

Thininventory will revolutionise supply chain efficiency in field service market says ByBox

As society becomes increasingly dependent on technology and people less willing to accept downtime and delays, the pressure on companies and organisations to deliver has never been greater.

Nowhere is this change of attitude more deeply felt than in those companies that provide breakdown, repair and warranty services using teams of field engineers to meet their contractual obligations.

Fortunately for them, there is now a better way to get these urgently needed parts and equipment to field engineers in time to minimise delays and improve productivity. Importantly, the solution also includes new ways to reduce stock levels, save time procuring parts and increase supply chain visibility. It's a first supply chain platform designed exclusively for the field service market and it's becoming very sought after.

The system has been developed by ByBox Ltd and in just a few years its use has grown to command around 70% of the specialist field service market in the UK. Now, with Thininventory firmly established at its core, ByBox says it expects many more companies will soon be joining the likes of Coca Cola, Fujitsu, Unisys, KonicaMonolta, AstraZeneca and the 90 or so others that are already experiencing the benefits of better supply chain efficiency.

Introduced 12 months ago, Thininventory is a cohesive end-to-end wireless technology developed by ByBox that maximises stock visibility and minimises stock holding by managing each of the key stages in the supply chain process: raising purchase orders, goods in, pick, dispatch, deliver, return, repair, and return to good stock – all with serial number visibility.

This innovative single platform combines both the software and the physical infrastructure required to deliver the standards of service now demanded, and as such can help companies meet not only their service commitments but also their responsibilities

and legal requirements to demonstrate total traceability of parts and equipment.

It really could revolutionise the parts supply industry, as ByBox CEO Stuart Miller explains: "Our concept comes at the problem from a different angle. We think about moving the data, not the part, and the control over the supply chain provided by Thininventory allows us to do this," he says.

"By having total visibility over the whole of the supply chain using Thininventory, we can see things that traditional distribution systems would not. Distribution companies make their money from moving things, but what if there were a way of reducing and even eliminating this? It could save a huge amount of time as well as money, and reduce road congestion. And for our customers it already is!

"When it comes to companies monitoring and controlling large teams of field engineers that want lots of different parts to service and maintain many different products, the traditional approach is to maintain huge stocks in a central location, all of which have to be sourced from a myriad of suppliers, and to attempt to get these to the engineers on demand and in time to perform a specific task.

"There is huge room for error here, not to mention the cost. They may have to rely on several different systems. Parts go missing en route or do not arrive in time. They have to travel large distances at high cost and still may not be suitable when they do arrive, so they have to be returned and new parts ordered.

"But if you know where everything is at all times, you can take shortcuts. We have often found that a part is in the right place, it's just that no one knows about it. Or the part a particular engineer wants may be close by: he

does not have to order it and wait; just travel a few miles to get it and get back to the job.

"The cost savings that are possible by moving the data rather than the part are enormous, and some of the companies using Thininventory coupled with our 18,000-strong UK drop box network have been able to give up their own stockholding and parts sourcing systems altogether.

"They now use us to order parts direct from the supplier or use our system to find the nearest location of a part they want. They use our lock boxes to store parts ready for collection on the way to a job, and use them again on the way back to return unused or faulty parts for repair. When we deliver into the box each morning before 8.00am we collect these parts and return them to the supplier, or move them to another box for another engineer to use.

It all adds up to a different way of thinking and a different way of working. But with Thininventory underpinning the distribution system and controlling the data, moving the part becomes a lot more efficient and cost effective.

And it doesn't stop there. Thininventory was developed for the field parts market but is capable of providing the same supply chain excellence for a whole variety of time critical products. ByBox are already working with the IT and healthcare industries and redefining the concept to meet their specific needs and are confident others will follow when they see the potential.

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