home-grown application and bulky handheld computers used to view and key-enter data in its NC facility. With its parent company, Belron, putting a strong emphasis on high fill rates versus running with lean inventory levels, it was time to deploy the company's first warehouse management system and new mobile computers featuring scanning.

Choosing the Right Computers

Distribution center staff had a list of priorities when it came to new technology. "They didn't like the way the old handhelds were set up," says Michael Bradsher, facility controller for manufacturing and distribution at Safelite. "They were heavy and bulky. We originally thought we needed big screens, but we really didn't. We were looking for something more streamlined." Safelite would also begin to use bar code for the first time. Since handling vehicle glass takes two hands, the company gravitated to a ring scanner design that would allow workers to collect data hands-free. They also needed long-range scanning, to reach locations high above workers' heads. Another requirement was the ability to run Windows CE, which Safelite IT folks felt would boot up faster at the start of a shift.

Safelite evaluated three leading mobile computer vendors. While the basic form factors were the same, "the LXEs were lighter, and used heavy duty plastic cases versus solid steel," says Bradsher. "The guys like the weight, and the buttons are nice and big – they use gloves."

While Safelite workers are accustomed to handling delicate glass pieces all day, unfortunately the mobile computers they use sometimes suffer rough treatment, and since it's attached to a production facility, the warehouse environment can be harsh. In addition to the lightweight but durable casing that could withstand these conditions, Safelite liked the LXE terminals' recessed screens, which protects them from vigorous handling. It also helped that "the repair center is two states away, not two countries away," Bradsher says.



Service a Priority

But choosing the right vendor came down to more than just hardware. Prior to Safelite's final selection, experts from LXE and its partner, Barcoding

Inc., an automated data collection value-added reseller in Baltimore, MD, helped the company configure its new Cambar warehouse management system to run on mobile computers.

"We liked the people we were dealing with – that always makes a difference," says Bradsher. "They came in and were extremely helpful. LXE went out of their way to help us. They gave us tremendous customer service, to the point that we know we could use the software, and the reseller working with us gave us a really good value."

Together with the quality of the hardware, the level of service they received made LXE the obvious choice. Between Safelite's two facilities, Barcoding Inc. deployed 18 MX7s, LXE's flagship rugged handheld computer, tough yet light enough for scan intensive picking applications, and 25 VX6s, rugged vehicle mount computers featuring a half-screen and larger, back-lit keys for easy visibility. Safelite also chose Bluetooth-enabled ring scanners for cable-free communication between the scanner and mobile computer.

Workers in both distribution centers now use the two models for receiving and picking as well as inventory movements. Most moves are made by forklift, but workers also do custom picking of parts. Due to the size and bulk of vehicle glass, reaching one location often means moving other product out of the way; Safelite relies on its WMS and LXE mobile computers to enable workers to easily locate inventory, as well as indicate a SKU's new location if that item had to be removed to reach the intended pick.

With the change in priorities, Safelite DCs shifted from picking 60% full pallets to 30%, with the majority now dominated by mixed picks of parts. "That takes more time," Bradsher says. Shortly following installation, Safelite saw a dramatic increase in worker productivity, particularly in its Ontario facility, which had not used any automatic ID system before. With the Bluetooth-enabled ring scanner, workers are able to quickly scan the appropriate bar code without having to pick up and then put down a mobile terminal, or move back to the vehicle-mounted unit. The light weight prevents fatigue during the shift, and large keys make interacting with the keyboard easy even with gloves on. "Our associates use them, and they like them," he adds. Safelite plans to soon add additional MX7s and VX6s. In the meantime, the current mobile computers "are performing very well," Bradsher says, as has LXE's staff and its partner, Barcoding Inc. "The customer service has been absolutely wonderful."



8650 Bluetooth Ring Scanner

About Barcoding Inc.

Barcoding Inc., an Elite LXE Partner, helps companies extend mobile applications through to the edge of their enterprise. Through understanding an organization's business issues surrounding today's mobile worker, their solutions team assists in architecting a blueprint plan to provide the solution. This often includes application design, software and hardware integration, project management, services and support. www.barcoding.com



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About LXE Inc.

LXE helps companies extend corporate networks to mobile workers in demanding conditions by providing easy-to-use, tough and reliable wireless computers. LXE rugged mobile computers are used by organizations to drive down costs and improve customer satisfaction. LXE develops innovative handheld, vehicle mount and wearable mobile computers with integrated wireless and automatic-identification technologies, backed by worldwide customer support. The company collaborates with customers and a network of technology, software and reseller partners to create winning solutions. www.lxe.com



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