

BlackBerry Case Study - Utilities



Mobilizing Building Maintenance Helps to Re-engineer Processes and Reduce Costs for Utility Company

Hydro Ottawa Limited

Hydro Ottawa Limited is an electrical distribution company responsible for the delivery of electricity to approximately 291,000 residential and business customers in the Ottawa, Ontario region of Canada.

Success On BlackBerry

Industry: Utilities

Region: Americas

Company Size: Large Enterprise – 550 employees

Email Environment: Microsoft® Exchange

Type of Solution: Field Service, CRM & Dispatch Operations

BlackBerry Alliance Member Solution: NOMAD by Horizant

Challenge

Replace the current system for work requests used by facilities personnel who complete building repairs, with one that is automated, more easily tracked and connected to a back-end database.

Solution

Hydro Ottawa deployed the NOMAD application from Horizant to BlackBerry® smartphones used by facilities personnel. The application wirelessly assigns work requests, tracks hours worked and connects to Hydro Ottawa's ARCHIBUS™ facilities management software.

Hydro Ottawa's Results

- Contributes to eliminating time consuming calls and paperwork resulting in cost savings and a reduction in administrative effort
- Helps facilities meet their Service Level Agreements (SLAs) contributing to a higher level of internal customer satisfaction
- Collects field metrics which helps management make cost-saving decisions about replacing or repairing machinery
- Helps to create efficiencies through the introduction of new time saving processes

The Situation: Streamline Facilities Management for Hydro Company

Hydro Ottawa Limited (Hydro Ottawa) is responsible for the delivery of electricity to approximately 291,000 residential and business customers in the City of Ottawa and the village of Casselman. To do that, they must maintain 85 substations and four office facilities across the region. A team of seven facilities personnel supported by contractors are assigned to these properties.

Prior to the implementation of the BlackBerry solution, the facilities team used cell phones and a paper trail that wasn't based on work requests, to manage the work. It was a difficult system to manage, track or follow up on. They had several goals in mind when they decided to use BlackBerry smartphones to automate the process:

- Eliminate virtually all phone calls and paper using wireless work requests;
- Help personnel in the field work more effectively; and
- Streamline project management and budgets through a more formal tracking process.

"We were essentially relying on voicemail messages to deploy people to jobs," says Joey St. Jacques, Supervisor of Facilities. "How do you set priorities or manage timing, and schedule contractors using this approach? It was quite a nightmare."

Electronic Work Requests on BlackBerry Smartphones

The NOMAD application was deployed to the facilities team's BlackBerry smartphones enabling them to wirelessly initiate work requests.

Work requests are initiated by the facilities team and internal clients through the use of a facilities web portal. Alternatively, as a supervisor, Joey St. Jacques, can walk through a building and, on-the-spot, create work requests using the NOMAD application on his BlackBerry smartphone.

All work requests, whether generated by internal clients or by facilities, are designed to be routed to the ARCHIBUS back-end system. There, they are assigned to facilities personnel and pushed to each individual's BlackBerry smartphone.

"One added benefit about having a BlackBerry smartphone is that our team can use the camera to take pictures of problems or work that's been completed; that picture is then automatically attached to the file in ARCHIBUS and a visual record is almost immediately accessible," says St. Jacques.

The facilities team also makes use of the Voice Notes feature on their BlackBerry smartphones to record short observations of the building issues they see. Later, they can replay the recordings and remind themselves of the information they want to enter into ARCHIBUS.

The team also checks the weather from their BlackBerry smartphones, which means they can set the parameters of the heating or cooling systems in the buildings to match the conditions.

Time tracking is another feature of the application. When a job is complete the facilities person enters their time worked into the application directly on their BlackBerry smartphone. That information is then routed to ARCHIBUS, where the job is closed. Customer service is enhanced through the delivery of an automated email to the internal client letting them know that their request is complete.

"We now get a lot of data coming back from the field because of the BlackBerry smartphones. You don't really know how well you are performing until you measure it."

~ Joey St. Jacques, Facilities Management Supervisor, Hydro Ottawa

How It Works.

Application Type: Field Service, CRM & Dispatch Operations

Application: NOMAD developed by Horizant

- The NOMAD application routes work requests to the BlackBerry smartphones as they are dispatched from Hydro Ottawa's ARCHIBUS database
- Work requests are generated through a facilities web portal accessible to all Hydro Ottawa staff
- The ARCHIBUS database allows the prioritization of tasks, so that they may be completed in the order of submission or by urgency
- The work requests are placed in a queue that is then routed to the BlackBerry smartphone of the individual responsible for the work in a particular building
- The information on work requests is accessible through a series of tabs, including read-only details about the job and editable fields
- Facilities personnel use the drop-down menus in the application to accept or reject work requests. Job specifics and the creation of new work requests can be entered 'on-the-fly' using the menus
- Facilities personnel log hours worked into the application
- All information entered into the application on the BlackBerry smartphones, whether it's hours worked or type of work completed, is sent wirelessly back to the ARCHIBUS system where it is updated in the database
- A series of reports are generated from the ARCHIBUS system that include key performance indicators (KPI) to help better manage Hydro Ottawa's facilities

Enhanced Productivity Equals Real Savings

The benefits of the new system were almost immediately noticeable. "The person we had managing the work requests is no longer handling this manual task," says St. Jacques. "She used to have to look at the requests and then manually type them into ARCHIBUS. Now it's more automated."

St. Jacques says reducing the administrative hours associated with processing work requests is an efficiency improvement. Less time spent on the phone means that this team member's time can be redeployed to other projects.

St. Jacques also believes the new solution helps facilities personnel avoid unnecessary trips back to the office. They can move seamlessly from one job to another, or create new work requests when they see there's a problem, right from their BlackBerry smartphones.

SLAs, Metrics and Business Improvement

Before using BlackBerry smartphones to track work in the field, St. Jacques found it difficult to measure how well his team was meeting SLAs established for repair work. Now, with information pushed from the field into the ARCHIBUS system, he can look at reports whenever he needs to and quickly know whether they are meeting their SLAs.

"With our BlackBerry solution, I am now getting good, solid metrics. I am starting to identify problem types in the repairs," he says. "At any time, I can run reports based on how many electrical problems we had, or mechanical ones, and so on."

St. Jacques gets this information because the application on the BlackBerry smartphone is designed to have drop down menus that identify different problem types. When a repair is done, the facilities personnel clicks on the problem type and this information is almost immediately updated in the ARCHIBUS system.

"The information gathered from the field on the BlackBerry smartphones is useful to me because I can look at something like an air conditioner unit and see how many work requests were assigned to it," he says. "I can calculate the number of hours we spent repairing it and compare it to the cost of simply replacing it. That helps determine whether we should continue to repair something or replace it."



“Putting mobility at their fingertips means our facilities team can now create a work request themselves from their BlackBerry smartphones.”

~ Joey St. Jacques, Facilities Management Supervisor, Hydro Ottawa

The Unexpected Benefits of Process Re-engineering

St. Jacques says automating the work request process naturally led to rethinking how Hydro Ottawa managed the maintenance of its facilities. That led to cutting out inefficiencies in how people worked and how jobs were assigned. This unexpected benefit is something he believes has added extra value to the solution.

“You don’t really know how well you are performing until you measure it,” he says. “With information routed from the BlackBerry smartphone, as work is completed, St. Jacques now gets a snapshot of hours worked, types of repairs and contractors hired. He is using that information to review the logic of how people work during the day to improve processes that benefit Hydro Ottawa.

“It has helped us to be more accountable to our CFO about what work we’re doing,” he says. “I can track our people, our vendors and look at whether we are making our customers happy. I’m starting to see all sorts of places where we can make improvements.”

Summary of Hydro Ottawa’s Results

- Contributes to eliminating time consuming calls and paperwork resulting in cost savings and a reduction in administrative effort
- Helps meet the facilities management group’s SLAs contributing to a higher level of internal customer satisfaction
- Collects detailed field metrics which helps management make cost-saving decisions about replacing or repairing machinery
- Helps to create efficiencies through the introduction of new time saving processes

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