

Spirit provides a comprehensive solution for Bord Gáis Networks' mobile needs



Bord Gáis Network carried out a comprehensive review of its processes in 2011 and identified some key areas where changes could enhance the efficiency of its operations. One important need was for a more streamlined and effective approach to activities in the field. Spirit Data Capture Limited helped Bord Gáis Networks to design and develop a mobile data capture solution that would give it a more competitive edge, by reducing costs, enhancing efficiency and boosting customer service levels.

Bord Gáis Networks is a business unit of the leading Irish energy provider, Bord Gáis Éireann. It is responsible for building, operating and maintaining the natural gas network on the island of Ireland. The unit employs over 600 people in branches throughout Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the UK. It also uses over 2,000 outsourced contractors for service, maintenance and construction work.

Identifying the needs

Following a review of Bord Gáis Networks internal systems and processes, the business unit decided to implement a Work and Asset Management / Field Force Mobilisation (WAM/FM) system as part of a wider Networks Transformation Program strategy. This included the need for a mobilisation solution that would support the data capture and transfer activities of its field workers.

This project was designed to help engineers and other workers who take meter readings or make site visits for the repair or maintenance of the gas supply. Bord Gáis Networks also needed to know where the mobile workers were for health and safety reasons. The requirements for this solution included an infrastructure (PDAs, tablets etc.), device management software and support.

Jason McGuire, from Bord Gáis Networks Services Centre, comments: "Our aim was to enhance the operations of Bord Gáis Networks so that it is the best in class for everything we do, in terms of people, processes and technology. We needed rugged PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) and laptops that could withstand the often harsh working environments for our employees, with wireless capabilities that included WiFi, GPRS, UMTS and HSDPA."

The project was put out to a competitive tendering process. Following this, independent mobile data capture specialist and integrated solutions provider, Spirit Data Capture Limited, was selected as the preferred supplier. Jason comments: "Spirit offered us an economically advantageous, all-encompassing approach to our mobile enterprise solution."

Geoff Littler, Spirit's Project Manager, says: "We knew that we had the capability needed to deliver a solution that would address all of Bord Gáis Networks' business objectives. We offered them an integrated technology approach, which was further strengthened by our close relationship with Getac and Soti."

"This meant that we could give Bord Gáis Networks access to the best practices in data capture – including project management, piloting, repair and maintenance services, software and hardware solutions, and an in-depth knowledge of different communications technologies."

Developing a solution

Spirit was engaged to design and develop a mobile solution that was stable, secure and rugged to support the Field Force Mobilisation mobile software, which involved a number of key areas:

- Device management
- Mobile VPN
- Security
- Rugged hardware

Spirit recommended Soti's MobiControl solution for comprehensive device management and NetMotion's Wireless Mobility XE for secure VPN connectivity. MobiControl provides effective management of any mobile device or computer running any Microsoft mobile or desktop operating system. Netmotion locks down pipelines of data so that no viruses can enter.

Jason remarks: "We liked MobiControl because it does exactly what it says it does and is very user-friendly, which is essential for field workers. Netmotion security software is simply the benchmark for all of the others."

Spirit also recommended the Getac PS236 rugged PDA and the Getac V100 tablet as two of the potential options for the field workers. The PS236 has been designed with the utility field worker in mind. It is lightweight and balanced, enabling it to be used with one hand for extended periods. The unit is suitable for use in harsh environment, as it has an IP67 rating.

The V100 is a convertible notebook/tablet PC which has been shown to have a very effective form factor for utility field workers, as it can be used either as a laptop for asset management and job despatch or a Tablet PC for GIS and mapping applications.

Jason continues: "We chose the Getac products because they outscored all of the other hardware during our usability tests by our mobile device evaluation panel. The hardware is extremely well specified in terms of memory and processor power; coupled with its ATEX certification and extremely attractive pricing."

Spirit's implementation team closely supported Jason's project team during the deployment of the mobile solution across the different hardware platforms. Spirit provided onsite technical consultancy to design and implement the entire mobile solution, which involved software application development; system testing, security analysis and solution integration. As part of the start-up process, Spirit also

supported the field workers' training programme to ensure that the necessary help and guidance was provided to gain maximum benefit from the solution.

In addition Spirit provided a number of operational services such as device selection and management; pre-configuration of the PDAs and tablets; installation in the vehicles and second-line support for the solution.

Reaping the benefits

All of the devices have now had Soti's MobiControl solution installed. Bord Gáis Networks Field Force support uses MobiControl to remotely provision, manage, monitor and support the devices during their entire lifecycle of use in the field. The solution's helpdesk tools are also widely used internally and by the company's outsourced Service Desk.

Jason reports: "The ability to support the devices remotely makes this a very efficient solution. The support can be based in a central location, keeping our costs to a minimum. MobiControl is reliable, flexible and easy to use and support – and it has strong reporting capabilities."

"The device users find remote access very helpful. Our Service Desk Agents also find the remote control and helpdesk tools invaluable for their day-to-day tasks. The ease of deployment of MobiControl and its thoughtfully designed graphic user interface make the application easy to roll-out and support."

Bord Gáis Networks takes IT security seriously and had requirements for device, application, and application data security. Netmotion's Mobility XE was the only mobile VPN that could meet BGN's corporate security requirement for remote access using dual factor authentication. Its application persistence, wireless performance optimisation and inter-network roaming are all features that are being exploited by BGN on a daily basis.

NetMotion's solution offers data compression that provides cost efficiencies for large attachments (e.g. multiple photos from the field). The product's analytics module also provides Bord Gáis Networks with excellent real-time analysis of data (such as network usage, battery charge, etc.), boosting operational efficiencies. Like the other solutions proposed by Spirit, Mobility XE is very reliable and easy to use. It is also very secure, with strong reporting capabilities.

Meanwhile, the Getac PS236 and V100 devices provide real-time access to data and information and are being used by the company for a wide range of field-based applications. These include siteworks management, meter reading, distribution project management and maintenance and repairs. They are being employed by various mobile workers, including site engineers, sales personnel, agricultural liaison officers and inspectors.

There is little doubt that the complete system developed by Spirit has significantly boosted the efficiency of Bord Gáis Networks field-based activities – which in turn should further enhance customer satisfaction levels. Jason McGuire explains: "Spirit's business consultancy helped the team to hit the ground running with our mobile deployment. Our solution involved WinCE and Win 7 platforms as well as mobile VPN and mobile device management technologies - all being deployed to a tight deadline."

Jason comments that "All of the intricacies of mobile enterprise deployments were clearly explained to the Bord Gáis Networks Team. Spirit offered us continuous practical support, drawing on their decades of collective experience in mobile rugged computing solutions. I am very pleased with their performance throughout this project – they are a very friendly and professional organisation to work with. We would use their services again in the future without hesitation."



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

The logo for Getac features the word "Getac" in a bold, italicized, grey, sans-serif font.

