



Streamlining Calls Results in Better Customer Service

As the spring season picks up, many ag retailers will begin to recognize flaws in their system and opportunities for improvement. Chief among these items is addressing customers' needs during this extremely busy time, having enough resources to handle the work load, and managing the business in a profitable way. Robin Siktberg, Custom Content Editor for *PrecisionAg® Professional*, caught up with Bill Lehmkuhl, owner of Precision Agri Services, Inc., in Minster, OH, to ask how he plans to use tools such as the AgriSync mobile support system to address these issues and differentiate his team from the competition.



Bill Lehmkuhl
Owner, Precision
Agri Services, Inc.

Heading into this planting season, what are your top strategies for efficiently meeting the demands of your customers, and are there any service elements you hope to improve this year?

BILL LEHMKUHL: Our main priority has always been to help farmers and save them time and reduce frustration. One of the things we do before every spring is host refresher meetings on the different vendors we offer. We try to anticipate questions our customers may have, refresh their memories on how various equipment works, and provide information on updates. This saves them (and us) time when things get really busy.

One of the things we want to improve, and are improving by using AgriSync this year, is being able to get back to customers in a timely way. We have two full-time agronomists and seven precision ag technology specialists on our team, and our customers have all our personal cell phone numbers saved in their phones. We each can get buried in 30 to 40 voicemail or text messages deep sometimes, and it's hard to respond quickly. And we don't like to make them wait. Or a customer might call several of us if they can't get us the first time. And often, the original call recipient might not be the best person to solve their particular problem.

This is where AgriSync is already helping us. Customers can text us tickets or call in to one number and it rings the entire team. It helps them get an answer faster and it helps our team as well by eliminating a lot of repeat calls and back-and-forth between the team.

How are these calls being tracked and billed?

BILL LEHMKUHL: In the past, to be honest, we have struggled to track these calls. I don't care if you're an OEM dealer or independent like we are. Everyone has struggled with implementing a service plan or billing for phone time. In past years, we've tried to download phone logs, or take a screen shot of how much time you spent on the phone with a customer before you call the next one. Then you have to remember to turn it all in to the office, and they have to go through it. Now we can track the phone calls and support tickets that come in and how much time was spent on each one.

Tracking the tickets works for the customer, too. For example, I may have certain expertise that some of my associates don't have. So, they can automatically assign that ticket to me, along with what they already talked to the customer about. I can then do some homework and prepare before I call the customer back. It's much easier to keep track of.

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Planting season can be chaotic for both producers and your support team. How do you keep your customers the #1 priority while making sure your team doesn't burn out?

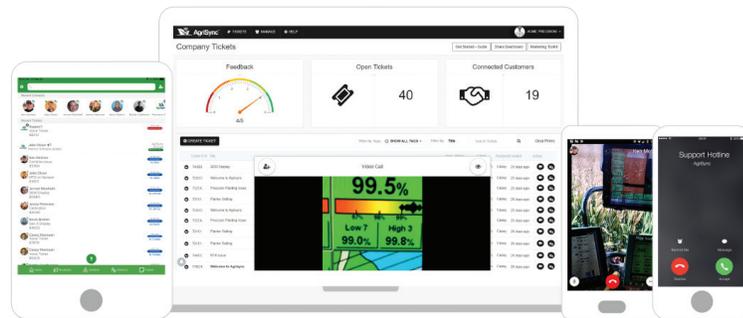
BILL LEHMKUHL: Our customers are ruined, because they do have all our personal cell phone numbers now! It's too late to rectify that. [Laughs]. Most of our team are farmers as well, so you can usually get ahold of one of us late at night because we're out there farming like anyone else. Now, with the one-number hotline system, we can choose who is on call and set hours. In any ag technology business, customer service is the priority – giving them a good experience and trying to meet their needs, but you also have to keep some sanity on the business side of things. Everybody on our team has a message on their personal voicemail box saying “You have reached [name]. If this is an emergency, please call the Precision Agri Services support hotline, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.”

We also manage the call center during the day. For example, if a team member is going to be busy all day doing an install, we pull them off the ring schedule for the day so they're not getting backed with incoming calls. They can concentrate on their job. That's gone a long way to help with burnout.

Does your dealership offer any type of remote service or technology support? If so, how do you charge for this service?

BILL LEHMKUHL: We do handle and have several RTK-based locations throughout our service area. We have our modems set up and we can look at things that way. The beauty of going to the next level with AgriSync is the ability to remote in with that grower and see what he sees, whether in the cab or back on the machine somewhere. We still use OEM types of remote service like Ag Leader Infinity, but it helps when you tell the grower, “Let's set up a remote video session so I can see exactly what you're seeing.” At first, our customers weren't used to that level of support, but they like it now. They don't have to describe everything. We're also able to charge for remote support now, because we have the ability to track those video calls with AgriSync.

It will be a great resource for our agronomy team, as well, because growers can show them problems in the field such as weeds, or poor stand development, etc.



One of the biggest challenges agriculture is facing right now is labor shortage and securing good talent. What is your dealership doing to attract the next generation, and how are you developing employees to set them up for success?

BILL LEHMKUHL: We've been lucky in attracting our new hires. We partner with Ohio State University and work with them on a number of technology projects. Five of my technology specialists have been OSU grads coming out of the Agricultural Systems Management program. We also have had good luck working with college coops for the summer. We offer ride-a-longs to college folks and kids with the Joint Vocational School. We've had kids who thought they just wanted to be mechanics ride along with one of our team members for a week and decide they would rather do what we do.

How has the new approach of using team-based support through AgriSync been received by your customers so far?

BILL LEHMKUHL: The customers who have used it have already responded very well to it. Right now, the full-blown wrath of spring hasn't hit yet, but the system has already made our lives easier. We announced our implementation of AgriSync at our spring meetings and had everybody download the mobile app on their phone. We also invited specific growers to download the app. We explained why we're using it and I think the team at AgriSync was rather shocked at how many customers we got to sign up!

I told our team we had to re-train our customers a bit to make it work, because everybody has our personal cell phone numbers right now. But I think they will see the value in it – customers can get a faster, better answer because the call gets to the right person more quickly.

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