Solihull MBC - Case Study
Insight Mobile software brings multiple efficiency savings

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council anticipates significant end-of-year efficiency savings after making all of its network inspection teams fully mobile. Leading the way with mobile devices, the council is showcasing the power of the technology and its capacity to revolutionise the role of inspectors, and thus improve service levels. This has been made possible through Symology's Insight Mobile solution.

Insight Mobile enables users to interact remotely with the central Insight system. Network inspectors are therefore free to spend much more time in the field carrying out inspections, which cuts down travel and paper costs, and improves the timeliness and quality of the information collected.

Highly Integrated

"*The new system enables our neighbourhood workers to go straight out on their daily inspections, without coming anywhere near the office*", says **David Carter, Directorate Performance Manager at Solihull**. "*As fully remote workers, they can perform all their tasks in the field using their mobile devices, including handling emails, and go straight back home at the end of the day*."

Insight Mobile enables inspectors to log the coordinates of defects on a graphical map interface, take photographs, perform risk assessments, raise works orders, update customer service requests and complete a range of different types of inspections and condition surveys. A fully integrated solution, all the data becomes available in the central Insight system, in near real time, using XML/SOAP web services over standard 3G or GPRS mobile networks.

"*The way it works is very impressive*", continues David. "*You can tap-in all the details, press the send button and, within a second, it appears in the back office core system. That ability is just amazing.*"

Efficiency Savings & Compliance

Insight Mobile also integrates fully with Symology's Street Works module, ensuring full compliance with the Traffic Management Act. Street Works notices are created automatically upon import, for the council's own works raised on the mobile.

Having more complete, timely data in the central system enables faster, and therefore cheaper, settlement of insurance liability claims where appropriate, and ensures that the Traffic Manager is always completely up-to-date.

"*We've got a list of things that we see as efficiency indicators that we want to benchmark. However, as the system has only been running for a short time it's too early to draw any hard and fast conclusions on the data collected so far. Already though, we are able to see mileage being reduced, more inspections performed and faster processing of insurance claims with no extra paper costs incurred*", says David.

"*We wouldn't have been able to give our officers handheld devices without the Symology software and there are a number of secondary benefits from having a field-based inspection force. If it's cold, for example, they can just look up the MET office Web-site and call out gritters for the following morning if necessary. Having them on the street at all times, with one single device that enables them to make a judgement, press a button and make something happen, has real benefits.*"

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Integration, Innovation & Integrity

Launched in January 2009, with the mapping functionality added in August, the technical project started back in May 2008. David recalls, "*Our Symology Account Manager has been very supportive throughout the project. We've felt very comfortable and confident from the start, both technically and on our own local issues.*"

Our Account Manager has a background in highway inspection, which really helps, and some of the options he has presented have been great value for the council. I think the keyword is 'trust' and I don't think he has ever tried to over-sell us anything."

Training was provided jointly by Solihull and Symology, with a follow-up drop-in session two months later to address any problems experienced.

A training video was produced and made available on inspectors' office desktops. "*We actually plan to put the video on the hand-held devices themselves*", says David. "*This will mean, that if an inspector in the field is unsure about something, they can just play the video there and then and see the answer.*"

More Mobile, More Powerful

The initial launch to neighbourhood inspectors used 14 Vodafone v1520 (Asus P550) devices, running Windows Mobile 6.0, equipped with a 3.5" screen, 3G GPRS and GPS.

The next group of users includes street lighting teams who, because of the nature of their work, will use the more rugged Trimble Juno devices running Windows Mobile 6.1 Classic.

Trimble Juno

The Future

"The future looks bright for the project", continues David. "We've just procured a tablet device and the five-year view is to look at the ability of moving away from PDAs to the emerging breed of small laptops where, using the same Symology infrastructure, the inspectors will have much more functionality."

David Carter is Directorate Performance Manager, Transport Highways & The Environment, Community Services Directorate, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

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Key Features

- Modular mobile solution, fully integrated with the Symology Insight suite

- Standardised for Microsoft Windows handheld devices and 3G or GPRS mobile networks

- Traffic Management Act compliance through full integration with Symology's Street Works module

- GPS, Camera and 3G communications all in-built on semi-rugged Trimble Juno SC device

- Greater numbers of inspections, with more complete, better-quality data

- Operating efficiencies from better utilised inspectors, improved handling of insurance liability claims, plus numerous secondary economies

- Minimal investment and maximum functionality through modular approach

- Mobile device sub-group offers opportunities to feed operational requirements into future releases

- Future-Proof Solution: free regular software upgrades cater for requirements changes

- Open technology standards

- Knowledgeable consultants who understand customer business processes

- Helpful, highly available, well-trained technical support staff

- Symology User Group enables customers to guide software development

- Privately-owned, financially independent company that values its customers