

Case Study



SOUTH WEST COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

South West Communications Group makes full use of its own cost-effective mobile solution to save time and man hours taken up by its engineers' paperwork.

South West Communications Group was formed in 1983 as a provider of business telephone systems. Since then, it has grown, both in size and technological expertise, to meet an ever-changing demand for more efficient, secure and reliable communication systems using the latest voice, data and Internet solutions.

The challenge

South West Communications Group has a team of 40 service engineers that work across south England and south Wales. These engineers were finding they were using multiple forms, a large amount of time filling them in and even more hours updating their records every week.

In addition, a great deal of time had to be spent processing the details back at head office in Exeter once the paperwork had been returned. This was a lengthy, but necessary task, as these details were used for stock control as well to keep all the engineers informed of every step of each customer's service history.

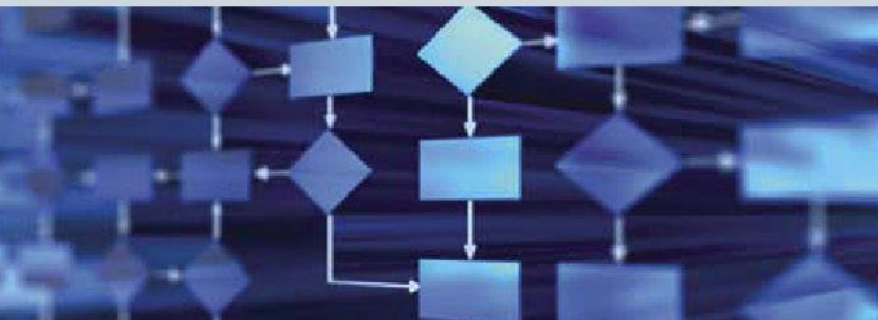
South West Communications Group was keen to find a way of simplifying and accelerating this process to free up the engineers' time, the office worker's time, to have effective and immediate stock control and customer record updates, and to reduce the reams of paper it was using each week.

The solution

South West Communications Group rolled out its own mobility solution which included the following:

Smartphones – were given to 40 engineers to immediately replace the need for paperwork. These were uploaded with specifically tailored forms that enable the engineers to make immediate note of the work that has been carried out on site and to detail any parts that have been used or are required, on a real-time basis.

This information can be sent straight back to South West Communications Group's headquarters without the need for further processing. This communication immediately updates stock levels, keeps service histories up to date and ensures the correct parts are swiftly sent out without delay to help engineers rectify any faults,



Stylus pens – are used so that customers can sign off the work done and to validate the information input by the engineer is correct in the same way that delivery drivers collect signatures for parcels.

Automatic faxes – are sent to the customer on completion and transfer of each form as proof of delivery. These include a summary of the job and the customer's signature. This solution was implemented in 2003 when it was felt that due to the amount work South West Communications Group was carrying out with the construction industry and similar customers that did not use email, sending faxes was the best option as all building sites had fax machines as a minimum at the time.

There are plans to progress to sending out email versions of these summaries as more and more companies embrace email communication.

Satellite navigation programmes – on the smartphones minimise travel times to enable engineers to get to their customers via the quickest route available.

Mobile email – gives the engineers a virtual desk while on the road to enable them to keep in touch with head office at all times.

The result

Although it is a slightly unorthodox decision to use itself as a case study, South West Communications Group fully believes in its own mobility solution and as such is proud to highlight its use to illustrate just how much time and money can be saved.

In terms of reduced costs, the smartphones save the company the annual outlay of approximately 25,000 sheets of paper as well as the obvious saving to the environment. The programme for the smartphones was also designed specifically to ensure that each communication back to headquarters was just 1 kb to help minimise costs. Furthermore, cash flow has been accelerated as invoices can be sent out to customers up to week earlier than they had previously.

In terms of man hours, the saving has been substantial. The engineers have more time to use their specialist skills to dedicate to their customers' needs safe in the knowledge that all records have been updated. There was also a significant saving on time previously spent on processing the forms back at head office releasing a member of staff to customer service.

South West Communications Group's managing director Harry Langley said: "When I was asked to recommend a mobility solution to use as a case study, I immediately suggested ourselves as the use of smartphones has completely revolutionised the way our engineers work to everyone's satisfaction.

"We truly believe in our own solution and would, and will continue to, advise our customers to use it where it is appropriate to save time and money; both of which are precious commodities for the modern-day business."