

Oakover maps out a vintage year in new market August 2008

James Blake says it was a major hassle planning which bottle shops he would have to visit each day to win new business in the fiercely competitive Victorian wine market.

"It was a daily grind," says Mr. Blake, the national sales and marketing manager of Oakover Wines who is spearheading the company's first marketing thrust outside its home state of Western Australia.

"Armed with a GPS, street directory and spreadsheet it was taking me at least half an hour each night to plan so I could visit at least 10 retail outlets across Melbourne or in major regional centres the following day.

"There had to be a better way of planning my travel between stores, spending some relationship building time with each retailer and saving time and petrol on the road," he said.

Not only did he discover a smarter way using the Route Optimisation service provided by MapData Sciences Pty Ltd (MDS) but he credits the service with helping boost the number of outlets visited daily by 50 percent and consequently with Oakover achieving its best ever monthly sales figures.

Now one email report a month from MDS enables Mr. Blake and a colleague to plan their visits for each forthcoming five week sales cycle, optimising not only time and distance requirements but factoring in the special requests of each customer.

"For a modest fee to cover the 10 sales cycles in a year the MDS service is an extremely cost-efficient investment," Mr. Blake said.

"Simply driving a lot less kilometres through optimising our daily routes has meant significant savings in petrol and similarly savings in wear and tear on cars.

"We have lifted our daily call rate from 10 to 15 outlets and are doing so in a more ordered manner," Mr. Blake said.

Route Optimisation is an essential productivity tool for organisations that offer programmed or sequenced delivery, merchandising or vending services. MDS now brings route planning efficiencies to enterprise and SME customers alike.

Mr. Blake said it has really proved itself in Victoria where the retail wine market is fiercely competitive in comparison with Western Australia. In its price point Oakover faces stiff competition from some established brand names in South Australian and NSW wine districts. Mr Blake and his colleague share a sales territory comprising some 500 retail outlets.

"This means we must each visit about 15 stores a day to build relationships with store owners and to carry out in-store merchandising. This is almost double the number of outlets visited daily in Western Australia. But getting around 15 stores a day without proper planning was proving a challenge," Mr. Blake said.

Within three months of introducing the MDS route optimisation system Oakover Wines has enjoyed significant growth in Victoria, achieving its largest ever monthly turnover.

"The MDS route optimisation system takes the headache out of who to see and there is no doubt it has helped us to achieve this milestone," James Blake said.

The customer's name, address, post code, last visit, products carried and date when the customer would prefer to be visited are stored in digital format and provide the basic customer relationship information required by the MDS system.

Rules can be applied to the system to ensure both the quality and consistency of relationships with the retailer. These may include for example, ensuring a three to four week gap between visits or factoring in the need in a new sales cycle to visit the oldest-visited customer.

Tailoring the service to Oakover's needs was a straightforward exercise said Mr. Blake.

"MDS' consulting staff was very positive, providing examples of route optimisation projects and asking questions as the first step in establishing the parameters for our solution. In an ideal world had all the information been on hand from our side the application could easily have been commissioned within a week."

Once the pilot system confirmed how it would work for Oakover, MDS has fine-tuned small aspects of the service.

Mr. Blake emails an updated file to MDS ahead of the next sales cycle and receives daily runs sheets for the forthcoming period within three days. The run sheets list which outlets are to be visited and when between 9.30 am to 5pm each day.

"We are yet to formally measure the success of the service but its contribution to sales figures and securing new business is undeniable. It is making a huge difference," Mr. Blake said.

He also expects the system will soon provide a form of key performance indicator (KPI) which will help the business case to add to the sales force in Victoria.

A survey of customers said they could not fault the service they were receiving from Oakover, a response which Mr. Blake attributes in no small part to the more planned approach the service ensures regarding sales visits. Likewise management at Oakover's WA head office attributes some of its growth in a new market to the MDS route optimisation service.

"As such we are looking at establishing a web portal to provide access to sales for customers and sales staff.

"The MDS route optimisation service is a fantastic planning tool for business. It is helping drive growth," James Blake says.

About Oakover Wines

Oakover Wines is a family-operated, boutique winery located in the heart of the Swan Valley. The historic estate was one of the original properties established in the Swan Valley in the 1830's and has been continuously used for grape growing since it was first cleared by convict labour. Some of the Swan Valley's first grapevines were planted on Oakover land by Samuel Moore in the early 1850's.

Inspired by Samuel Moore and with three generations of Swan Valley heritage behind them, the Yukich family acquired the estate from Houghton in 1990 and Oakover Wines was born. The family has been involved in grape growing in the Swan Valley since Nicholas Yukich purchased his first vineyard in 1929. A new winery was established in 2002 along with the appointment of Rob Marshall as general manager and chief winemaker

Currently, the winery crushes over 1000 tonnes a year and is a contract winemaking facility for many smaller vineyards in the Swan Valley.

About MapData Sciences

MapData Sciences is a company specialising in the provision of digital mapping data, services and geocoding software. With offices in Sydney, Australia and Wellington, New Zealand, MDS has a dedicated team of GIS and software professionals who build and maintain digital mapping data products and hosted spatially enabled applications. Specialising in Location Based Services, Demographic Analysis, Where's the Nearest, Travel Planning, Route Optimisation, Site Selection, as well as GIS consulting services and data development projects. MDS has an extensive list of clients involved in the banking, insurance, retail, franchise, travel, oil, transport, government and automotive sectors. For more information visit www.mapds.com