Spirit and Merseytravel: driving forward with device management

Mobile devices have proved their value over and over again – and are now used extensively by field-based workforces and remote / home workers. However, to gain the maximum efficiency from the deployment of multiple handheld mobile devices, an effective device management system is needed. Merseytravel called upon the skills and expertise of Spirit Data Capture Limited to source and supply a suitable solution for its needs: SOTI's MobiControl software. This has enabled Merseytravel's ICT department to manage a large portfolio of personal digital assistants (PDAs), to automate their application deployment, to lock down devices, and to produce management information reports.

Merseytravel is the operating name for the Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) and Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive (PTE). It is responsible for spearheading transport plans across the Merseyside area, to ensure that a co-ordinated and integrated approach is adopted. It also oversees the public transport network; co-ordinates bus and rail services; maintains the transport infrastructure; provides public transport information; and operates the Mersey road tunnels and the Mersey Ferries.

The organisation uses handheld M3 PDAs to carry out customer surveys. The data collected via the devices serve a number of purposes, including reimbursing bus and rail operators for seasonal and concessionary tickets. To increase the efficiency of its operation, Merseytravel decided to invest in device management software. During an in-depth Internet search, it came across Spirit Data Capture, an independent consultancy specialising in sourcing, developing and supporting mobile computing solutions.

Spirit recommended SOTI's MobiControl software, as it met all of the organisation's needs, including device security, application deployment, reporting and group management. MobiControl is a versatile device management solution that provides an efficient and effective way of deploying, supporting and managing multiple mobile deployments. It has been designed to optimise the effectiveness of mobile devices whilst freeing companies to focus on their core business activities.

Spirit demonstrated MobiControl to Merseytravel's IT department, which was impressed by the software's capabilities. Systems Programmer, James Wilding, explains: "MobiControl is currently being used to manage Merseytravel's portfolio of M3 Sky Handheld PDAs. There are currently 67 devices deployed by two teams, which run different in-house applications. MobiControl has allowed us to group these applications into deployable packages.

"This means that we can send out updates remotely. This removes the need for the M3s to be brought back to the office, which in turn increases the number of surveys that can be carried out by the teams. In addition to the remote deployment, we've been able to lock down the devices. This ensures that users can only access the applications they require - which has reduced the number of issues that arise due to accidental setting changes."

James continues: "The lockdown policy also allows us to create a 'group' within MobiControl that can handle any lost or stolen devices. With a simple 'drag and drop' approach, the device can be completely locked down. A message is displayed, informing the user that the device has been reported as lost or stolen and providing them with a contact number."

The IT department has also made use of MobiControl's ability to create different users. This means that team leaders and managers can run reports on factors such as battery usage and signal strength. These all help with the management of staff. The department's service desk team can also use MobiControl for the remote control of an M3 device, enabling the team to provide on-the-job training and first line support.

The main benefits that Merseytravel has enjoyed from deploying MobiControl have included: remote package deployment; more efficient first-line support (due to the software's remote control capabilities); the ability to find signal weak spots using its reports; enhanced device security; and scheduled file synchronisation.

James Wilding comments: "So far, MobiControl has been performing exactly as we had hoped. It has reduced first line support fix times and has streamlined the package deployment. We have been able to develop additional in-house applications, and to test and deploy them remotely - which has increased the volume of surveys carried out.

"As well as sourcing and recommending MobiControl, Spirit has provided us with general technical support. They managed the installation of MobiControl in a professional and timely manner. The training they provided helped to ensure a smooth implementation and meant that the users adapted to the new hardware without difficulty. The team at Spirit were helpful, efficient and thorough and we would be happy to work with them again in the future."