

case study

Scottish Borders lead the way with mobile working

RURAL housing association Scottish Borders promised its customers a fully appointed repairs service and needed to find an effective system that would make this possible, taking account of the huge geographical area covered by the association.

The responsive repairs unit services 6,100 properties and 1,500 garages over a 1,200 sq mile area with variations in weather conditions and road quality.

Said Paul Bonser, IT Manager for Scottish Borders Housing Association, "The size of our area meant we had already negotiated with our operatives to start work from home rather than the depot to save on miles and hours of productive time."



"But even so, we had a huge back log of work with no capacity to complete it. Much of the work had to be outsourced to sub contractors at huge expense and planning on paper was just not efficient as jobs could be lost creating management issues due to lack of visibility."

Members of the management team went out looking for best practice and found it in OPTI-TIME, a dynamic resource scheduling system.

The team saw OPTI-TIME in action at Peterborough and realised immediately that this was the way forward; but also that the full benefits of the system could only be realised by implementing mobile working at the same time.

Said Paul, "Organisations who don't harness mobile to OPTI-TIME miss out on a huge range of system benefits. Because it gives real time scheduling, it needs real time data to operate at maximum effectiveness. Not to use mobile working alongside OPTI-TIME is like buying a sports car, then pushing it."

The housing association, the first to implement dynamic mobile working in Scotland, visited Peterborough in August 2005, contracted Xmbrace to deliver OPTI-TIME one month later and were engaged in field trials just three months after that.

"Mobile with OPTI-TIME was an obvious choice for us and making a rapid decision allowed us to undertake a rapid implementation. We saw the solution they had in Peterborough and had confidence we could find a similar working solution for Scottish Borders."



"With OPTI-TIME and mobile working, we have full visibility. Operatives get one job at a time and managers can see what is happening on the ground through constant, real time, status information."

Paul Bonser
IT Manager for Scottish Borders
Housing Association

Key Points

- Number of properties maintained - 6100
- Number of responsive orders a year - 25,000
- Size of geographical area - 1200 sq m
- % appointed / kept - 93% appointed, 98% kept
- 98% completed within target

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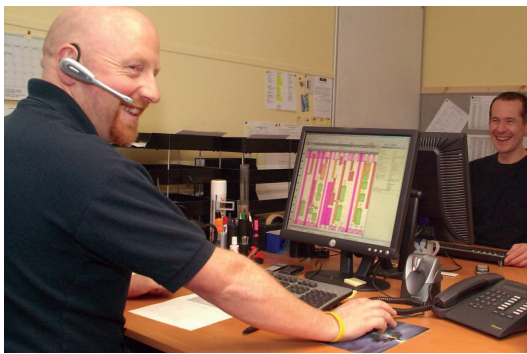
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Through this appointments system, Scottish Borders are now completing all their jobs on time and 30 percent of the workforce are undertaking improvement programs and void work in addition to responsive repairs.



The housing association has made a saving of £250,000 just on sub contracted emergency repairs with a further 17 percent cost saving on planned work.

Scottish Borders staff took to the system from the outset as the project management team involved them through consultation and designed the handheld look and information around their input.

Said Paul: "I think our staff understood that the repairs service was in such disarray that we had to make this work. We put together a trial group from staff to make it more effective and make the roll out easier."

"They effectively worked as champions who took the message out to our 65 operatives who are now all successfully using PDA's, jobs are getting done and customer satisfaction is improving."

OPTI-TIME needed to integrate with other IT systems in the housing association, including the housing management system for which an interface had to be developed.

Said Paul: "Xmbrace and Cognito, who provided the handheld solution, worked together throughout the project to achieve a solution for us, the customer. At critical points they each sent up their own IT staff to ensure workflow and, despite some challenging IT issues, worked with us to make the solution happen."

The system has been so effective that Scottish Borders is now rolling the system out to include other field staff doing tenant visits. A culture of continuous improvement now exists with the systems and business processes evolving as opportunities for more effective working arise.

Benefits realised since implementation

- Repairs backlog eliminated
- 40% of the responsive team redeployed to installations
- 30% reduction in installation costs
- Improved tenant satisfaction
- 52% reduction in sub-contractor costs
- 32% reduction in depot costs

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