

HMRC Debt Collectors Increase Visits with Ultra Mobile PCs

Improved information flow and data analysis drives operational efficiency and accelerates cash-to-bank

The Situation

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) collects money to fund UK public services. It does this through activities varying from advice and support to debt collection and enforcement action. In cases where contact by phone or letter have failed, Field Force Enforcement Units (FFEUs) chase outstanding debt through direct face-to-face customer contact, providing advice, delivering legal documents and, where necessary by enforcement actions which can include the seizing of goods to the value of the debt. To optimise flexibility in the operations and improve information flow, HMRC worked with Capgemini to introduce mobile technology and automation.

The Solution

Field Force Collectors (FFCs) have been given Ultra Mobile PCs (UMPCs) with a secure 3G connection and a specially designed application to verify details with

customers and provide information about the outcome of visits. The new IT for office-based tasks enables the FFEUs to provide contact information, scheduling and analysis to FFCs; performance information to managers; electronic case information to HMRC solicitors; and management information to Debt Management and Banking.

The Result

UMPCs linking FFCs to FFEUs have significantly improved operational efficiency. The solution allowed HMRC to increase the number of calls to taxpayers and debtors, and the target to accelerate cash-to-bank by £200 million in the first year was exceeded. FFCs make 33% more visits a day, on average, than they did without the UMPC solution, and HMRC has reduced the number of

office desks to one per three collectors. FFCs update pre-populated information on the UMPC screen and print letters during visits instead of writing forms and posting follow-up letters.

Outcome analysis helps identify the best time for visits to different debtors, and gives greater flexibility to schedule out of hours and weekend visits. The encrypted UMPCs provide greater customer data security than paper, and continuous communication between FFCs and FFEUs improves their personal safety. Accurate management information improves work allocation and staff management. Data from UMPCs allows HMRC to better evaluate performance, and implement best practice across teams to improve productivity and quality.

The solution supports HMRC's commitment to make early contact to help customers in difficulty, and where appropriate remove goods or deliver court papers to those who refuse to pay or make returns. FFCs now spend more time educating customers, such as explaining how to make electronic payments. Their enforcement work is more effective too, for example, bankruptcy petitions prepared by HMRC solicitors' office can be hand-delivered by FFCs within hours of filing in court, and when notices are served on, or goods removed from, companies with multiple sites, visits can be scheduled to take action simultaneously in different locations.

How HMRC and Capgemini Work Together

HMRC's Debt Management and Banking directorate established an in-house operation for face-to-face debt collection and worked with Capgemini on new IT to help cut the cord which tied locally based FFCs to their offices. The mobile technology and automation programme team combined specialist business, commercial and IT. This group defined processes and specifications, from idea generation to implementation, including how to deliver the solution within budget.

FFCs need UMPCs that meet data security needs, work in all weather conditions, withstand being dropped, have reliable

connections with the FFEUs, and batteries that last throughout the working day. Mobile equipment meeting this specification was new to market, and the initial investment cost was too high, so HMRC and Capgemini worked out a one-off commercial model to overcome funding constraints. The equipment, development of the application and ongoing support and maintenance was funded by spreading development costs over a managed service charged per user per month.

The central objective was to help increase the daily number of successful debtor visits by automating activities which did not add value carried out in the field. From initial scope onwards, FFCs clarified requirements and tweaked IT development after the initial design was agreed. So opportunities which were identified once the potential of the new IT was fully understood could be included in the first release of the solution, like showing debtors a pre-populated on-screen form before goods are seized instead of digitising the forms agents had previously completed after taking legal control of goods. Prototyping overcame

problems such as adapting aspects of the selected product's networking solution so the UMPCs were fully encrypted and compatible with HMRC's environment.

FFCs have rugged UMPCs with no moving parts and FFEUs schedule visits and process the resulting documentation quickly and effectively. Staff use templates, which are pre-populated where relevant, to gather information from meetings with debtors using drop down menus on a touch screen. A sliding scale of fees which are payable is automatically calculated for individual visits and populates letters left, which helps complete the visit quickly and removes potential for error.

The mobile UMPC solution aligns HMRC and Capgemini aims. It contributes to efficiency and modernisation to deliver value for public money and increase cash-to-bank, and a new way of working which staff prefer. Capgemini provides HMRC with new IT, which is integrated with the standardised services for the Department's other IT, to support future plans. And there are no hidden knock-on costs.



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Approved by:
HMRC Press Office
Graham Cassford, vice president,
Capgemini UK

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