

Sun Microsystems' Global Events Group Taps RFID to Automate Shipping and Receiving

Challenge

As a Fortune 500 company and leader in network computing, Sun Microsystems Inc. (NASDAQ: SUNW) participates in hundreds of tradeshows and events around the world each year to support its marketing and sales efforts. Because the company attends, exhibits at and sponsors so many events, the Sun Events Group must ensure that the necessary IT equipment arrives on time, in excellent condition and at the correct location. This adds up to thousands of pieces of equipment being shipped from a central Sun warehouse to and from more than one hundred different locations around the globe each year, and leaves considerable room for error.

The group's previous method for tracking equipment shipped from and received at its docks, was entirely manual. According to Sun Engineer John Wetherill, "We were working with a home-grown system that was file-based and fairly low tech. When equipment was coming in and out, we had to literally open the cases, cross check the serial numbers against our manually created records and determine that everything was present."

The manually driven system also required a hefty amount of paperwork that further constrained time and resources and made it prone to human error. The equipment's serial numbers were previously recorded manually, and, because the equipment was shipped to both national and international locations, the group had to fill out numerous export forms.

According to Wetherill, "Our paperwork was generally substantial on a daily basis, but it went through the roof when a huge show came around. For a main event like JavaOne where we're shipping anywhere from 400 to 1,000 pieces of equipment, we'd start weeks out and have one person solely dedicated to handling all the event and shipping paperwork."

The group's management of the shipping and receiving function evolved into a major challenge and sent Sun seeking a solution that would streamline the process, reduce manual labor and decrease the likelihood of error.



Solution

For better management of its shipping and receiving operations, the Sun Events Group turned to Fluensee Dock™, a software solution that uses RFID technology to automate the shipping and receiving functions as equipment moves in and out of a dock environment, eliminating the need for manual tracking and inventory. Fluensee Dock also provides Sun with real-time visibility into the movement of its equipment, prioritization tools, as well as detailed management reports, enabling improvements to operational accuracy and efficiency.

"Fluensee Dock is uniquely designed for an environment like Sun's where assets are shipped from and are returned to central locations," said Chris Brumett, Fluensee's vice president of operations. "By harnessing the power of RFID, the Sun Events Group can cut significant time from its shipping and receiving functions and track the status of its equipment in real time."

A stationary RFID portal is located at the Sun Events Group warehouse. Along with handheld RFID readers, it keeps track of all RFID-tagged equipment that moves in and out of the dock and reports these movements in real time to the Fluensee Dock software running on local computer systems.

“RFID expertise was one of the reasons we selected Fluensee Dock to help us streamline our operations,” said Wetherill. “We have RFID tags affixed to thousands of computer systems and related hardware. The equipment moves through a portal when it leaves and is returned to the warehouse, and Fluensee Dock tells us immediately what’s coming and going.”

Fluensee Dock also topped the Sun Events Group’s list because it supports the Sun Solaris 10 operating system. Also, although the product is platform-agnostic, most of the code for Fluensee Dock is written in Java, so it can run on any platform and has no specific Windows requirement.

Results

With Fluensee Dock in place, the Sun Events Group has seen significant improvements in the time it takes to ship and receive its equipment worldwide.

“We’re no longer physically entering data into a system and generating paperwork, which is clearly a big time savings for us. Automating our operations with Fluensee Dock has also helped us reduce the number of errors that happened more frequently with our previous manual data entry process,” notes Wetherill.

What’s more, the Sun Events Group benefits from:

- ◆ Knowing immediately when its IT equipment is shipped to a show and the ability to view the status of the equipment at any given time during the shipping process
- ◆ Automating shipping and receiving, coupled with real-time location and status information, for assurance that equipment will be delivered as planned
- ◆ Receiving real-time information that reveals if something is awry with a shipment

“With Fluensee Dock, we now know immediately and without opening boxes if part of a case or part of a shipment is missing,” states Wetherill. “By knowing earlier that something is missing, we are now able to chase it down quicker and remedy the situation before it escalates.”

With Fluensee Dock’s sophisticated proactive alerting feature that provides managers with better information to make better decisions, the Sun Events Group is now armed with a powerful tool to streamline shipping and receiving operations, maximize inventory control and reduce costs, while saving time and resources for more strategic functions.



About Fluensee

Fluensee’s RFID-enabled asset tracking and supply chain management solutions improve the visibility, accuracy, security and utilization of a company’s mobile and fixed assets. Its end-to-end solutions combine highly configurable and patented software and implementation services with hardware from leading RFID, barcode, GPS and sensor technology providers. Fluensee’s solutions include its entry-level AssetTrack Express™ and enterprise-class AssetTrack™, along with the Fluensee Yard™, Dock™ and Fleet™ supply chain applications that are designed to efficiently manage assets in transportation and distribution environments. All of Fluensee’s solutions are platform and hardware agnostic. Fluensee is a privately held company headquartered in Englewood, Colorado. **For more information, visit www.fluensee.com.**

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