

Spirit helps E.ON to enhance its metering service

Each year, millions of gas and electricity meters are read in the UK. This work needs to be carried out rapidly, accurately and reliably. A leading organisation involved in this activity is Energy Services. Its Metering Services division is currently in the process of upgrading its data capture devices. The new system will be based around Dolphin® 9500 mobile computers, sourced and supplied by Spirit Data Capture Limited.



Energy Services is a division of E.ON UK, which in turn is part of the E.ON Group. E.ON UK is the UK's leading power and gas group, and also owns Powergen. In 2003, E.ON UK acquired Metering Services Limited, which subsequently became Energy Services Ltd. It has since become the UK's leading provider of cost-effective metering and data collection solutions.

Each year, Energy Services staff visit over 12 million households nationwide. Its Metering Services section offers a complete suite of solutions, including data capture, meter operations and meter refurbishment. The section recently started to explore alternative data capture devices. ▶



Case Study

David Collard, Head of Technical Support, Data Retrieval, explains: "We were looking for a rugged device that is ergonomically designed, and to which we could add complementary technology. It also needed to be easy to maintain. We wanted to find a hardware supplier who could work closely with our software supplier, Logica CMG."

E.ON's Procurement team drew on a number of sources to shortlist potential suppliers, who were then asked to submit competitive tenders. These sources consisted of the Achilles Vendor Database as well as lists of contacts that E.ON employees already held internally on file. It was one of these internal sources who recommended Spirit Data Capture, an independent consultancy specialising in automated data collection.

Spirit subsequently suggested the Dolphin® 9500, a versatile mobile computer from Hand Held Products. The Dolphin incorporates state-of-the-art wireless technology with an industry-leading triple-radio design that offers real time data collection. It uses an Intel® X-Scale processor and a Microsoft® Windows® Pocket PC platform, and Hand Held Products' Adaptus™ imaging system.

The Dolphin is available with both Bluetooth and GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) technology. It has a very tough and durable design and offers a full alphanumeric keyboard capability. It also has a battery with a high power capacity – ideal for mobile applications.

David continues: "We opted for the Dolphin following our meter reader evaluation trials. We like its robustness, its ergonomics, and the processor it uses. It also works well with the Logica meter reading software. The trial group thought that it was well designed, with a well-positioned Enter key; and that the screen was both clear and responsive."

Energy Services plans to roll out several hundred Dolphins each year for the next three years, starting in June 2006. Initially, meter readers will use their own modems to transmit the collected data from the Dolphin, which will be placed in a home base overnight.



Ultimately, GPRS will be used to transmit the data instantly from the field. The unit will also receive details of jobs online.

David says: "The reliability of the Dolphins should reduce both downtime and repair costs. We also expect to achieve significant cost savings by using GPRS. Technically, we really like the faster processor; the availability of both Bluetooth and GPRS, and the Pocket PC operating system."

He adds: "Spirit have been helpful, willing and proactive throughout, and have also given us valuable advice about effective GPRS communications. We found their attitude to customer service very refreshing."

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DATA CAPTURE LTD

For further information contact us at:

Vale House, Aston Lane North, Preston Brook, Cheshire WA7 3PD

t: 0845 3373243 f: 0870 762 2824 email: info@spiritdatacapture.co.uk

www.spiritdatacapture.co.uk