



Connectivity Creates High Growth for Manchester SME

"We used to lose at least £2000 a year because we never invoiced for the work," laments Jeff Bridgewood, founder and MD of JB-EYE (Fire & Security). The small Prestwich-based intruder and fire maintenance company employs six engineers to install and maintain alarms, cameras and other security devices at its customers premises. "Our engineers were so busy they would forget to fill in the forms, or lose them under a seat, or put their chips on them by mistake. And even if they were intact, there were often delays in getting them into our office so that invoicing was slow."

Instant transmission of job data benefits cash flow

JB-EYE's solution has been to provide each engineer with a personal digital assistant (PDA) - a handheld computer - with mobile phone capability. Now they can fill in the details on site and instantly transmit them to the office. "The result," beams Jeff, "is that we can often have the invoice in the post before the engineers have started their van's engine. It's done wonders for our cash flow. And we've saved time and money by avoiding the rekeying of data."

The PDAs are used to transmit job details and locations to engineers, and allow two way e-mail communication. Satellite tracking also provides location information which enables operations manager Ben McKenzie to assign incoming jobs to the nearest engineer. And customers



Jeff Bridgewood and Ben McKenzie with JB-EYE's latest alarm

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Key Facts

- **Using mobile PDAs creates more accurate records, quicker invoicing, and higher added value**
- **Instant logging of equipment and materials use allows automatic stock replenishment**
- **Broadband cuts costs by enabling remote monitoring and diagnosis of equipment.**



***“We’re growing our revenues by 25% a year in a pretty static industry
- largely because of our IT investments”***

can provide an electronic signature to approve any required work, allowing JB-EYE to discontinue its previous practice of faxing a record to them. “I knew the PDAs had really paid off,” says Jeff, “when I was able to junk the fax machine.”

The PDAs also record any components or materials used by engineers, so that central records are continuously updated. Stocks can be reassigned, or new orders generated, so that engineers are never lacking something vital when on a job. Generally, all orders are now made on-line. This gives some cost savings but, more importantly, says Ben McKenzie, “it means that we can check the stock levels and locations with our suppliers. This allows us to schedule jobs that are reliant on incoming supplies in shorter time periods, and with greater confidence, than in the past.”

**Interactive web site improves
customer service**

The engineers can already use their PDAs to access the Internet and this will become more useful with JB-EYE’s new interactive web site. This will allow on-line access to job details, and technical information, which is currently stored on CDs. Customers will also have access to their account and installation details. This will allow them to, for example, update keyholder details at any time or download user manuals for their alarms.

PDA success has been built on JB-EYE’s history of innovative IT applications. The condition of alarms and other equipment used to be monitored by telephone lines but the company now does it over a secure Internet connection. “Broadband is now sufficiently reliable to allow this,” comments Jeff, “and allows us to gather a lot more information, more often.”

**Engineers productivity and value
added is greatly increased**

“Broadband also makes it easier to diagnose problems remotely, and sometimes repair them when they are software related,” Jeff continues. “This means that our engineers are now making fewer corrective visits - which don’t make us much money - and have more time to work on new installations and routine maintenance. This, together with our increased office efficiency, means that we can take on more business for each engineer. We’ve ploughed all these savings into winning new customers by subsidising initial installations in the expectation of an average 6-8 years income from them. As a result we’re growing our revenues by 25% a year in a pretty static industry - largely because of our IT investments.”

Further Information

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region’s people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.