

# Applying Technology for Multiple Product Delivery

by **Dinah Eng**

**D**elivering multiple products on different days of the week isn't easy, but newspapers are using technology in a variety of ways to ensure that service is consistent and on time.

Software that creates delivery lists, GPS for efficient routing, and eBooks for convenient carrier viewing are improving distribution efficiency for many, allowing companies to leverage their resources and truly own their geographic market.

At the Dallas Morning News, technology is used in several forms to deliver four single copy products (The

Dallas Morning News, Financial Times, Quick and Al Dia) and five home delivered products (The Dallas Morning News, Al Dia, Investor's Business Daily, Financial Times and USA TODAY). In 2008, the paper will also begin distribution of The New York Times.

"With single copy, we have added Intermec hand-held computing devices that help us capture draw and return data down to the outlet level," says John Walsh, senior vice president of circulation at the paper, "whereas, we were getting data only at the aggregate level prior to implementing this hand-held technology."

On the home delivery front, the paper uses MyDistrict.Net software and eBooks, which provides a sequenced delivery route for carriers after the route list is manually entered. Once entered, the starts and stops automatically adjust on the route list.

"Prior to using this, the route list would be updated each morning by an independent contractor, and they'd have to hand write vacation stops and service holds," says Goddey Ejuwa, assistant director of distribution at the Morning News. "The information is displayed on eBook electronically, and there's no further need for a paper list."

Chip Danneker, senior director of circulation operations at the paper, says the paper is rolling out the software and eBook system to its independent contractors, who in turn sub-contract the delivery services to more than 1,500 carriers. Currently, about 550 of the sub-contractors have started to use the technology, and rave about it.

"We've got testimonials from contractors saying their worst carriers have gone down from 10 complaints to zero," Danneker says. "Old carriers say they don't need it, but once they try it, you can't pry it out of their hands."

Walsh explains that use of the software system and eBooks is voluntary.

"We think technology's very important because we're looking for ways to better utilize the assets we have," Walsh says. "We're picking up delivery of the national titles, but it also comes into play with community products."

"We also contemplate a day when our independent contractors may be interested in delivering non-traditional newspaper products, like telephone books or moving our TMC out of the mail to address-specific delivery in the future."

By the summer of 2008, Walsh says RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tags will be placed on production carts so that



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the right product is loaded onto the right truck. A bar code reader will be used to confirm that the package goes to the right distribution center.

One problem, he notes, is that technology evolves so rapidly, it is hard to justify the expense to constantly upgrade these devices as newer versions and enhancements become available.

At the Denver Newspaper Agency, carriers deliver 15 publications on the

single copy side and 13 products on the home delivery front.

“On the home delivery side, we have software called Delivery List, which was developed locally and sets up a home delivery list in delivery sequence order,” says Steve Johansson, director of circulation operations for the two Denver papers, The Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News. “We are exploring a couple of GPS solutions for complaint re-delivery. These systems and

devices need to be proven as cost effective, though, before we would proceed.”

Johansson says managing the delivery of multiple products with other media company partners means hosting all the partners within the Denver Newspaper Agency’s own circulation system.

“Partners like USA TODAY and The New York Times have a circulation system with their own call centers,” Johansson

says. “For us to make this all work, we have their subscribers in our system as well. Daily start-stop-complaint transactions are processed in the DNA circ system. Then once a week, we run a balancing check to make sure it all stays in synch.”

Bill Reynolds, senior vice president of circulation for the Denver Newspaper Agency, says newspapers are leveraging their distribution networks and geographic coverage as much as possible.

“There’s competition on the sales side, but if you allow the paper with the bigger distribution to take over delivery, it makes more sense,” Reynolds says. “The Colorado Springs Gazette handles El Paso County home delivery distribution for us. We handle The Boulder Daily Camera and The Grand Junction Free Press. I see more papers getting into the national publication distribution business, and also looking at other local publications in their own markets because there is revenue to be

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made, or savings there.”

The San Diego Union-Tribune delivers 11 products, three of its own newspapers and eight national publications, in 28 frequencies. Pete Savoie, consumer distribution manager, says technology not only allows the paper to make additional revenue by delivering more publications, but also helps in carrier retention.

“It takes two to three weeks to train a new carrier,” Savoie says, adding that the paper used to use RouteSmart mapping software, but recently switched to MyDistrict.Net. “The ease of MyDistrict.Net has brought the time and cost down on that.

“Another thing the technology will help us on is delivery on demand. You could have customers call and say, ‘I want the paper for two days’ to get coverage of a big story. It’ll also help us with sampling and marketing efforts.”

Staying organized to handle more at a time when fuel costs are running higher isn’t easy. One of the more inexpensive ways to map a large geographic area is to use GPS technology, but experts cite mixed results.

“We do have Nextel GPS-enabled phones that are used as a safety consideration, so we know where the district managers are,” says Ken Smith, circulation director for the Herald-Journal in Spartanburg, S.C. “We can also keep a history of the manager’s driving record. We’ve tried to track mileage, but we’ve never been successful with that because they often pick up the tower as a location, so we can’t rely on the mileage.”

Mark Rome, a distributor for the Houston Chronicle and national sales representative for MyDistrict.Net, says reception of GPS signals may be spotty in parts of downtown Houston, and in general, GPS readings are only accurate within about 100 feet, making it difficult to distinguish addresses of houses on a typical street.

“That’s why we only use that technology for Single Copy Sales, where the delivery points are separated from each other,” Rome adds.

While the industry is moving to embrace technology on many fronts, Rome says that “most newspapers are still using traditional route books. Some carriers are still using handwritten route books, but I haven’t done that in 10 years.”

Writing by hand, he notes, doesn’t automatically update information like software programs do, or give you real-time draws for all titles. In a world of complex deliveries, digital solutions are saving the day. ■



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