

Metering Services Empowers Field Staff and Boosts Efficiency with TaskMaster Mobility Solution

Industry: Utilities

Metering Services saw an opportunity to benefit from the introduction of mobile technology. It chose to implement TaskMaster mobility solution from TBS running on Microsoft Windows Mobile Pocket PC's. The Solution has enabled Metering Services to improve efficiency, increase customer service levels and develop competitive advantages. The solution ensures fast, accurate delivery of business critical information to and from the field and eliminates the resource hungry manual processes.

Metering Services is a division of Aquila Networks UK and delivers services such as meter reading, re-certification and replacement, and emergency repair work.

Situation

Engineers had to collect and return their paper job sheets at the beginning and end of their shift resulting in time wastage. The sheets contained only limited written instructions sometimes resulting in misinformation and delays.

Solution

Deployment of Windows Mobile™-based Pocket PCs running the TBS TaskMaster solution to field service engineers.

Overview

Metering Services is a subsidiary of Aquila Networks UK, the largest regional electricity company in the UK, which provides electricity services to 2.3 million customers. Its Metering Services business includes services such as reading, re-certification, replacement and emergency repair of meters within its operational scope. The division deals with between 3,000 and 4,000 calls per day from customers.

Situation

For many years office employees transferred customer requests to job sheets and allocated them to field engineers. Business practice within the Metering Services operation required field workers to attend their depot at the start and end of each shift to collect and return job sheets. Not only did this process limit the number of jobs each engineer was able to complete, it also required the business to maintain a considerable (and expensive) depot infrastructure in order to support its mobile workforce. Julian Windmill, IT Director, Aquila Metering Services, says: "This time could have been used for one to two extra jobs per engineer each day." Windmill continues, "Requests were recorded in the form of handwritten instructions on paper forms. There was no room for notes, safety information or any extra detail." Metering Services needed to minimise

engineer downtime and simplify communications, with a minimum investment in infrastructure.

Solution

In 2001, the company rolled out TaskMaster to 120 electrical engineers via Microsoft® Windows Mobile™-based Pocket PCs. Rollout was extended during 2003 to over 200 users. TaskMaster supports any Microsoft operating system on handheld devices. The application models business processes and assists workers in the completion of their duties through providing a task-centric interface. This ensures all aspects of work are completed within the required parameters and that complete and accurate data is collected and returned to host systems in real time via a wireless network. The solution is supported by a powerful and scalable Microsoft platform that can deal with large-scale business applications. "It would have been very difficult to use this solution without Windows, which enables information to be presented in a format that is meaningful to users," says Windmill.

No detail is too great

The solution enables engineers to access accurate and detailed data via Pocket PCs, ensuring they are at the right place on time. Engineers can quickly and simply deliver job status information directly to administrators. They can react faster to emergency calls and complete jobs quickly. Likewise, administrative staff are relieved of the responsibility of entering job completion data into host systems manually. Better staff management ensures customers benefit from more efficient service. With their familiar Windows interface and customisable look and feel, Pocket PCs are easy to use so staff training was kept to a minimum. "The solution was well received by staff. They are not all technically minded but picked up the solution quickly," says Windmill. Other savings have become apparent since implementation. "The cost of meter operations has been cut by 20 per cent, as there is no need for clerical intervention," says Windmill. "Engineers are able to carry out an extra one or two jobs per day saving in the region of £100,000 a year. There has been good return on investment— this solution paid for itself



within 18 months." The TaskMaster solution has also enabled Metering Services to bid for new contracts that require faster turnaround and job completion, which is now possible with their mobile solution.

Lending support

Established in 1993, TBS is one of Europe's leading mobile solutions providers in the corporate market. As a member of the Microsoft Mobility Partner Advisory Council, TBS develops its software with leading technologies and with secure and committed backing from Microsoft. Metering Services needed a solution that had the flexibility to support its existing infrastructure, while providing a scalable platform for future growth and development. Following some investigation Metering Services chose TBS based on its experience and proven track record, to provide the solution. Its innovative mobility solution TaskMaster delivers enterprise information to over 200 field staff using wirelessly connected mobile devices. Windmill says: "We felt we could trust TBS and were impressed with TaskMaster. The solution fitted our criteria and enabled us to take over some of the bespoke elements ourselves." Jon Poynton, TBS, says: "Microsoft technologies enabled us to deliver TaskMaster in a user friendly environment that was well received by Metering Services employees. Pocket PCs are easy to navigate, reliable, and can be customised to suit their environment." Metering Services are pleased with the end result. Windmill says: "TBS staff have shown dedication and expertise in helping us to implement this project and we believe that we have a platform on which we can remain a leading provider of data collection and meter operations in the UK."

For more information

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