



## Windows Mobile Customer Solution Case Study

# SHARP®

## Sharp Electronics Gains Market Intelligence 400 Percent Faster with Mobility Solution

### Overview

**Country or Region:** United States  
**Industry:** Manufacturing—Consumer electronics

### Customer Profile

Sharp Electronics Corp., based in Mahwah, NJ, is the U.S. subsidiary of Japan's Sharp Corp., a leading innovator of Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) technology. Sharp Electronics employs about 2,500 people.

### Business Situation

Sharp wanted a faster, more accurate way to get market intelligence from retail stores across the United States that carried its products, while reducing the burden on the employees who collected the data.

### Solution

The company now conducts surveys using Windows Mobile® powered devices and the FAST (Field Adapted Survey Toolkit) solution from GeoAge.

### Benefits

- Surveys updated 400 percent faster
- Immediate answers that enable competitive action
- Insight into retailer, consumer opinions
- Better rapport with store personnel
- Better nationwide field force management

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*Steve Faulkner, Director, Field Marketing and Training, Sharp Electronics*

Sharp Electronics needed the most accurate, most detailed intelligence possible about how its products were faring in retail stores nationwide, and it needed to get that intelligence quickly. But the paper-and-pen-based surveys that its field marketing managers took during store visits were time-consuming to collect, error-prone, and not very thorough. To meet its needs, the company turned to Windows Mobile® powered devices and the FAST (Field Adapted Survey Toolkit) solution from Microsoft® Certified Partner GeoAge. Sharp now updates its surveys 400 percent faster, gains 400 percent more information, and cuts survey time by 67 percent, so that field managers can spend more time building rapport with store personnel and selling product. Sales by field managers are up 500 percent in the year since Sharp adopted the solution.



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Steve Faulkner, Director, Field Marketing and Training, Sharp Electronics

### Situation

To remain a leader in the consumer electronics market, getting your products into retail stores is only one challenge among many. You need to know where your products are placed in those stores—and you need to enhance their placement relative to the competition. You need to understand which products are selling, which ones aren't, and why. You need to know how your prices compare to those of the competition and what both store personnel and customers are saying about your products.

Sharp Electronics gathers that intelligence on its AQUOS line of LCD, flat-panel televisions through 27 field marketing managers located throughout the United States. Each marketing manager visits 25 stores per week, spending about 90 minutes in each store.

Traditionally, managers spent half of each store visit collecting marketing intelligence information, which they recorded using paper survey forms and notepads. At the end of the day, the managers would spend up to four hours reentering this information into their computers so that they could send it to Sharp headquarters as attachments in e-mail.

Because of the time-consuming and error-prone nature of reentering that data manually at the end of the day, the surveys were limited to 50 questions or points of information per store—less information than Sharp considered ideal, but as much information as it considered practical. In addition, the surveys were updated once a month—as frequently as possible for time-pressed Sharp executives, but not frequently enough to reflect the latest changes in the market.

“We were selling the latest technologies to our customers—but the information technologies we were using to support those sales were slow, sometimes inaccurate, and cumbersome,” says Steve Faulkner, Director

of Field Marketing and Training, Sharp Electronics.

As a result, Sharp executives didn't always have the information they needed to understand, and respond to, the latest competitive moves or trends in the flat-panel television market.

### Solution

To satisfy its need for timely, relevant information on its products in the field, Sharp adopted the FAST (Field Adapted Survey Toolkit) solution from Microsoft® Certified Partner GeoAge and equipped its field marketing managers with HP iPAQ mobile devices powered by Windows Mobile® 5.0 software.

“The fact that this was a Windows Mobile–based solution was a huge factor in our choosing to adopt it,” says Faulkner. “That made it very easy for us to use from day one. Our field marketing managers knew how to use it, and our IT staff knew how to manage it.”

Indeed, each of the field marketing managers received just half a day of training on the new solution and were using it on their next store visits. Faulkner received additional training in the creation of surveys and the use of reports.

Now, Faulkner uses the FAST software on his laptop, from wherever he is, to create and update surveys and push them out to the field marketing managers over the Internet. The company currently uses seven surveys, covering situations that include store visits, special events, formal trainings, sales days, competitive information, escalate to service (display model issues), and supervisor summaries.

The surveys reside in the FAST application on the mobile device and are accessed by field marketing managers during their store visits.

The managers enter information into FAST using drop-down lists, text entry, digital photos, and video. When they complete the surveys, the managers upload the surveys from their devices to Sharp headquarters. The surveys are compiled by FAST and exported to Microsoft Office Excel® 2007 spreadsheets, which Faulkner uses to share information with other Sharp executives.

### Benefits

Sharp executives now have the market intelligence they need, thanks to Windows Mobile and the GeoAge solution, and they're using it to make better marketing and product decisions. The information that Sharp gets is more accurate and more timely, addresses immediate needs, and frees field marketing managers to build better rapport and train retail personnel.

### Allows Surveys to Be Updated 400 Percent Faster

Because the new solution makes it faster and easier for Sharp to update its surveys, those surveys are now updated at least weekly instead of monthly, ensuring that Sharp is soliciting information on the most recent marketing trends and issues. And because

the solution also makes it faster and easier for field marketing managers to record and upload information, Sharp has expanded its surveys from about 50 questions each to more than 200, giving the company more detailed information than it had before.

### Enables Competitive Action by Providing Immediate Answers

When new information is needed immediately, the solution gives Sharp the ability to get it: New surveys can be created and uploaded to the field across the United States in as little as half an hour. For example, when Sharp executives wanted to understand how consumers regarded AQUOS picture quality compared to the competition, Faulkner was able to add relevant questions to the surveys and push them out to the field within a day—and the answers started coming back immediately.

"In the past, it would have taken days or weeks to get this information," says Faulkner. "With FAST and Windows Mobile, we had the answers right away—and we were able to act on them." It turned out that Sharp's picture quality was fine—but the way that the products were displayed in retail stores put the picture quality at an apparent disadvantage. Those answers were relayed to Sharp's product development teams, which produced upgraded software that the field marketing managers deployed on Sharp's display models to eliminate the disparity with the competition.

### Offers Insight into Retailer Opinions

Field marketing managers can record the actual reactions of store personnel to Sharp products by using digital video capture in FAST and the devices running Windows Mobile, and then share those reactions with Sharp executives back at headquarters. "That's a really cool benefit," says Faulkner. "It takes great advantage of the mobile

Figure 1. Sharp field personnel use their Windows Mobile powered devices to capture information on product placement, and more, during store visits.



“Our managers have more time to see what’s going on in the stores and to share that reality with corporate.”

Steve Faulkner, Director, Field Marketing and Training, Sharp Electronics

devices to really close the distance between the store and our corporate offices.”

#### **Enables Better Rapport with Store Personnel**

Better marketing intelligence is just one benefit that Sharp derives from the new solution. Better relationships with its retailers are another. With FAST and the Windows Mobile-based solution, field marketing managers have cut the time that they spend on surveys during store visits by 67 percent, to 15 minutes per visit. The half-hour that marketing managers save per visit is invested in building rapport with store managers and other retail personnel—including training them on Sharp products and how to sell those products.

“With the mobile solution, our managers are creating real business value for Sharp and driving our sales, rather than spending half of the visit looking at a piece of paper,” says Faulkner. “Our managers have more time to see what’s going on in the stores and to share that reality with corporate.”

Field managers have time for more than just seeing what’s going on in the stores. They also gain more time to sell AQUOS products while they’re in the stores. That enables them to sell more product to consumers during those store visits than ever before. Sales by Sharp field marketing managers have increased 500 percent in a year, an increase that Faulkner attributes to the FAST and Windows Mobile solution.

#### **Supports Better Field Force Management**

Faulkner also attributes better management of his field force to the solution. Faulkner looks at the depth and quality of responses to open-ended survey questions—such as how consumers are making purchase decisions between Sharp and its competition—and uses those responses to help evaluate the performance of the field marketing managers. “If

someone gives thoughtful answers to the survey questions, I know they’re really on top of their jobs,” says Faulkner. “If they leave key questions blank or give cursory answers, I know there may be a problem that I need to follow up on.”

#### **Boosts Satisfaction of Field Managers**

The solution even contributes to higher satisfaction on the part of Sharp’s field marketing managers.

“In the past, when our managers finished their last store visit for the day, they still had two hours or more of data input to face before their work was done,” says Faulkner. “Now, when our managers are done with their last store visit, they’re done, period. They love this new process.”

## For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

For more information about GeoAge products and services, call (866) 565-9855 or visit the Web site at: [www.geoage.com](http://www.geoage.com)

For more information about Sharp Electronics products and services, visit the Web site at: [www.sharppusa.com](http://www.sharppusa.com)

## Windows Mobile

Windows Mobile brings the power of the Windows® operating system to mobile devices, helping businesses and their mobile employees stay connected while on the go. Windows Mobile runs mobile versions of Microsoft programs, including Microsoft Office Outlook® Mobile; Internet Explorer® Mobile; Pocket MSN®; Windows Media® Player Mobile; and Microsoft Office Word Mobile, PowerPoint® Mobile, and Excel Mobile. With Windows Mobile, information workers get powerful software combined with the familiarity of Windows. Combined with available service plans and connectivity options, Windows Mobile-based devices, available from 42 device makers and 68 mobile operators in 48 countries, can be used to make calls, send e-mail and instant messages, surf the Web, and access critical business information even when users are away from the office.

More information about Windows Mobile can be found at: [www.microsoft.com/windowsmobile](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsmobile)

### Software and Services

- Windows Mobile 5.0
- Microsoft Office
  - Microsoft Office Excel 2007

### Partner

- GeoAge