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Itronix implements wireless, rugged computing solutions for mobile workers.

For more than 15 years, Itronix has worked extensively in the utilities industry. Today, the company works with 90% of the largest utilities in the United States, as well as organizations in the commercial field services, telecommunications, government, public safety and EMS markets in USA, Europe, Africa and Asia.

More information about Itronix and its products is available at www.itronix.co.uk

Product Solution Delivered

- By integrating this installation solution Transco has been able to increase customer satisfaction, improve health and safety standards and lower operational costs

Itronix Reference Account:

Transco

SITUATION: *Transco And Itronix Providing A Major Workforce Management Solution*

Transco, the UK national gas pipeline and emergency service operator, is responsible for ensuring that gas is delivered to more than 20 million homes and businesses around Britain safely and efficiently. A major element in achieving this is the work of its rapidly growing field service team that attends gas emergencies, and carries out installation and essential maintenance work.

PROBLEM: *Effective use on the move*

Use of laptops in vehicles has been an issue ever since they were introduced for field engineers. Twisting to either pick up the laptop from the passenger seat, where it was typically kept, or to use it on the seat caused concern for people with back problems.

Visibility has also been a problem with reports of eyestrain caused by glare from the screen and comments that the screen is difficult to see at night.

During preparation of the tender a steering group was nominated to make sure the views of users were taken on board. Their involvement was key to the whole process. No other industry using laptops in the field had successfully dealt with the problem of installing them in vehicles.

An Itronix Solution

Itronix offered the capability to deliver a complete end-to-end solution for Transco's workforce management requirements as well as fulfilling their specific criteria for system functionality. The input from many parts of the business ensured Transco received a solution that met its needs now and had the potential to evolve as the business environment and technology developed.

The 'total package' solution includes in-vehicle installation, training, implementation, support and servicing, warranty and the option to purchase or lease these services.

This solution is believed to be the largest GPRS deployment yet seen in the UK. In total, circa 6,400 Itronix GoBooks will be issued to Transco Emergency Services Engineers (ESEs) and Repair & Replace (R&R) teams. Roll out is expected to be complete by Sept. 2003. In services, the equipment will be used by Transco service engineers for recording emergency repair and general meter work in real-time.

The GoBook has a rugged build developed especially for utilities. The new machines at Transco run Windows 2000, are faster and more reliable than existing equipment and have the potential to support more software, which will see field-based staff getting access to other desktop applications, including TransNet, the company's intranet service.

For Transco engineer and GMB trade union rep Dave Cheetham, getting a workable solution was almost a personal crusade. Dave had been on an earlier working group looking at mounting options for laptops, but they hadn't been able to resolve the in vehicle issue.

"We could see straight away from the drawings supplied by Tempus (an Itronix Business Partner) that it had greater potential than other options. We made suggestions on joints and pivots to improve the design and we've ended up with a quality piece of kit. "The support arm means the GoBook laptop is at a good working height for the vast majority of users. It drops down from the bulkhead when a lever is pulled instead of having to be lifted so there's no longer a risk of exacerbating back problems. GoBook's screen is close enough not to have to lean or stretch so there's no eye or back strain. The anti-glare screen is also a great improvement. The arm folds back into the bulkhead when it's not being used, making the laptop far more secure than being left on the passenger seat. There are no wires to plug in and nothing has to be unlocked,"

In all, the GoBooks are scheduled for mounting in up to ten different types of vehicle in the Transco fleet, including the Ford Transit 100 and 280, the Mercedes Sprinter and the smaller Renault Kangoo. Although each vehicle obviously takes the same GoBook, each cab design dictates a slightly different version of Tempus' mounting arm.

Although effectively still in the early stages of the roll-out, Transco is already seeing very positive feedback from field users. "The laptops are turning out to be much more reliable and durable than Transco's old field service kit," said Carl Rogers, Transco hardware logistics manager.

He is complimentary of Itronix project management services, which he says are fundamental to the success of the implementation and roll-out. "Itronix supports Transco in managing all other third party contractors for us, so we can focus on managing the internal and operational side of the project," he said. "This project management service plays a key part in the success of the programme and complements the work of Transco, who are responsible for ensuring the overall solution meets business requirements. Having a supplier that can look after and manage all of the external issues is a huge benefit to Transco," he added.