

# Spirit's Panasonic FZ-B2 tablets streamline data collection for WSPIPB



Even the largest companies can make significant cost and time savings by using mobile data capture as an integral part of their supply chain activities. A leading consultancy in the engineering world is WSPIParsons Brinckerhoff (WSPIPB). Some of its UK field-based teams have recently moved over from a paper-based system to Panasonic FZ-B2 tablets for capturing borehole data. The tablets, which were recommended and supplied by Spirit Data Capture Limited, have led to faster processes and a greater consistency and quality of data.

The merger of WSP and Parsons Brinckerhoff (WSP/IPB) in 2014 has created one of the world's leading consultancies specialising in engineering professional services. The company has a workforce of over 34,000 employees and has more than 500 offices in 40 countries across the globe.

In the UK, the company's specialist Smart Consulting department has 16 employees, who are responsible for delivering innovation and technology to external clients and internal projects. One of its tasks is to source solutions for various teams that go out to sites and carry out geological and environmental investigations for developers.



## A strategic and behavioural change

The department recently started looking for rugged Android tablets which its teams could use in the field and which could run the company's Flowfinity-based data capture system. This is used to develop and deploy field data collection forms on the tablet and automatically syncs data back to the office. The tablets would be used outdoors, so would need to be capable of withstanding harsh environmental conditions.

An independent consultancy, Spirit Data Capture Limited, has been working closely with WSP-PPB for the last three years, supplying a range of equipment and services. The Smart Consulting department therefore asked for Spirit's help in sourcing a suitable tablet.

Anthony Jones, the department's GIS Manager, explains: "We needed a tablet with a strong battery life so that our users can work at a site for a full day without having to recharge it. The use of tablets also represents a major behavioural change for our field workers, as previously they were using pen and paper to record and transfer information. The move to a digital approach therefore meant that we needed a proven and reliable solution with 'no excuses' – i.e. the employees couldn't revert to pen and paper by using the excuse that the tablet or software wasn't reliable."

The company had previously tried a few tablets but these had proved to be unreliable, with numerous problems that took time and trouble to solve. Spirit was therefore asked to provide some recommendations for this project and for others, and subsequently supplied the company with a few demonstration models. This proved invaluable, and WSP/IPB subsequently chose the Panasonic FZ-B2 Toughpad tablet.

## Deploying the solution

The Panasonic FZ-B2 is a fully rugged Android™ 6.0 tablet with a 7-inch outdoor display. It's a very energy-efficient and versatile mobile solution, with a ten-finger multi-touch display, flexible configurable ports and business expansion capability. It can be used in the field and has connectivity options that ensure that data is always available when needed.

Spirit supplied the devices, along with a full range of Panasonic accessories and a manufacturer's support contract. The company also provided WSP/IPB with technical support and has helped it to explore the expanding use of mobile data capture across the business. The new Panasonic FZ-B2s have now been deployed.

Anthony Jones comments: "In the past, our users were often concerned about the risk of losing data. The Panasonic brand helped them to embrace the behavioural change, as it convinced them that these are top-of-the range tablets, which also alleviated their fears about any data loss."

"Two other great benefits of the new devices are the three-year warranty - which helps to reinforce the belief that these are very dependable tablets - and the decent battery life, with options to extend it further by using hot-swappable batteries."

The tablets are being used by the Ground Risk and Remediation teams in WSP/IPB's offices throughout the UK. Together with custom-built forms (developed using the Flowfinity software) the tablets have been used to capture borehole drilling records and subsequent environmental monitoring data from these boreholes. The tablets have also been used to access other features, such as mapping, email, Skype for Business and timesheets, whilst the workers are at the site.

## Reaping the rewards

Anthony continues: "The Panasonic tablets have been working perfectly so far. Since the rollout of the devices in May 2016, a total depth of 3500m of boreholes has been logged and 865 boreholes have been visited as part of the monitoring regime."

"As the previous process relied on field notebooks being transcribed into a database back in the office, WSP/IPB estimates that nearly 30 days of manual typing has been saved alone by the new devices. The quality and consistency of the data has also improved, as the tablet forms ensure that the data is captured to a British Standard. This facilitates other efficiency-saving workflows."

"Spirit have always been professional and very informative when offering different options and have kept me up to date throughout the ordering process," adds Anthony. "They have also provided priority support for the tablets so that any issues can be dealt with externally with a minimum of downtime."

WSP/IPB and Spirit are now looking at the possible future uses of mobile data capture for the company. WSP/IPB recognises the efficiency gains and consistency and quality improvements that can be achieved through field data collection. The company believes that developing smarter working methodologies and gaining greater insight into the data is an important aspect of improving the decision-making process – further enhancing the service that it offers to its clients. It will therefore continue to introduce field data collection to a wide range of disciplines in its business.