

AT YOUR SERVICE

HELPING TO KEEP YOUR MAILROOM RUNNING



Customers and mailroom managers alike are impressed with eCourier. In the past year a host of high-profile businesses have converted to what is arguably the country's fastest-growing courier business.

'eCourier has certainly made a big difference to us', comments Ben Reardon, Despatch Manager for Harrods in Knightsbridge. 'We book on line and a few minutes later the courier turns up. It's as simple as that. We use eCourier throughout the day, mostly to deliver items for our customers. Booking on line is faster and more efficient, and it has definitely reduced our courier costs.'

Tom Allason, CEO of eCourier, founded the company in response to frustration with unreliable courier services while working in the shipping industry. Inspired by the lack of innovation within conventional courier operations, Allason felt that combining cutting-edge technology with a customer-oriented business philosophy would revolutionise the courier industry.

'I'd had too many bad experiences with couriers', explains Allason. 'Out of curiosity, I tried to work out why they were so unreliable. What I found wasn't so much a gap in the market as a gaping hole waiting to be plugged with vastly improved service.'

Tom left his shipping job and founded eCourier with university friend, Jay Bregman, who is now the firm's Chief Technical Officer. In their first month, September 2004, they completed 25 deliveries and charged £1000. Now, the company manages 80 couriers within London and this is growing by the week.

WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION

As well as business success, eCourier is achieving widespread recognition. On the anniversary of its first year of operation the business celebrated a raft of awards from the likes of The Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport, the Department of Trade and Industry and the British Computer Society.

So what is eCourier doing so successfully that other courier firms aren't? 'The limitation at a conventional firm is the number of people that a booking has to pass through before reaching the courier. An operator takes the details and passes them to a controller', explains Allason. 'The controller then has to work out who to give the delivery to and then actually give it. This all happens by radio or mobile phone; it's labour-intensive and based on



Founded out of frustration, eCourier offers customers real-time tracking of their consignments (below)



little accurate information. If the customer wants to know where their package is, the information has to pass down that human chain then back up again.'

eCourier set out to develop technology that would connect customers with couriers directly and minimise the impact of the middle man. The result is a unique technology platform called AIBA – Advanced Information Based Allocation System.

AIBA knows where all the eCouriers are, and it knows what they are carrying, where they are heading and how fast they are moving. This information is combined with the latest traffic and weather reports. The computer also compares the journey with previous patterns, allowing it to calculate the impact of a traffic jam, a thunderstorm or just a busy Friday afternoon. It then uses this information to predict a travel time for the collection and delivery and allocates each new delivery to the most appropriate courier. The whole process takes milliseconds.

When the journey is complete, AIBA compares its prediction with what actually happened and then uses this data to improve the accuracy of its next predictions.

Perhaps most significant is that from the moment a booking is made the customer can track their courier on a map in real-time, with estimates for pick-up and delivery. The client then receives an instant e-mail proof of delivery complete with digital signature of the signer.

MORE RELIABLE SERVICE

The true measure of success as with any new technology is adoption and eCourier takes 85 per cent of bookings on line. Its nearest rival takes about five per cent!

'For clients sending hundreds of deliveries each day, we cut their costs significantly and provide a faster, more reliable service', says Allason. 'The mailroom manager at one investment bank in particular says we save him and his team three hours a day because his staff never need to phone up to check the status of a delivery.'

eCourier's system has been designed to manage at least 10,000 couriers – that's as many as in the whole of London, and 20 times more than the current largest fleet.

'Our goal is to change the perception of same-day delivery', says Allason. 'We want to make it a credible alternative to next-day service. Everyone knows household names like UPS, FedEx, and DHL. They don't yet know the names of same-day couriers. There is that perception that we're all glorified minicab firms. With us that's a long way from the truth.' **DM**

● For further information, contact eCourier; telephone 0870 085 3333; www.ecourier.co.uk.