

Case Study: FrontLines Returns Success in a Manufacturing Co.

One of the Clients, which we shall call “the Client”, has had great success in its innovative and timely deployment of FrontLines Returns. In its first year of utilizing the FrontLines returns management solution, the Client was able to increase their throughput with regards to the calibration portion of their business by 20%-25%. As the calibration business represented 35% of their total revenue the increases were highly significant.

FrontLines helped them realize even greater profits, from the increased business, as they were able to handle the greater demand on their services without the necessity of hiring a single additional service technician. The efficiencies realized by utilizing FrontLines Returns enabled, not only the increase in their throughput but, additionally, enabled them to cost effectively handle the increased business.

The Client, is a world leader in manufacturing and servicing of sensitive scientific monitors used in the construction and mining industries. The monitors must be sent back for re-calibration on a regular basis. In addition to calibration returns, the harsh environment where equipment is deployed generates a continuing repair flow to the Client. Repair and re-calibration service generates significant revenue for the Client; however, the compelling value of service with the Client is strategic. The customer demand for rapid turnaround is vital; equipment not active in the field is in costly downtime. Within this demanding environment, providing swift service is mandatory to preserve customer loyalty.

Before deployment of FrontLines Returns:

- The RMA process was semi-manual using phone, email, faxes and paper, and was tracked in a rigid internal-facing MRP RMA module that could not be configured or extended to match the Client’s evolving RMA processes.
- The Client had placed a html form on its website to allow its customers to request a return material authorization number (RMA) over the web. The form asked for company name and address info, return shipping instructions, and the serial numbers of up to 10 units to be returned. The form was processed by a simple script that gathered the info into an email and sent it to a support email address at Head office. When the distributor needed to return items later, he had to re-enter all the contact and shipping info again on the form. This was an annoyance for distributors as they sent back units regularly.
- The distributor had to wait for the email to be received by the Client and responded to. If the distributor was many time zones away this could take several days. During this time the distributor anxiously awaited a reply with the RMA number.

- Once the email was received by the Client, a service rep would have to authorize the return, generate the next RMA number from the MRP internal system, and send an email back to the distributor with the RMA number and shipping instructions. Again because of time zone differences, this could take from a few hours to a few days before the distributor saw the return email.
- Meanwhile the customer of the distributor was anxiously awaiting a repaired or re-calibrated unit so he could get on with his construction project.
- Units being returned from outside of the Client's country were shipped to a customs broker at the border. For each unit being returned, the service rep at the Client had to gather information that was needed by the customs broker to pass the unit through customs, such as the price of the unit and the date it was shipped out of the country. The service rep manually extracted this info from the MRP system for each unit, entered it in an email and sent it to the customs broker daily.
- The need for service rep intervention in the processing of these emails, and the manual lookup of order entry data from the MRP system was not only inefficient and tedious, but also, error-prone. It was difficult for the service manager of the Client to have "Peace-of-Mind" that the RMA process was being run smoothly and error-free.
- When a unit arrived at the Client, it went through several work stages as it was inspected, cleaned, re-calibrated and repaired. Many service reps were involved in this process. A paper checklist went with each unit and was filled out at each stage detailing the work done by each service representative. Internally, the tracking of the repair process was paper-based. This provided limited visibility to the service manager and made it difficult to analyze the process to see trends and to identify areas for process or product improvement. Reporting on the process was also time-consuming requiring manual extraction of data from the MRP system and paper checklists into Excel spreadsheets.
- The distributor had no way of knowing the status of the return or where it was in the process other than by calling the Client because they had no web-access and the MRP system and RMA process was internal facing only. This resulted in many calls to support.

Aware that excellent service was mission critical to both the Client and its distributors and customers, the Client put this process under analysis to look for innovative improvements in efficiency and productivity, and to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. They then found FrontLines Returns.

After FrontLines Returns Deployment:

- FrontLines Returns automated the RMA process and turned it from a manual paper-based process into a paperless, web-based, globally available one within one week.
- FrontLines Returns allows distributors to request an RMA over the web using forms as before; but the difference is the RMA number is returned to the customer immediately on the web, and behind the web form now is the full power of a web-based application (FrontLines Returns).
- As soon as the distributor requests an RMA on the web, FrontLines Returns does the following: 1) an email is sent to the distributor with the RMA number and shipping instructions, 2) an email notification is sent to the service rep, and 3) an email is generated with the order entry info needed to clear customs and sent to the customs broker. This is all done without any intervention from a service rep in the Client! Also a RMA request is generated in the FrontLines Returns database automatically with all the customer contact information and data entered by the customer as well as fields extracted from the order entry database based on the item's serial number – info that had to be entered manually by the service rep into the MRP RMA system for each RMA request before FrontLines Returns was implemented. This has resulted in a more efficient process that is always error-free, and has greatly reduced the time spent by service reps in RMA administration.
- When the distributor enters a new RMA request he does not need to enter his contact and address information again as it is stored in his account. FrontLines Returns also allows the customer to enter multiple RMAs very quickly without the need to re-enter duplicate data.
- The distributor can easily track the status of all his returns over the web with FrontLines Returns using a familiar web browser interface. This has reduced phone calls to support for status checks dramatically.
- The RMA is entered into the FrontLines Returns database and is then tracked through the internal repair process in a paperless way – gone is the paper checklist. Workflow in FrontLines Returns sends emails to the distributor/customer, customs brokers, and service reps as the unit passes from stage to stage in the Client's internal RMA process. The Client was able to configure FrontLines Returns to meet its RMA process exactly (states, events, workflows and email actions) in hours without any custom programming required on our part. The Client can change the RMA process in FrontLines Returns at anytime as their processes evolve. As the return moves through its repair states the service reps use FrontLines Returns to enter notes and details of work done and items checked (all of which was previously entered on the paper checklist).

FrontLines Returns is extremely configurable following established internal process so deployment in the Client was non-intrusive and immediately accepted by all service reps.

- The service manager at the Client now has real time visibility into the status of each return. Reports provide data analysis to spot trends that was difficult before with the paper-based system. He has developed several weekly reports with the report generator in FrontLines Returns requiring no manual entry of data. Using data generated from the database provides more management capability, continually supplying input to improve the RMA process and spot product improvements.
- The service manager now has true “Peace-of-Mind” with the RMA process; secure with a 24*7 integrated solution, smoothly operating in the global economy. Customers get repaired and re-calibrated units back in a timely manner and all stakeholders (service reps, customs brokers, distributors and customers) receive complete correct info at the right time.

Conclusion:

- In summary, FrontLines Returns has automated all RMA processes in the Client, providing a much more efficient and error-free system. FrontLines Returns has also greatly reduced time spent by service reps in RMA authorization and administration and in return status checking. FrontLines Returns truly provides the customer with “instant gratification” – instant issue of the RMA number and web visibility of the real time status of returns. Calm, trust and confidence are now provided to customers and internal service reps.
- The Client has embraced FrontLines Returns as a truly innovative approach that has significantly increased; ***profit margins, productivity, sped up the RMA processing time, and increased customer satisfaction / loyalty.***
- FrontLines Returns is now a “strategic application” for the Client. It is used daily by all service reps for all aspects of the RMA process and has yielded a paperless 24*7 available system. Distributors are very happy with the new system and are reliant upon it. In a little over 2 weeks, literally “A day and night transformation” happened; yielding very rapid time-to-benefit and ROI.

For more information on this [case study and other case studies](#) or FrontLines affordable solutions please contact sales at (613) 254-6585 or email sales@frontlines247.com or visit our website at www.frontlines247.com .