

Furmanite's customer service given electronic Pocket PC boost

Furmanite International Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Kaneb group.

Operating within the oil, gas, petrochemical and power generation industries, (both onshore and offshore), providing high quality engineering solutions to problems encountered the world over.

In their aim to become leaner, fitter and faster to respond to their customer's needs, Furmanite explored the market for a dynamic field operative solution that would not only be both flexible and capable of operating in extreme environments, but could provide the ability to assignment and dispatch calls.

Shortening the time between project completion and issuing the customer invoice is the prime objective of the Electronic Data Transfer (EDT) system recently adopted by Furmanite International in the UK.

At the end of February, the company completed its training of almost 100 technicians in the use of the system, which employs hand-held computers running a version of Microsoft's Windows CE operating system. In conjunction with a mobile phone, EDT allows two-way transfer between the technician and the company's Kendal headquarters.

"Improving administrative functions was the driving force," reports Furmanite's IT director, Chris Hayton, "but as the projects progressed, we've been able to include additional features.

"Each individual now receives daily information about their job details, the customer and location. Then, when the work's been finished, the technician can complete the customer job sheet as an electronic form, and obtain the customer's signature there and then on the screen.

"This information can then be relayed back to Kendal for processing and, should the client request it, a hard copy of the job sheet can be e-mailed or faxed back automatically - cutting back dramatically on the input needed from admin staff."

A new software package called Synchro, designed by TBS, one of Europe's leading Mobility Solutions providers, and developed in line with Furmanite's specification, takes care of collection and processing. The package holds all data about client sites and their individual plants, together with technicians' details and their skills and training.

Capable of recording all information for Furmanite's key services - leak-sealing, on-site machining, controlled bolting, Trevitest, pipe freezing and others - the system can record all the information necessary to determine the feasibility of carrying out the work.

"Once that's been ascertained, the system really comes into its own," says Chris. "After examining the client and work requirements, it produces a ranking of all the technicians, built upon their location, technical ability, training requirements and plant induction.

"Notification of the job is then sent to the relevant technicians, who then dial in and download the necessary information."

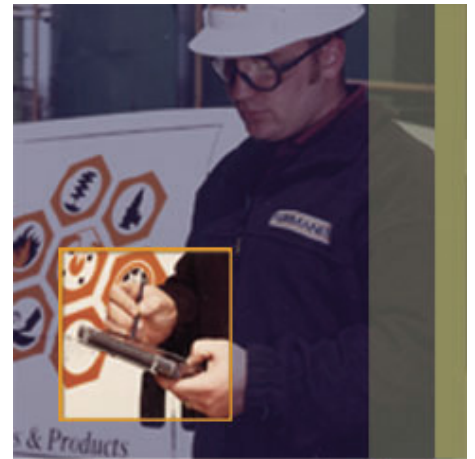
Completed job sheets can be processed automatically and transferred into Furmanite's accounting system ready for invoicing, speeding up the process dramatically and avoiding any time-wasting repeated entry of data. Technical data is transferred to an archive database, building a wide-ranging library for future reference.

Internal administration has also been eased. The system allows the inputting of expenses, stores requisitions and even holiday requests, which are then forwarded via e-mail to the relevant people for approval.

EDT is running alongside its predecessors until all testing and training is complete. "Our target for complete migration is the start of Q2," comments Chris. "To date we're ahead of schedule and already seeing the benefits.

"The most significant has been in reducing the amount of paperwork. Working in difficult environments, wear and tear and the vagaries of handwriting meant that jobsheets could sometimes be difficult to interpret - sometimes our admin staff would have to send them back to the engineer concerned for clarification.

"Electronic forms have cured all those problems, and given us a more streamlined system, ultimately improving the service we can provide to our customers."



FURMANITE

About TBS:

TBS was established in 1993 to exploit two emerging technologies - the handheld computer and GSM mobile communications. It is now firmly established as Europe's leading developer for portable computers using the Windows CE and PocketPC operating systems. TBS has a proven track record in providing major private and public sector organisations with intuitive mobility solutions and services.

TBS specialises in all areas of mobile data distribution, including field service, health and safety, transport and logistics, quality audit and, sales and marketing systems.

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