

Space Engineering Services take to the Sky



One key advantage of mobile computing technology is that some of the devices – such as personal digital assistants (PDAs) – that are currently available are both compact yet very rugged. These are important factors when the devices need to be used in harsh or demanding environments, or out in the field. This was one reason why Space Engineering Services decided to migrate to more rugged and well-supported units. The company opted for M3 Sky PDAs, sourced and supplied by Spirit Data Capture Limited.

Space Engineering Services specialises in the design, manufacture and delivery of refrigeration and HVAC (heating, ventilation and cooling) solutions, as well as mechanical and electrical services, energy services, facilities management and service and compliance. Based in Bristol, it has won several industry awards.

The company's IT Department is headed by IT Manager, Giles Kirkham, and supports 720 people based in nine locations throughout the UK. Around 500 of these are field engineers, who use handhelds and PDAs (personal digital assistants) as an integral part of their work.

However, in the past, these devices had often reached their 'end of life' within six months. Newer replacement models were moving towards the smart phone end of the market, with far more functionality than Space Engineering Services required. The IT Department therefore started looking for more suitable units.

Giles Kirkham explains: "We were looking for a device that would be supported for at least a couple of years. We also wanted a solution that would meet our needs in terms of both cost and ruggedness, as the units need to withstand varying conditions in the field."

The department conducted a search online and came across Spirit Data Capture Limited, an independent consultancy with vast experience of the mobile data capture industry. Spirit demonstrated various solutions and then put together

a package based around the M3 Sky from M3 Mobile. The M3 Sky is a rugged, lightweight and durable PDA with a low cost of ownership.

Space Engineering Services evaluated and tested the device and received good feedback about the durability of the hardware and its processing power. Giles comments: "The M3 Sky met all of our cost and specification requirements." The company subsequently ordered a large number of the PDAs.

The new PDAs have been loaded with a field service maintenance programme. This issues jobs to the company's engineers based on their skill set and location. It connects over GPRS and an APN to Space Engineering Services' Head Office, where a scheduling engine sends out information about available work.

Spirit has been providing technical and hardware support throughout the project and gave help with leasing options for the devices. The company also provided Space Engineering Services with a suitable care package that ensures that any breakages in the field are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Giles Kirkham continues: "The M3 Sky's rugged nature and excellent battery life are key benefits for our engineering force and they are happy with the quality of the devices. The service we've received from Spirit has been very good. My Account Manager is always accessible and any issues are always dealt with swiftly. We will be deploying more M3 Sky PDAs and expect to use Spirit services again in the future."

