



Virgin Mobile

streamlines logistics with unique on-demand reporting and alert-forwarding from ChristianSteven Software

When Virgin Mobile needed an automated way of scheduling reports for their busy Supply Chain team they chose MARS from ChristianSteven Software. As well as distributing standard hourly, daily and weekly reports, MARS is used to deliver on-demand reports and to forward alerts against stock levels. This improved decision-making has enabled Virgin Mobile to streamline its logistics operation and drive greater efficiency.

Background and Challenge

Virgin Mobile is the UK's leading mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) with more than

four million customers. It was the first major consumer brand to enter the mobile marketplace when it opened for business in November 1999. In 2006 Virgin Mobile was acquired by NTL and became part of the Virgin Media group.

Karl Glover, Logistics Support Manager at Virgin Mobile, continues the story, "The UK mobile market is very competitive which means it is vital for us to have a clear picture of stock movements and levels, especially for popular and in-demand items. We operate six days a week, and receive and dispatch thousands of different items, including mobile phones,



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SIM cards, mobile broadband, netbooks and numerous accessories. All these items need to reach our web and telesales customers, high street retail outlets and major retail partners in a timely and efficient way.”



In order to improve efficiency and operate more proactively the Supply Chain team needed a wide variety of reports, including stock level monitoring, quotes, orders, dispatched orders, inventory of parts, goods in and products shipped.

Karl continues, “It was a time-consuming and difficult task to program our ERP system to produce all the requisite reports, so we invested in Microsoft Access to extract and manipulate the data more easily.”

Karl began to investigate ways to automate the scheduling and distribution of standard reports in a variety of formats and came across ChristianSteven Software MARS (Microsoft Access Report Scheduling). “Manually creating and distributing all the reports was out of the question, it would have required a small army of administrators to send all the hourly, daily and weekly reports, as well as night shift and weekend work. So a piece of software like MARS that could do it all for us was a very attractive and cost-effective solution.”

After downloading and testing the free trial version Karl realised it was exactly what they were looking for “The software is easy to use and very intuitive. Similar products I have worked with in the past were always complex and required days of classroom training. Crucially, MARS is also extremely reliable – which is vital for our busy operation.”

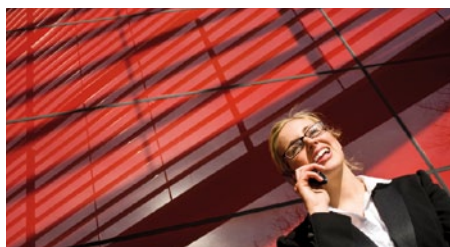
Solution and Benefits

MARS was initially installed on a desktop machine, but once it had proved itself was transferred to a fully managed Windows Server, becoming an essential part of the operational systems.

Karl continues, “I am very pleased with the way that MARS has performed. It has just got on with the job of automatically distributing hourly, daily and weekly reports in PDF and Excel format. We have had few - if any - issues with it.”

“Even though we are just scratching the surface of what we can do with MARS, I am particularly impressed by its unique event and data-driven capabilities. This has allowed us to build two great applications which have made a big difference to the business.”

The first application allows users to run reports on demand simply by emailing the MARS server with their request. MARS tells them when to expect the report and then delivers it soon after into their inbox in the required format. Karl explains, “This application was relatively easy to set up but crucially ensures our Supply Chain team gets the right information at the right time, allowing them to take decisive action. We can also monitor the most and least popular requests and create or retire standard reports as required.”



The second application uses MARS’ data-driven capabilities to generate an alert that is sent to key members of the Supply Chain team when stock levels of certain key items fall below set levels. Karl adds, “Again, this application was relatively easy to set up, but the benefit to the business is immense, ensuring we are always in a strong position to meet demand, especially for popular items. This obviously means we also get to maximise sales.”

Karl continues, “ChristianSteven Software MARS has easily paid for itself several times over in the few years we have been using the product. It has consistently ensured our Supply Chain team has the right information at the right time in order to operate efficiently, minimising stock holding and maximising sales by ensuring we meet demand. Plus we have saved a huge amount of money by not needing an army of administrators to simply churn out reports.”

The Future

The business has started using MS SQL-Server and Karl is keen to develop a similar reporting environment using SQL-RD from ChristianSteven Software. He concludes, “I would not hesitate to use MARS or SQL-RD for other applications, or to recommend their use in other parts of the business. In particular I believe there is a lot of scope for utilising the business automation capabilities of these products. This would maximise our return on investment still further.”

Requirements

- Easy, cost-effective and automated way of scheduling the distribution of vital information and reports to the Supply Chain team
- Enterprise-class solution capable of reliable, consistent 24 x 7 operation in a Windows Server environment

Benefits

- Better decision-making leading to greater efficiency – minimising stock holding whilst maximising sales
- Unique event driven on-demand reporting means the right information is available at the right time to take decisive action
- Unique data-driven alerts ensure stock levels of key items are maintained in order to meet demand
- Solution that has paid for itself several times over – even if only measured against the cost savings of not requiring full-time administrators
- More value to be exploited through other applications and use in other departments



MARS for Microsoft® Access, part of the powerful range of business automation software, alongside SQL-RD for Microsoft® SQL Server and CRD for Crystal Reports.



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