



## CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

# Improvements to Blue Bell Creameries' Route Accounting and Inventory Control Systems Ensure the Leading Ice Cream Company Continues to Scoop Out the Finest to Its Customers

### Challenge

Blue Bell Ice Cream is the third best selling ice cream in America. With its sales region stretching from Arizona up to Kansas City, across to Charlotte, North Carolina, and extending to everything south of that boundary, the 101 year-old company has a lot of ground to cover. In order to do so efficiently, Blue Bell Creameries is committed to evaluating its day-to-day operations.

Specifically, Blue Bell management acknowledged that its route accounting and inventory control systems were significantly out of date. "The route accounting system was DOS-based. You can't buy hardware that runs DOS, so we had to buy new handhelds and have software rewritten. In addition, the printers we were using in our trucks were 10 to 15 years old," says Charles Gaskamp, information technologies manager at Blue Bell Creameries. Indeed, the company's printers alone were problematic—they were bulky and heavy, and took up a great deal of space in the trucks.



Blue Bell's inventory control processes also required an overhaul because the legacy system was outmoded and too costly in terms of time and errors. According to Gaskamp, "Our inventory control was primarily still manual. We wanted to implement an automated bar code system that would allow us to track raw goods from the time they were received at the plant, through the production process."

The ice cream company realized that the key to a successful operation was simplicity; if devices were overly complicated and drivers and operations managers could not understand them, any steps to update the company's system would be useless. Finding a solutions provider with excellent customer service was also essential. Blue Bell wanted a partner that would guide the company through the transition of updating its systems, assist with any technical problems, and continue to be a partner for all of its printing and inventory needs.

These major criteria, plus the knowledge that Zebra Technologies could provide a superior and customizable handheld wireless printing device and a bar code system for inventory control,

led Blue Bell Creameries to choose Zebra Technologies as its business partner and solution provider. Together, Zebra Technologies and Blue Bell applied these technologies to improve the ice cream company's route accounting and inventory control systems.

### The Solution

Zebra Technologies has provided Blue Bell Creameries with a complete solution that enhances the company's operational efficiency while maintaining the all-important ease-of-use ideal. Drivers now use Zebra's RW 420™ mobile printers, equipped with updated software and Bluetooth® connectivity technology, while Blue Bell's four production facilities and several of its distribution facilities are outfitted with Zebra Z4Mplus™ industrial/commercial printers. Drivers process transactions via their mobile printers. The Zebra Z4Mplus processes print requests throughout the facilities, thereby improving processes for receiving, identifying and tracking incoming goods.

The RW 420 is an essential tool for drivers and makes it easy for them to load media quickly while servicing their routes. As Gaskamp points out, "A printer is a key part of the driver's life. He prints invoices in every store he enters. At the end of the day when he returns, he will print his load sheets, along with a recap of every sale made that day. During the day, he also can print out a list of inventory left on his truck at any given time. This is what makes the RW 420 printer so important. It facilitates many of the duties that a driver has to do every day. Its Bluetooth capability allows the driver to do his work quickly and efficiently, without repeated trips back and forth between stores and truck."

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**The right asset. In the right place. At the right time.**



Zebra customized the mobile printers to meet Blue Bell Creameries' needs. Printers have been outfitted with the Blue Bell logo, as well as a special vehicle mount inside the delivery trucks.

"In our production and distribution centers, the Zebra Z4Mplus printers allow for much greater efficiency and accuracy in the inventory control system," said Gaskamp. The printer is used to identify each pallet in the facility by item, lot, and quantity. Combined with Blue Bell Creameries' new bar code scanning project in which pallets are scanned as they come into and move around the facility, the Z4Mplus helps Blue Bell track items and lot control items more easily than ever before.

However, Zebra Technologies' service as a complete solution provider does not end with its printers. Blue Bell Creameries and Zebra Technologies have entered into a business partnership such that Zebra is now the creamery's one-stop shop for all of its printing supply needs, from printers to ink cartridges to label media and tags.

### Results

Blue Bell completed the overhaul of its route accounting and inventory control systems in just 18 months. While the upgrade was an investment of time and resources for the creamery, it was a wise one that the company knows will yield high returns. Already, the route accounting system has improved dramatically, saving drivers time and increasing their productivity.

Drivers have also responded well to the RW 420 printers, saying that they are fast, yet incredibly rugged and reliable. "The printers are so durable that I've even tried throwing one against the wall to see if it would break and it still works fine," said Gaskamp. "Plus, they are so easy to handle and the battery life is very long. Our drivers have not reported a single problem with the batteries while on their routes."

On the warehouse side, the Z4Mplus printers have enabled Blue Bell Creameries to increase efficiency and track inventory more accurately through the supply chain. Says Gaskamp, "With the new bar coding system, we now have much tighter control of inventories. We track everything from raw ingredients to finished products. The system more than pays for itself in inventory reduction and cost control."

Blue Bell Creameries' technology transformation had minimal disruption on the company's day-to-day operations. Gaskamp reports that the transition has been practically seamless, causing no interference with quality of product or service. He attributes this partly to the quality of the Zebra products and their ease of integration into Blue Bell's processes, but also to the high level of service Zebra delivered in working with the creamery to roll out the technology and ensure the transition went smoothly. "That was a key element to our success," notes Gaskamp.

As a result, Blue Bell Creameries and Zebra Technologies have been forging ahead with their business relationship. Blue Bell continues to hone its reputation as a maker of high quality ice cream products while, at the same time, updating its methods for delivering products to customers. As Jim Kruse, controller at Blue Bell Creameries, concludes, "We still make ice cream the old fashioned way, and now we do it using advanced technology solutions that include Zebra's innovative on-demand printers."

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