

London Borough of Lewisham - Mobilise their Workforce

The London Borough of Lewisham has further enhanced quality of service to tenants by deploying a sophisticated mobility strategy. Recognising the need to improve how its field craft workers received information about jobs when working remotely, they rolled out Microsoft Windows Mobile-based Pocket PC Phone Edition devices.

Running the TBS TaskMaster solution, the devices enable workers to operate independently of depots. This has dramatically increased the efficiency of building maintenance and service provision within the Borough.

Situation

Local government authorities are under increasing pressure to cut costs while improving the quality of service to tenants. The London Borough of Lewisham realised that they needed to take advantage of proven technologies to be able to effectively achieve these goals.

The Borough employs 200 craft workers such as plumbers, carpenters and electricians, who deliver planned maintenance and repairs for 30,000 homes across the region. But each day, these workers had to drop into the depot at least once in order to pick up their job allocation sheets—a process which could take up to 45 minutes.

Malcolm Diston, Business Development Manager, Housing Building Services, London Borough of Lewisham, says: "The pieces of paper often didn't contain all the necessary details to complete the job. This meant the workers would have to telephone the depot, or return to pick up more information or parts, which was highly inefficient."

To keep costs down, the Borough needed a much more reliable way of ensuring that jobs were completed in time. Voice calls and extensive paperwork were costly to the Borough, and the amount of time workers were forced to spend at the depot was unacceptable. "We also had to meet the challenge of the Council's asset management strategy by reducing our operational sites, condensing our operations and thus making further savings for the Authority. Ideally we wanted our craft workers to operate from home so we decided to look for a mobility solution to streamline these processes," adds Diston.

Solution

Lewisham approached Microsoft partner and systems integrator TBS to help. TBS uses Microsoft technologies to create its wireless offering, TaskMaster - a client application that delivers enterprise information to field workers using wirelessly connected Microsoft Windows Mobile-based devices.

On the advice of TBS, the borough chose to roll out O2 XDA's running TaskMaster to its craft workers. The solution, built using the Microsoft.NET Framework, integrates directly into London Borough of Lewisham's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System. The TaskMaster application



exchanges data with the CRM System using the TaskMaster interface tool and stores it in an SQL Server database. This data, along with device configuration preferences, is then synchronised with the mobile devices over the O2 GPRS network.

Brian Barnes, Sales Director, TBS, says: "TBS chose to build TaskMaster on the Microsoft Mobile platform because of the power and variety of tools the platform provides."

At the start of each day, users turn on their integrated phone and mobile device to receive details of the day's jobs. As they complete certain stages of their work, users automatically send back updates to the CRM system, including an electronic signature from the tenant once the job is complete.

"The TaskMaster client application utilises intuitive, easy-to-use electronic forms and menu driven pre-defined selection lists, which are relevant to specific jobs and tasks. It asks questions based on their answers and guides them through the forms in an intelligent way," says Barnes.

TBS customised the solution to meet the Borough's needs. One of these included the need for a schedule of rates function to be built into the TaskMaster system. Craft workers get paid per job, and the software shows them a total of how much they're earning during the day.

Diston says: "TBS's technical knowledge and understanding of our requirements was invaluable." The solution is being rolled out initially to 120 users, all of whom are expected to have the devices in 2004.

Benefits

Easing the Administration Burden

Armed with Pocket PCs, craft workers no longer need to visit the depot on a daily basis. All the details of jobs are available at any location, at any time and TaskMaster dynamically pushes out any further emergency work to them in the field. With a minimum of 45 minutes saved each day, the craft workers are more productive and can fit in more jobs.

Previously, depot staff spent a great deal of time transferring handwritten notes into the computer system and allocating and planning work. Diston says: "Now that updates automatically load into the CRM systems, we expect to free up four office workers from these sorts of duties and employ their skills in other areas". Diston highlights that these workers can instead concentrate on more productive roles, such as being more proactive with tenants and keeping them informed of work being done.

Expected Cost Savings

The Borough expects to see significant cost savings as a result of the mobile deployment. Not only does it hope to make an annual saving of £5,500 in fuel costs by workers not having to return to the depot, but it also expects to save up to £6,000 annually through the reduction in paperwork and printing.

"GPRS also helps us plan our costs better as it operates on a fixed rate basis, rather than GSM, which is variable," says Diston.



"The handheld technology has already contributed to a saving of £60,000 per year with our reduced accommodation needs," says Diston. All the savings will be passed back into the Borough and will work towards providing a better service to our tenants."

More time away from the depots frees up workers to take on extra jobs. Diston says: "We are always stretched for craft workers. There is enough work for many more, which means we have to subcontract out the work. This new solution enables us to keep much of this work in-house."

Keeping it Simple

Lewisham Borough is delighted by the ease with which craft workers have adapted to the Pocket PC Phone Edition. Its easy-to-use interface, combined with the intuitive nature of TaskMaster, ensure that users require very little training in order to use them effectively.

"Craft workers often have little or no experience of using a computer, but they are adapting surprisingly well. The interface is easy to operate, with simple options on a touch screen. And they can do all their planning from home," says Diston.

Reducing Paper-Based Processes

Paper job allocation sheets were difficult to carry around, easily misplaced and occasionally details were lost in the translation of the workers' handwritten notes. The Pocket PCs enable accurate information to be entered into the company CRM system in real time, ensuring the Borough has up-to-date records on the progress of work. "We know instantly what is going on and this way can provide a much better service to the community," says Diston.

Local government organisations are subject to a best value inspection as part of the government's legislation to provide a more seamless, cost-effective service to the community. Diston says: "This solution means office staff can focus on more important tasks such as improving our performance and getting ready for the best value inspection. We consider that the deployment of this solution will contribute toward a better rating by the best value inspectorate"

Mobile Business Solutions-the power of mobility, the familiarity of Windows Microsoft Windows Mobile -based Pocket PCs and Smartphones enable mobile professionals to quickly work with their most valuable information while away from their desk, expand their device functionality to meet changing enterprise needs, and make the best use of their downtime.

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To access information via the World Wide Web, go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/uk>.

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<http://www.microsoft.com/mobile/enterprise>

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