

UTILITIES ROI SHOWCASE

United Utilities

Psion Case Study

United Utilities
Warrington, England
United Utilities provides electricity, gas and water to nearly three million homes and businesses in northwest England.

Business Process Challenge

United Utilities' 150 field service engineers are tasked with tracking the types of meters installed at its 2.9 million customers, changing meters, scheduling repairs and monitoring work-assignment results.

Utility deregulation in the United Kingdom threatened to open the company's market to competition, requiring United to improve productivity and customer satisfaction. Field service engineers had been downloading their daily schedules during the morning and uploading reports at night through an inefficient system, communicating schedule changes by phone and documenting them on paper.

The Solution

The network services division recently selected the netpad, a new rugged handheld tablet from Psion Teklogix, for its field operations staff. Their netpads connect to the host system via GPRS (General Packet Radio Services) wireless, which provides separate voice and data channels.

The hand-held combines a large screen (1/2-VGA) with a rugged design, and improves user performance with a large touch screen and dynamic switching between portrait and landscape mode.



With no internal drives or moving parts, and the ability to withstand a 1.5-meter drop to concrete, the netpad performs in demanding environments, gives more than eight hours of continuous use on one battery charge, and features instant-on capabilities.

The Benefits

Field service engineers now can stay up-to-date with changes in work instructions. This real-time communications system is a major advantage over the previous batch solution, which was updated twice daily. Data entry is enhanced with easy-to-use drop-down menus and tick boxes. Other benefits include faster problem resolution and improved customer service.

"The device has quite a fast processor, and provides quality images," said Steve Bradwell, United Utilities' IT strategy manager. "Its 1/2-VGA screen gives a clear definition, therefore it's easy for the operative to view and understand."

Another advantage is accuracy.

Information transferred by the engineer to the host can be validated against data already verified. In case of discrepancies, the system sends a message to the engineer asking for a check. Prior to real-time updates, the utility could have lost two or three days before dealing with data discrepancies. Now the more accurate information reduces disputes and lowers administrative costs.



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