

Case Study: Driving productivity with mobile working

Implementing a mobile email solution has taken the Commission for Rural Communities out of the sticks and into the modern world; read on to find out why they did it and the benefits they've reaped since switching.



About the Commission for Rural Communities

Set up on 1 April 2005, as an operating division of the Countryside Agency, the Commission for Rural Communities acts as a rural advocate, expert adviser and independent watchdog for rural communities, with a particular focus on rural disadvantage.

Its main purpose is to ensure that the government makes the correct policy decisions for rural communities including such issues as transport and housing. Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett said: "It gives rural people – especially the disadvantaged – a strong voice to ensure that policies deliver for them, their communities and their businesses."

The challenge:

The Commission has a number of employees who are required to travel regularly throughout England's rural regions and between its offices in London and Cheltenham. They rely heavily on email for communication between government offices, regional development agencies and assemblies, as well as between internal staff members in different offices.

Although equipped with laptops and mobile phones, employees were unable to check their email on the move as they needed access to a phone line for dial up internet connection, which was not always possible in more remote locations. They could not action any urgent email, receive up to date relevant information for their meetings on route, such as any changes to agendas, or access the latest news in order to be fully prepared for meetings.

Jonathan Ballinger, IT, Finance & Estates Manager, commented: "Travel features heavily in the lives of our employees and without email access on the move there are great periods of staff downtime and lost productivity. We are an information-driven organisation and in recent times, email has become fundamental to everything we do.

"With increased data volumes, the lack of mobile email has impacted our work/life balance because employees were returning home from meetings to face huge volumes of unread emails. We needed a solution that would allow them to respond to emails more effectively; eradicate downtime and provide them with a more manageable email load. MobilePA provided this."

The solution:

Following a recommendation from IBM, the Commission decided to pilot Sirenica's MobilePA, a solution that provides users with access to email, relevant news feeds and business applications through their mobile phones or PDAs. It is cost-effective and works on virtually any mobile phone, PDA or laptop.

MobilePA acts as a personal assistant organising emails that relate to each other, as well as having the capacity to store up to 10,000 emails per user, which are easily and rapidly searched and retrieved. Emails are fully indexed, archived and prioritised in order of relevance. This means that prior to attending meetings, employees can access all email relating to the meeting within seconds. When an urgent email arrives, they are alerted via SMS text.

MobilePA also integrates with the Commission's other business applications providing employees with access through their mobile phones and PDAs on the move. They can update their calendars, access meetings notes and contact lists and read the latest news to ensure they have the most recent developments at their fingertips.

MobilePA also offers a voice interface, enabling users to listen to their email being read and respond verbally, so they can use the service anywhere, including on the road, when using mobile phones with hands-free equipment.

The application sits within the Commission's existing IBM infrastructure and utilises IBM Websphere Everyplace Connection Manager to provide a highly secure and efficient connection for moving data between the enterprise and mobile users. The service stores all data on a server on the Commission's site, ensuring data security. If a mobile device is lost, unauthorised users cannot gain access to any of the Commission's valuable business data.

Jonathan Ballinger added, "Employees no longer have to wait to access a fixed-line internet connection – something which has increased our productivity levels and is helping us work more efficiently, as well as making email more manageable in order to ensure a better work life balance."

The benefits:

Following the successful pilot, the Commission plans to integrate its CRM database into the service; a database which contains information such as personnel data, meetings notes and other business critical information, which will ensure that staff will arrive at meetings better informed. MobilePA will now be rolled out to other users across the Commission.

The CRM functionality will have a significant impact on staff as they will be able to update meeting notes and action points faster and more efficiently. Allowing staff to look up information such as phone numbers directly on the system will also mean fewer calls being made to the switchboard and reduced mobile phone bills.

"MobilePA has changed the way we work. It has eradicated the frustration that was felt previously by staff when they could not access information on the move, reduced staff downtime and promoted more effective team working – we have teams who are now communicating more effectively than ever before", concludes Jonathan Ballinger.

HR Zone 24-Nov-2005

Categories: