

FROM A DISTANCE: SOTI'S MOBICONTROL ENABLES WDH TO MANAGE ITS PDAs

Summary

Operatives employed by Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) use PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) to schedule their work more efficiently.

However, if there is a problem with these mobile devices in the field, the operatives may have to make a long round trip so that it can be resolved.

This started to cancel out many of the efficiencies that had been gained.

WDH therefore looked for a versatile device management system that would mitigate this problem – and chose MobiControl, a solution developed by SOTI inc and supplied by Spirit Data Capture Limited.

The business need

Wakefield and District Housing is England's fifth largest housing organisation. It employs some 1,400 people and is responsible for over 31,000 homes with a total of over 100,000 residents. It is committed to spending £720 million refurbishing tenants' properties until 2012. Its 'OneCALL' system operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, helping tenants with enquiries on any housing issue - including repairs, anti-social behaviour, rents and general enquiries.

To streamline the efficiency of its mobile repair workforce, WDH has equipped them with HTC Touch Pro 2 and HTC TyTN II PDAs. The devices use a Windows Mobile 6.0 operating system and Capita OpenSystems (Open Mobile) software. The company has an Intel-based dedicated server architecture but plans to move to a virtualised infrastructure, based on VMWare.

The use of PDAs formed part of the organisation's 'Systems Thinking' approach, which aims to reduce waste and eliminate unnecessary steps from WDH's processes. The PDAs are used by operatives in a wide range of trades who are employed to provide 'Responsive Repairs'. They include plasterers, gas engineers, plumbers, electricians, joiners and members of general trades.

The mobile device has removed the manual, paper-based aspects of the operatives' work and enabled them to manage their own work schedules. They can therefore plan to visit a batch of tenants in the same area on the same day, saving both time and fuel.

The PDAs were sourced by the organisation's ICT Department, which is responsible for the maintenance and development of its ICT systems. This includes the development of software and services designed to support the business and to boost the levels of service provided to the tenants.

Although the PDAs proved to be successful in terms of streamlining the Responsive Repairs process, some of these gains were lost if the devices developed a fault of any kind. This is because the operative would have to make a round trip of up to 30 miles to the ICT department to get the problem resolved.

The technology solution

The ICT department therefore realised that it needed to find a system that would provide remote access to the PDAs so that any software problems could be resolved from a distance. Wendy Popplewell, WDH's Business Analyst in the ICT department, says: "We wanted a solution that would enable us to remotely manage the PDAs and diagnose any faults, so that only hardware problems need to come back to the ICT department."

The ICT department considered various options and then selected MobiControl, a versatile device management system. This was developed by SOTI Inc, a technology leader in mobile device management and security, based in Ontario, Canada. Wendy had previously seen a demonstration of MobiControl and had been impressed by its capabilities. After searching the Internet, she found Spirit Data Capture, an independent consultancy that distributes the solution within the UK.

MobiControl is an advanced Device Management, Helpdesk and Security solution for mobile and desktop computing devices. It is based around award-

winning technology, and existing customers have reported benefits that have included increased productivity, minimised downtime, and reduced labour costs. The result has been a lower total cost of ownership for their mobile workforces.

The ICT department subsequently installed MobiControl on its server with support from Spirit. It also installed software on 120 PDAs. The software monitors the devices and sends reports back to the main system. MobiControl has now been deployed across the Wakefield district – an area of some 350 square kilometres that encompasses a mixture of both rural and urban areas.

The benefits so far

Wendy reports: “MobiControl gives us a reliable level of remote access to the PDAs for troubleshooting purposes. As a result, our operatives don’t have to travel back and forth to depots if something happens to their PDAs. This means that their work isn’t disrupted and we save money on the fuel that would have been used. MobiControl has also enabled us to start to transfer the support of the PDAs to our central Service Desk.”

MobiControl can send a message to a stolen device that locks or wipes it, preventing it from being used. Using GPS Location Based Services, MobiControl also has the ability to track devices in real time as well as recording tracking information.

Wendy concludes: “The MobiControl system is excellent and we’ve had great support throughout from both Spirit Data Capture in the UK and from SOTI in Canada. MobiControl is good value for money, simple to use and easy to install. It’s also a logical and intuitive system which doesn’t require a huge amount of training.”

For further information please contact Helen.jones@spiritdatacapture.co.uk

Telephone 01928 718800