

Sales Field Force Automation

Project Timeline:

- **Start Date:** May 1995
- **Estimated Completion:** May 1996
- **Actual Completion:** June 1996

Organization Overview: Unilever Sri Lanka, established in 1938. As a prominent FMCG (fastmoving consumer goods) company, Unilever Sri Lanka operates local manufacturing facilities and reports to regional business groups for innovation and business results.

Challenges with Existing System: Unilever Sri Lanka's extensive distribution network encompasses over 200 island-wide distributors at the time, with daily deliveries to each. Manual processes led to frequent discrepancies in stock levels, impacting sales to grocery shops and supermarkets. The need for a more efficient system to track inventory and sales became evident.

Project Involvement: As a sales engineer, I explored the capabilities of the HP 200LX palmtop, a pioneering handheld computer with 4MB of memory, DOS operating system, and infrared communication features.

Initial Development: I developed a basic stationary inventory system using the HP 200LX palmtop, capable of generating printed receipts via the HP DeskJet 340 printer. This solution intrigued Unilever's IT team, leading to a mutual agreement for further development and testing.

Prototype Development: Collaborating with Unilever's in-house programmers, we enhanced the palmtop-based system, overcoming initial memory constraints by integrating 32MB flash memory. The solution featured real-time inventory management and invoice generation, with data securely transferred to the headquarters' Oracle database via a communication kit and PSTN line.

Pilot Testing: After rigorous in-house testing, the solution was piloted with actual sales personnel, demonstrating successful daily data transmission to the Oracle database. The finance department validated the data accuracy over a two-month period, yielding satisfactory results.

Implementation: Unilever initially acquired 8 palmtops and printers for pilot testing, followed by a phased rollout of 200 units for widespread sales operations. To address printer battery limitations, our team designed a car lighter jack for convenient charging. This project marked a significant milestone for Unilever in this region and gained global recognition, boosting HP's worldwide sales of palmtops and printers.

Recognition: I was recognised as a “Young Innovator” by Hewlett Packard Singapore