Most Innovative Use of IT 2006

TRIPLE WINNER
- Most Innovative Use of IT
- Most Effective Use of Communications Technology
- Most Effective Use of IT in Manufacturing and Logistics

eCourier

Project:	The eCourier System
Business goal:	To create a vastly more efficient courier service through the use of mobile, route optimisation and dispatch management technologies.
Award sponsor:	SAVVIS TRANSFORMING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY℠

Every year, the Effective IT Awards seek to recognise true innovation in technology. eCourier so impressed the judges with its use of global positioning system (GPS) communications technology and online commerce model that the two-year-old London start-up took home a record-breaking three trophies – demonstrating, if nothing else, that each award category is judged on its own merits.

Information Age's judges praised eCourier for its "excellent use of leading-edge technologies to deliver competitive edge and business growth", and its use of bespoke software to change its business – and those of its competitors – to "disrupt a mature market".

And that was just the intention. "The top item on our agenda is to conquer the London courier market," says co-founder and CTO Jay

DX Network Services
The UK's leading private business mail service operator had outgrown its Excel-based sales reporting system, which was giving an unreliable and rarely useful picture of forward sales. A Microsoft Sharepoint Portal Server has greatly improved the accuracy of sales projections, improved customer service and helped grow sales.

Premier Decoration
Britain's biggest Christmas decorations supplier relies on seasonal, often non-English speaking warehouse workers to meets its customers' cyclical demands. Using the Vocollect voice-directed distribution system, Premier has cut the cost and time of training, and produced pick accuracy rates approaching 100%.

Bregman, "to be huge, highly profitable and demonstrate our scale efficiencies."

The company, which was started by two frustrated courier customers with a penchant for the latest technology, has grown revenues from £100,000 in its first year to £300,000 a month. And in the fragmented and – according to Bregman – technologically timid and stingy courier industry, it has already won over the giants of the City with a sales story rooted in transparency, reliability and efficiency.

"With all our functionality, we're loved by large clients and their mailroom managers," says Bregman. "We've completely changed their daily routine."

At traditional courier companies, mail managers typically spend three hours a day on the phone – first to clients at investment banks or legal firms, for example, who desperately need documents sent across London, then placing the order with individual bikers, then to-ing and fro-ing between courier and sender to keep track of the delivery. With eCourier, they can place an order online through an interface that is so streamlined customers can be in and out before competitors have even answered their phones, says Bregman.

The level of transparency is also unique. Each dispatched courier is tracked across the capital by GPS, which clients can watch themselves using a real-time online map. When the package is delivered, an electronic copy of the

recipient's signature is instantly sent to a client's BlackBerry.

Saving their customers' mailroom staff literally hours a day means eCourier is the only company of its kind to win business on indirect cost savings, rather than slashing its own margins to compete on price. But even here, the start-up is using home-grown technology to increase the number of couriers its controllers can manage, bringing the sort of economies of scale that elicit almost daily requests from courier companies all over the world to license its system.

And there is good reason for that interest. The company processes 90% if its orders online 85% more than its nearest competitor). And once a booking hits the database, eCourier's advanced information-based allocation system – AIBA – matches the order with a member of the fleet, sends the details over GPRS and optimises their delivery route. Neural network technology balances courier location against customer details, priority and service level agreement – all within a fraction of a second.

This removes the problem of a central and often overloaded control room. As a result, while most competitors reach their maximum load managing about 40 couriers – and get less efficient as they grow – eCourier has over 1,000 couriers at its disposal, with hundreds more waiting to join up. That is in spite of initial reservations from backers that bikers would not want to be tracked as they move across town.

"If you give [couriers] a tool to make more money in a shorter amount of time and they are treated better as a person, that's something they want to do," says Bregman, who pays his couriers on an hourly rate as well as commission for each delivery, to ensure they do not loiter in the busiest areas.

Managing the technology in this demanding environment brought some initial challenges. Long shifts mean devices must have long battery life, as well as withstand varying road and weather conditions. The fleet department that manages the vehicles also trains the couriers, who are given a powerful incentive to use the gadgets – radio-dispatched couriers are locked out of the ordering circuit.

The result: each courier is more profitable; each package is delivered faster; therefore, each customer is happier. With monthly deliveries growing at 42%, eCourier looks on target to overrun the London market within the year. Watch out Edinburgh, Paris and Frankfurt!

HIGHLY COMMENDED
Most Effective Use of Communications Technology

vodafone
Award sponsor

GCAP Media
To economically deliver programming to the widest possible audience, today's broadcast networks require a capability spanning multiple digital channels. GCap has built just such a unified IP-based network, to create a truly strategic application network platform that has also improved the quality of GCap's radio broadcasts.

West Yorkshire Police
The force's BlackBerry-based wireless information system provides officers with access to central databases and remote reporting capabilities. It is credited with keeping officers actively policing for an extra 35 minutes a day, meaning an extra £8.8 million of police services for local residents every year.