

Case Study

TotalMobile boosts productivity 10% for South Somerset Works

(How Consilium's TotalMobile solution is empowering housing maintenance staff to complete more work, improve efficiency, save fuel and increase client satisfaction)

South Somerset Works

South Somerset Works (SSW) is the contracting arm of South Somerset Homes Ltd who own and maintain 14,500 properties across various locations in South Somerset. SSW was created as a stand-alone subsidiary company to ensure that resources & emphasis would always be given to the one most important part of the services they provide.



In 2007 they adopted Consilium's TotalMobile solution to as a means of improving their productivity and profitability. This case study will outline the challenges they faced, the reasons for adopting Mobile working and the benefits TotalMobile enabled them to achieve.

The Situation

SSW employs 58 maintenance staff and are supported by a back office team of 210 staff. However as the organisation grew and the number of properties they were responsible for increased, so did the administrative challenge of managing maintenance schedules and tenant information.

Hurdles to efficiency...

As time is billed by the minute, efficiency and cost reduction are the key focus for SSW. However, the number of jobs maintenance staff could complete each day, and therefore profit and customer satisfaction, was affected by the following inefficiencies and challenges:

- Maintenance workers spending time in the office planning out daily job routes
- No ability to issue new jobs when tenants were not at home - requiring workers return to the office for further job information
- Forms were filled out twice (once on-site and once in the back-office database) duplicating effort and risking the occasional loss of information.
- Lack of up-to-date information on job requirements (occasionally requiring additional visits to the office / supply depot)
- Existing in-van radio system not equipped to facilitate communication to back office support team
- Paper based records occasionally lost, damaged or misplaced

...Creating additional costs

Each of these activities brought additional time and expense to SSW while taking time away from the servicing of homes in the region. Additionally, these issues created the following additional costs and problems:

- **Increased fuel use** – additional travel to and from the office reduced available working time and resulted in additional fuel costs.
- **Paper waste** –30,000 paper job tickets printed annually
- **Training** – additional IT and back-office training required for maintenance staff to perform daily duties
- **No flexibility** – the existing system was unable to be adapted to either new job or compliance requirements
- **Accountability** – no standard system through which through which to check that maintenance staff had visited tenants property

Having acknowledged these problems, South Somerset Works sought a provider who could solve all of the above problems with a simple and flexible solution adaptable to future change.

The TotalMobile Solution

Consilium worked together with SSW to integrate their Microsoft Certified TotalMobile solution across its 58 strong maintenance team and, through the use of a full network solution, connect them with their existing back-office systems via Windows Mobile devices. Using these, TotalMobile allows maintenance workers in the field to focus on their key skills by reducing travel and time spent on admin tasks while providing them with all the information they need wherever they are.

Organising, mobilising

The solution organises daily schedules for each worker and then sends these instantly to workers in the field, planning their jobs and route for the day. In the cases where tenants were not available this would normally have led to workers leaving a card and time being wasted until the next appointment became available. Now new jobs are now instantly delivered – maximising the use of available maintenance time.

"South Somerset Works has chosen mobile working technology as a natural progression in improving working efficiencies. Mobile technology is here to stay. We must embrace these technological advances or risk falling into Mediocrity"

Alan Pegram, South Somerset Works

Anytime, anywhere

Once at an appointment, workers are able to enter maintenance reports into mobile devices which are then transmitted securely to the office management system via the mobile network or WiFi. Applications are stored locally on each device meaning that where signals are not available, information is stored offline until a signal is available – avoiding the loss of information and allowing workers to continue their tasks.

Taking stock of things

The solution also tracks stock management, linking front-line operations to the organisations stores depot. Once a job is logged and completed information about materials used is captured from the completed electronic form and transmitted to stores. Replacement supplies can be readied for the vans arrival, while the back office integration in real-time allows for constant stock ordering and replenishment.

More than words

TotalMobile fully utilises the multimedia capabilities of mobile devices and allow workers to take picture, video and voice records relating to repairs and maintenance. As devices are GPRS capable, media are not only time and date stamped but also location stamped – providing an independent record of worker location at all times.

Implementing the Solution

The TotalMobile solution was first trialled on a small number of maintenance staff before being fully implemented across the workforce. PDAs were distributed to the staff accompanied by training from Consilium's mobile team who demonstrated clearly how the solution fitted into the daily routine.

User feedback

Consilium's mobile team worked closely with the maintenance staff to make sure the solution matched the procedures they were used to executing, right down to the terminology used in SSW. Comments and feedback were noted and the TotalMobile Team actively implemented improvements suggested by the operatives.

“Consilium ensured all the feedback was incorporated into the completed solution and made sure staff understood that their opinions were very much part of the process.”

Rob Barker, South Somerset Works

Implementing the full service

After a successful trial, the full solution went live across its 58-strong maintenance team in April 2007. All relevant back-office personnel were trained to support the day-to-day use of the technology allowing them to handle queries from the maintenance teams. The back office staff support the solution as a part of their duties without being dedicated to the project – freeing them up to focus on added value work.

Benefits

The TotalMobile solution delivered measureable productivity gains while saving money for SSW. The system has enabled employees to focus on their core skills while reducing the administration workload and opening the organisation to new challenges.

“Moving to a mobile solution not only improves our efficiency as an organisation, but gives our employees far more flexibility.”

Rob Barker, South Somerset Works

Saving money, increasing efficiency

Using TotalMobile, SSW has experienced the following benefits:

- Productivity levels are up by 10% - equal to 6 new full-time employees with a further 5% expected
- 25,000 miles travel saved in one year on journeys to and from the office – saving fuel and the environment
- A reduction of approximately 30,000 paper job tickets used each year
- Administration workload reduced – 2 admin staff redeployed into value-added work

Empowered workforce = happy and productive workers

“Our maintenance staff can now fully embrace a mobile working option, which improves their work/life balance on a daily basis and gets rid of the constant ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ between home, the properties and HQ, which was forcing them to spend unnecessary time on the road.

“The introduction of what our maintenance staff consider to be hi-tech devices has helped them to raise their game significantly,” continued Barker. “The introduction of mobile devices has in fact helped to create a greater sense of job ownership amongst the operatives.”

Rob Barker, Finance Manager, South Somerset Works.

Focus on strengths

As staff can now give their full attention to the jobs that need to be completed onsite, SSW are more flexible and productive as an organisation and are able to concentrate on their core business of supplying maintenance services to South Somerset Homes – allowing both organisations to grow.

“As we increase productivity, we can look to take on further tenders across the region and increase the number of properties we manage”

Rob Barker, Finance manager, South Somerset Works

Looking to the Future

Building on the success of the implementation, South Somerset Works is looking at new ways the technology can eliminate inefficiencies across the organisation. Initial plans are to have all empty properties scheduled, specified and allocated by the surveyors direct to maintenance teams.

Acknowledging the need for flexibility, the TotalMobile team introduced software enabling SSW to write their own electronic forms so they can adapt to future demands and compliance procedures.

“We expect to achieve an additional 5% productivity gain over the next 12 months as further modules are rolled out.”

Rob Barker, South Somerset Works

One identified application is to enable SSW to introduce a means for all field-based personnel to report any additional work or maintenance they cannot address when out at properties. This includes reporting on the condition of gardens, any difficulties encountered and possible dangers to other operatives.