

Case Study

National Retail Pharmacy Chain

BACKGROUND

Leading through technology

How does a company get to the top and stay on top? One critical component is technological innovation. For the nation's largest pharmaceutical retailer, technology has given it a competitive edge for decades. From the first nationally linked pharmaceutical computer network, to the earliest adaptation of retail pharmacy point-of-sale technology, this industry leader has paved the road for others to follow.

With 5,611 stores nationwide and more than 4.7 million customers served daily, technology is the backbone that enables this giant to communicate with customers, process orders and make purchasing transactions. It takes a well-coordinated team of internal staff as well as an army of outside vendors to manage the multitude of upgrades, repairs, and new technology installations required to keep each and every store not just functional, but leading edge.

During the past nine years, the company has relied on Comm-Works as one of the main vendors for its voice and data infrastructure. So when a deal was inked with Catalina to install point-of-sale coupon printers in several of the retailer's operations, Comm-Works was immediately contacted to help with the implementation process.

CHALLENGE

Making the impossible possible

For this project time was of the essence. The pharmacy and Catalina stood to generate significant incremental revenues from the point-of-sale coupons the technology delivers.

Knowing many variables and obstacles would come into play during the 1,800-store rollout,

Comm-Works piloted the installation process in a few of the pharmacy's most difficult locations – five stores in downtown Chicago. The urban settings presented many of the challenges the team would encounter over the next eight months – small stores, older buildings, a crowded urban environment, and a tight timeframe with pressure for minimal customer interruption.

"The pilot rollout went so smoothly, we were instantly presented with our next challenge: rollout 110 stores in Massachusetts before Thanksgiving – a timeframe of less than two months," explained the Comm-Works project manager. "The timeframe was tight, but we knew from past experience that our team could meet the challenge."

Beyond the Massachusetts assignment, Comm-Works was assigned rollouts in 17 additional states. 1,500 of the 1,800 locations were also scheduled for a future upgrade of their photo labs. In order to save the pharmacy time and money, Comm-Works integrated the upgrade as part of the Catalina rollout. In addition to the Catalina system, the team installed equipment cabinets, data cabling, and electrical circuits to the equipment cabinets and printer locations.

COLLABORATION

Monumental coordination

With its assignment clearly laid out, Comm-Works developed a 132 page installation manual that detailed every aspect of the project from scheduling and equipment specifications to reporting and quality assurance. The pharmacy was so impressed with the organization and detail in the plan, that it decided to implement the process nationwide and required other project vendors to follow it as well.

A Comm-Works project manager and key account manager orchestrated all the details of the complex rollout and oversaw a team of more than 20 Comm-Works team members, 48 different vendors, and 75 crews.

Comm-Works had four individuals scheduling the rollouts as well as receiving, staging, packaging, and shipping the equipment necessary for each installation. Since four different manufacturers supplied the equipment, this was no simple task.

Two project coordinators handled the day-to-day operations of the entire project ensuring crews arrived on time and had all the components necessary to complete their assigned rollouts. In addition two technical specialists were on hand to answer any questions that arose relating to equipment complications. Additional personnel were dedicated to handling all the payables and receivables, keeping the financials of the project flowing smoothly. Finally, 10 field managers, trained in all aspects of the projects, oversaw all of the onsite work ensuring quick resolution of any problems.

Quality assurance is always a top priority for Comm-Works and this project was no exception. The installation manual called for training of all crews by a Comm-Works field manager to ensure each job measured up to Comm-Works' and the pharmacy's standards.

Each store manager was contacted three days prior to the installation to confirm the details and to ensure the installation would not interfere with special store promotions or critical sales weeks. Each store manager was given the direct phone number of the field manager in charge of their store and was able to contact them at any time if a problem arose.

Upon completion of an installation, which included the installation of an equipment cabinet and cabling and testing of the Catalina system, Comm-Works conducted a rigorous quality assurance process.

Each crew was responsible for filling out an installation checklist and had to provide photos to the project coordinators and project specialists to show that the installations had

been done correctly. If the photos revealed any sub-standard work, a field manager would personally inspect and address the problem, and the crew would be provided with additional training so the issue would not occur again.

RESULTS AND VALUE

Going above and beyond — the Comm-Works way

With Comm-Works project leaders working 70-80 hours a week and team members averaging 60-hour weeks, Comm-Works was able to complete the entire rollout one month ahead of schedule. Out of all three of the vendors contracted for the project, Comm-Works had the highest percentage of on-time completions.

In addition, Comm-Works was able to step in when one of the other vendors missed a significant deadline. A competing vendor was responsible for completing a portion of the rollout, in the state of Florida, before Thanksgiving; unfortunately it missed the deadline by more than 50 stores. The Comm-Works team filled the gap and rolled out the remaining stores the first week in December, salvaging significant profits during the critical holiday season.

"Consistently delivering above and beyond is what keeps us in good standing with the largest pharmaceutical retailer in the country," the Comm-Works project manager explained. "Going the extra mile is what sets Comm-Works apart from the rest."

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