

CHALLENGE

Replace and manage desktops and servers at 500 Ford dealerships throughout Canada to increase efficiency-enabling dealer applications while reducing total cost of ownership (TCO)

SOLUTION

Deploy Dell™ Latitude™ C640 notebooks, OptiPlex™ GX260 desktops, PowerEdge™ 1500SC servers, and printers at dealerships to increase IT performance and stability; use Dell Professional Services for assistance with migration to Microsoft® Exchange and the Microsoft Windows® operating system; use Altiris Client Management Suite and Server Management Suite to help simplify support operations and lower overall management costs by standardizing and automating IT tasks

BENEFIT

A reliable, cost-effective Dell platform that is easier to maintain and upgrade, and supports essential dealership systems

Dell revs up automotive sales at Ford

Ford Motor Company of Canada rolls out a new IT model to enable turnkey business applications for dealerships

Although car salespeople still spend the bulk of their days on the lot greeting customers and taking vehicles out for test drives, today's automotive dealerships use sophisticated tools to manage leads, seal deals, and provide ongoing service to new car owners. The dealer management systems (DMSs) that modern dealerships now depend on help drive sales and customer satisfaction.

Ford Motor Company of Canada is one automotive company that is on the leading edge of DMS deployment. To enable its approximately 500 Canadian dealerships to more effectively manage customer relationships, the Ford Canada i-Connect Dealer Services department develops DMS tools for the company. The company also supports certain third-party DMSs and maintains other enterprise applications, including a parts catalog database as well as service, accounting, finance, and insurance software programs.

"i-Connect deploys and supports applications for almost every department of a dealership," says Mike Ryan, general manager at i-Connect. "When dealers sell a vehicle to a customer, they use our Business Office Selling System (BOSS) application to complete the deal and to add on other services like financing and insurance. And when customers come in to purchase parts over the counter or to have service work done, dealers use our system to create an invoice."

Ford Canada trades in outdated hardware

In 2002, the i-Connect team determined it was time for a hardware refresh. At three years old, the PCs in most dealerships were becoming obsolete. Hardware-related calls to the i-Connect help desk were increasing, and salespeople were clamoring for more robust desktops and better application performance.

The i-Connect team planned to eliminate old hardware and supply each dealership with a minimum of one new desktop and server. Ford Canada sent a request for quote (RFQ) to hardware companies and wheeled and dealt for the best pricing and service. Dell, which already had a relationship with the corporate office,



came back with a fully-loaded proposal that included the best options for Ford Canada.

“We compared Dell to what its competitors had to offer and, in the end, felt that Dell offered greater value in terms of the hardware features, pricing, support, and maintenance,” Ryan says. “Dell turnaround time—from point of order to delivery—was definitely the strongest.”

By ordering direct through Dell, Ford Canada was able to reduce the time it took to get new desktops set up at dealerships from a month to two weeks. Dell also was able to provide Ford Canada with consistent installations and on-site support through a local partner, Getronics, which helped the deployment go smoothly and minimized the impact on business operations. “The Dell relationship with Getronics was part of what sold us on Dell,” Ryan says. “Getronics has been a very good partner, and the fact that we were about to pull together procurement, installation, service, and support under one contract with Dell made the upgrade process easier for us.”

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General Manager, i-Connect Dealer Services
Ford Canada

With help from Getronics, Dell deployed Latitude notebooks, OptiPlex desktops, and PowerEdge servers at 500 dealerships. After extensive testing, Ford Canada chose Dell PowerConnect™ switches as the i-Connect standard. By May 2003, the Dell rollout was complete. Now Ford Canada dealers have a more robust IT architecture to support their DMS applications—and their customers.

IT reliability is key for dealerships

In the automotive sales business, dealers' success hinges on their ability to draw new customers to come out to their lots, hold their interest, and efficiently make the sale. An application that crashes or takes too long to respond during a sale adds another challenge to an already-tough job. For this reason, a seamless customer experience is a must for dealerships.

“If a system goes down at a dealership, the service representative or salesperson might have to handwrite an order,” Ryan says. “Retail customers do not want to deal with the hassles associated with manual processes. They do not like waiting or having to come back to the dealership to get a proper invoice. So, throughout the dealerships, our point-of-sale systems must be up and running at all times—this is critical for Ford.”

By offering better performance and system stability, the new Dell architecture helps Ford Canada dealerships more efficiently process transactions. An additional benefit has been a 20 percent reduction in the number of calls to the i-Connect help desk since the Dell deployment. According to Ryan, “This shows that our systems are far more stable than they were in the past.”


Dell and Altiris help drive greater efficiency

The distributed nature of the new Dell environment called for a management tool that would allow i-Connect to manage desktops and servers from a central location, eliminating the need to send a technician on-site and preventing prolonged user downtime. Additionally, the links between dealer locations are low-bandwidth, meaning that i-Connect needed a management tool that had bandwidth capabilities for remote software delivery and image deployment. The Altiris Client Management Suite and Server Management Suite were selected to enable remote desktop management and software delivery, comprehensive hardware and software inventory, configuration management, and image deployment—all from one integrated console.

Ford Canada predicts that by standardizing on Dell and managing those machines with Altiris, it should be able to lower total cost of ownership (TCO) because upgrades and maintenance costs will be reduced. i-Connect also expects cost savings when it comes to rolling out new applications and providing support.

“We really have to give Dell credit,” Ryan says. “They delivered everything as a package. As a result, we got the right hardware, the right software, the right management tool, and the right maintenance partner.”

Next up, Ford Canada will release an updated version of its flagship finance and insurance application, BOSS, which will enable dealers, for example, to sell more accessories to customers. Along with the latest version of BOSS, Ford Canada plans to roll out Dell flat-screen monitors at dealerships so that salespeople can better display products and accessories to help close more sales. “Overall, our partnership with Dell is helping our dealerships—and that helps Ford be successful,” Ryan says.

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