

A Mobile Solution in thirty days



THE SITUATION

Major energy retailers throughout New Zealand, such as Meridian, Contact Energy and TrustPower, rely on Delta Utility Services to read meters and provide maintenance services; in turn, Delta relies on small contracting companies to perform the work. Delta needed an application that would automate and digitise meter reading and wanted to improve customer service and manage its contractor network more efficiently, but there was no nationwide technology infrastructure to make this possible. Delta turned to mobility experts Kognition (now Intergen) to develop two applications.



THE PAIN

In this geographically dispersed, mostly rural country, the manual methods of collecting and reporting meter readings and dispatching work requests were burdensome and expensive. The existing solution, an application written in Microsoft eMBEDded Visual Basic development system, was nearing the end of support and no longer suitable.

Similarly, the process of dispatching work requests was manual and slow and even more complicated. Consequently, Delta found it difficult, time-consuming and expensive to manage its distributed work force, and service to consumers suffered.



THE SOLUTION

It was obvious that a system based on mobile devices would hold the answer, and Intergen employed the Microsoft .NET Compact Framework and Microsoft Visual Studio .NET 2003 to create two applications - DeltaView and WalkTrackNet - for Windows Mobile Pocket PCs in just 30 days. As a Microsoft partner, Intergen was able to use code, assets and skills to reduce development time, cost and risk, never having to go outside the managed code provided in the .NET Compact Framework.



WALKTRACKNET

Deployed to 60 Pocket PCs, WalkTrackNet captures meter readings in a Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Windows CE Edition database within the Pocket PC. At the end of each shift, the meter reader synchronises the Pocket PC using a cradle connected to a modem. The device connects to a SQL Server database in the Delta data centre.



DELTAVIEW

Delta uses DeltaView to dispatch contractors in the field to perform tasks, such as installing new meters and performing maintenance. It consists of the following three applications that connect to a core set of web services: a field application that allows contractors to receive notifications and details of new jobs and then report status to Delta; a smart client desktop application used by Delta staff and external contracting companies to schedule and route jobs; a status-tracking application used in a read-only fashion by the call centres of the major electricity retailers for tracking the status of jobs.

ENGINE ROOM:

- >> Microsoft .NET Compact Framework
- >> Microsoft Visual Studio .NET 2003
- >> Microsoft Windows Mobile 2003 software for Pocket PCs

DeltaView was deployed to 25 desktop PCs and 30 Pocket PCs. Data is stored in a database running SQL Server 2000.

Since DeltaView is integrated with a number of other significant third party systems belonging to major electricity retailers around the country, staff from these retailers can now access real-time job information via a web browser. This allows Delta to easily provide KPI reporting and real-time access to job progress.

"Speed to market was the key to the success of this project."

- Chris Auld.

THE GAIN

Windows Mobile and the .NET Compact Framework provided several advantages, foremost being lower development costs and a very short development time, with all applications successfully deployed across a variety of ruggedised and consumer grade mobile devices.

The deadline was met and Delta now has a truly robust and user-friendly mobile solution at their fingertips, with very real business benefits as a result, including:

- >> Approximately 20% reduction in service response time
- >> Significant improvements in efficiency, productivity and accuracy
- >> Lowered operational costs
- >> Vast improvements to the bottom line