

That's the Spirit – Scanning applications at Edinburgh University

Handheld scanners are being used for an increasingly diverse array of applications. A recent example comes from the University of Edinburgh, which is using Motorola units supplied by Spirit Data Capture Limited. The mobile devices are being used in fire equipment and asbestos surveys; planned maintenance; and even for recording and monitoring water temperatures to prevent legionella outbreaks.



The University of Edinburgh is one of the UK's foremost research universities. Founded in 1583, it now has 7,550 full and part-time staff and some 24,000 students. The university has over 500 buildings, which are the responsibility of the Estates & Buildings Department. ▶

Case Study

The department uses handheld barcode scanners for a wide range of different tasks. Just over a year ago, it started looking for a new supplier who would be able to source high quality devices at a competitive price, whilst also offering a high level of customer service combined with an efficient system of delivery. After a thorough search, the department selected Spirit Data Capture Limited, an independent company specialising in mobile computing and data capture.

Lesley Weaver, the university's Estates & Buildings Project Co-ordinator, says: "We wanted some robust handheld devices with an inbuilt scanner and with Windows Mobile 5.0. We were also looking for USB docking stations to improve the upload/download speeds."

As a result, Spirit supplied a number of Motorola Cobra LS2208 handheld barcode scanners and Motorola MC70s. The MC70 incorporates a mobile phone, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), computer, scanner and imager – all in a single unit, providing multi-mode wireless networking. Spirit ensured that the units were running correctly and installed software that prevents users from altering the device settings.

The MC70s are being used in varying ways, most of which involve links to the Estates & Buildings database. For instance, users carrying out a Fire Equipment Survey can download data relating to the fire assets of an

individual building. After the survey has been carried out, the new data are uploaded back from the MC70 to the database using XML transfer.

The mobile devices are used in a similar way for carrying out Asbestos Risk Surveys and Planned Maintenance. With the latter, details of maintenance tasks

for a selected building relating to a specific trade are downloaded. Once these have been carried out, the information is uploaded before the next month's tasks are due. The MC70s are also used for legionella recordings, again using links with the departmental database and uploading data via XML transfer.

Lesley Weaver comments: "The MC70s are excellent. The data we collect are very accurate and only have to be entered once, at source. Most of the data input is linked to 'look up' boxes that the user can select, so they only need to use freehand text where absolutely necessary. The users are happy, and are even coming up with ideas to improve the software further.

"We are continuing to use Spirit to source our handheld devices. In the future, we intend to use the MC70s for room use surveys, so that we can check that people actually use the rooms that they have booked! We will also use them for more reactive maintenance for trades staff, and for time recording."

