



Ready to Pour

A Houston concrete supplier uses high-tech communications to deliver solid customer service.

Concrete is a basic commodity, so how does a supplier differentiate itself in a highly competitive marketplace? With a relentless focus on customer service and delivery. That's precisely how Leaman Building Materials Inc., based in the Houston suburb of Richmond, Texas, has thrived for more than 50 years.

Leaman, through its Allied Concrete subsidiary, provides concrete to home builders, commercial contractors and government clients throughout the Houston area, relying on a workforce of some 340 people. Their goal is to ensure that the proper mix of concrete arrives precisely when and where customers need it. That's more challenging than it might sound, given the symphony of moving parts that must be coordinated at each of the many job sites serviced by Allied Concrete every day. Complicating the prep work performed by multiple trades are inevitable delays associated with inclement weather.

Show up at a site too early, and concrete trucks will have to idle unproductively while contractors finish last-minute site details, possibly allowing the concrete to harden and go to waste inside the mixer. Show up too late, and contractor crews will have been standing waiting for the trucks to arrive. Either way, the result can be a costly waste of time and, in some cases, a giant lump of wasted concrete.

Running Smoothly

To avoid such problems, Allied Concrete relies on sophisticated communications technologies that allow it to match the movement of delivery trucks to the work rhythms of customers in the field. Several years ago, the company outfitted its 130 ready-mix trucks—those with the large, familiar-looking tumbling drums—with Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking devices. Paired with specialized software, the GPS devices allow the company to schedule and monitor truck movements through automated dispatching.

More recently, Leaman began looking for a cost-effective way to give similar capabilities to its fleet of 10 pump trucks, which move concrete from ready-mix trucks to such hard-to-reach locations as the upper levels of multistory buildings. Rather than duplicate the high-cost system used in its ready-mix trucks, Leaman chose to equip its pump truck drivers with handheld wireless devices—in this case, BlackBerry® Curve 8310 smart phones—at a fraction of the cost. Using these GPS-enabled handhelds, drivers can maintain voice, text message

Leaman Building Materials Facts

- **Industry Focus**

A leading Houston-area supplier of concrete to home builders, commercial contractors and government clients

- **Size**

A workforce of 340 people operating 12 concrete plants, and a fleet of 130 ready-mix and 10 pump trucks

- **Business Needs**

Sophisticated communications to ensure that the right mix of concrete is delivered precisely when and where it's needed

- **Communications Solutions**

An intricate network of truck-mounted GPS tracking devices and GPS-capable handhelds—all powered by the AT&T EDGE high-speed wireless network and by the AT&T TeleNav Track™ GPS service. The system gains extra speed and reliability from AT&T wireline phone service; T-1 lines from AT&T High Speed Managed Internet Service are fortified by the AT&T Managed Redundancy Option service.

and email communication with Leaman dispatchers via the AT&T EDGE high-speed wireless network. Leaman dispatchers also use the AT&T TeleNav Track™ GPS service to efficiently route drivers where and when they're needed. On occasion, drivers also use the system to download turn-by-turn directions to an unfamiliar job site.

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—Mick McKirahan, Chief Financial Officer, Leaman Building Materials Inc.

“Once our drivers leave our plants, they typically don't come back until the end of the day,” says Virginia Lopez, Leaman's IT manager. “When they leave, they know only the location of the first job. With this technology, we can send them text messages with job information for subsequent stops, so they know exactly where to go and what they need to deliver.”

Tracking trucks and keeping in touch with drivers is just part of Leaman's technology-oriented approach to superior service. The company also needs to maintain close contact with all its customers along with the 12 concrete plants it operates at seven different locations. To enhance communications, Leaman recently upgraded its data network, giving it faster, more reliable

Internet access via AT&T High Speed Managed Internet Service. It built the service on the back of speedy T-1 transmission lines, rather than ordinary copper phone wires, and then fortified the whole setup by signing on for the AT&T Managed Redundancy Option (MARO) services.

Managing Disruptions

“We had an incident about a year ago when a contractor cut through a fiber cable a mile from our offices and knocked our network out of commission for almost a day,” Lopez says. Today that wouldn't be a concern. If any physical problem disrupts network connectivity among the various Leaman facilities, AT&T keeps the data flowing by automatically rerouting company communications traffic through an alternate MARO service on its network. “If a similar incident happened today,” Lopez says, “we would be able to maintain communications among all our facilities and our customers.”

To round out its communications capabilities, Leaman also has AT&T wireline telephone service, with discounted local and long-distance calling plans and a toll-free line for incoming calls.

“The AT&T team is well attuned to our forward thinking and how we want communications to play a part in our business,” says Leaman Chief Financial Officer Mick McKirahan. “They bring us ideas, which we bounce around with some of our own, and we come up with a workable solution pretty quickly. And it's always been a cutting-edge solution. We think we're the most technologically advanced ready-mix company in the area, and AT&T is helping us make that happen.”

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