



Spirit 'accommodates' Aspire Housing's needs for device management.

As organisations rely on automated data capture devices to streamline their processes in the office and the field, device management becomes an increasingly important issue. When Aspire Housing had to upgrade its PDAs, it also decided to find a company that could manage them. It chose Spirit Data Capture, which supplied Motorola MC65s and its Managed Service (which includes MobiControl device management) and Helpdesk. Spirit's solution has transformed the efficiency of Aspire's field operations, saving the organisation both time and money.



Aspire Housing was formed in 2000. It provides quality affordable homes and housing management, maintenance and improvements services for some 20,000 customers in North Staffordshire and South Cheshire. The organisation's services also include general needs housing for rent and shared ownership, sheltered housing, extra care housing and help for people so that they can live independently.

The company's operatives use Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) when they are in the field. These are used for a range of work scheduling and related tasks that had previously been carried out manually, using paper job tickets. This was a labour-intensive procedure, as the completed tickets were handed back to the Team Leader at the end of each job and were then passed to the Admin Team for processing.

However, the PDAs that Aspire has been using generated their own problems. The devices had insufficient battery life for a complete working day and weren't very rugged: if they were dropped, they tended to disintegrate. In-house staff were therefore used to support the operatives and to manage the PDAs but this proved time-consuming and difficult. It led to many instances of non-productive operative time, when the devices were sent back to the offices to rectify hardware or to receive software updates.

Eventually, Aspire decided that it had no choice but to upgrade the devices, especially as they were outdated and replacements were no longer available. Debbie Simpson, Aspire Housing's System Development Administrator, explains: "We needed an economical way of upgrading our hardware from a consumer-type device to a more professional and fully robust model that would give us some technical continuity and stability.

"We also wanted a fully-managed service for the new PDAs. This included a solution that would allow remote access to the devices for direct problem solving whilst the operative is still in the field, and remote upgrades of our mobile application. Basically, we didn't want to know if there was a problem – we just wanted a company that could sort out any issues for us."

Another housing organisation recommended Spirit, a highly experienced and independent data capture consultancy. Aspire approached Spirit directly with a Business Requirements Document that forms part of the official tender process for replacing and supporting the PDAs. Aspire was looking for a reliable managed service and support desk, together with a cost-effective deal on the hardware devices, which had to be fit for purpose and future-proofed for at least the length of the contract (three to five years).

Spirit's proposal met all of these needs. It included the provision of Motorola MC-65s, a Managed Service and a Helpdesk – along with a three-year leasing option on the devices and accessories. New devices and accessories can also be added to the leasing agreement.

The Motorola MC-65 is a rugged Enterprise Digital Assistant (EDA) with an IP rating of 64. It is therefore ideal for use in field environments and has a Windows Mobile 6.5 Professional operating system. Spirit's Managed Service includes its MobiControl SaaS (software as a service) device management solution. This provides all of the benefits of device management without the need for dedicated resources or infrastructure. It also includes a continuous technology refreshment programme. The hardware and software were complemented by a first line managed helpdesk service and user training.

Debbie Simpson comments: "The MC65 certainly looked professional and functionally good. We were particularly interested in ease of use, a clear voice signal, a clear visual screen, numerical keypad, barcoding, camera and the ability to lock down the user screen to prevent tampering. Obviously, ruggedness and battery life were also important."

Spirit won the tender and subsequently provisioned and deployed the MC65s. Now, if there are any problems with the devices – whether due to a hardware issue, operator error, connectivity or mobile software – the first port of call is Spirit.

The new Motorola devices are being used for logging jobs on the Aspire's Housing Management System; scheduling and assigning them; and for receiving and completing works orders (which are then sent back to the Housing Management System). Spirit also monitors the Service Level Agreements to ensure that these are always met; and maintains a buffer stock so that any exchange EDAs can be shipped immediately to Aspire.

The key benefits of the solution provided by Spirit revolve around the asset management of the devices and the remote support given to operatives. The asset management is maintained and updated regularly by Spirit. Debbie Simpson says: "I used to complete this on a spreadsheet – and trying to maintain it with the amount of swop-outs I had to undertake was very difficult. The remote support is vital to our field operatives: if they aren't near our depot, they would waste a lot of lost time travelling and trying to get any device issues resolved."

She continues: "The turnaround time on getting new devices to us has been excellent, as they are delivered before 10:00am on the next day if we don't leave it too late in the day to request one. Spirit also provided us with support and onsite training prior to the roll-out of our new 'Gold Build' software, and remote support during the roll-out.

"To date, the devices have performed outstandingly, with signal strength, clearness of voice and ease of use all being highly successful. Prior to moving to the MC65 and the support from Spirit, most of my working days were spent resolving issues or returning broken devices back to the manufacturer. On average, I would return at least one per week and the process was very frustrating and time-consuming. I've received feedback from our operatives, who are extremely happy with the way the MC65 works. Its battery life is excellent and I am more than confident that the devices will still be technically viable at the end of the leasing term.

"As we also took advantage of the MobiControl software, this has enabled us to roll out software much more effectively and efficiently. Under the old system, I had to call in all 60 operatives, clear down their PDAs and reinstall the software via an SD card, which was very inefficient."

Debbie concludes: "Spirit has been excellent – I wish we'd used them earlier to take the stress out of operating all of our PDAs! They are flexible and at the end of the phone and will provide help with any issues I raise, even if the problem doesn't lie with them. They provide an outstanding service and I would be more than happy to recommend them to anyone who was considering going down this route."



For further information contact us at:
t: 01928 718800 **f:** 0870 762 2824
email: helen.jones@spiritdatacapture.co.uk
www: www.spiritdatacapture.co.uk

