



CASE STUDY

The Business

Lowri Beck Services Limited was established in 1996 as an independent meter reading company in the newly deregulated energy market. Today, Lowri Beck provides an efficient, cost effective metering and business solutions service, which extends beyond utilities to all companies that need the accurate collection, management and transfer of data electronically. Headquartered in Lancashire, UK, the company employs 350 mobile field staff and its customers include EDF Energy, Npower, Scottish and Southern Energy, Scottish Power and Calorgas.

Lowri Beck installed the first version of PortechFMS in 2003. It has since proven to be a cost-effective, flexible and easy-to-use mobile workforce solution for all of Lowri Beck's field work needs.

The Challenge

Lowri Beck has achieved steady year on year growth since its foundation, this has meant that it has also increased its field based staff coverage to meet its customer's needs for UK wide data collection. In early 2005 Lowri Beck realised that their mobile workforce software was not going to meet its future needs much beyond the end of 2006. Some of the areas which were highlighted as future limitations were:

- Speed of data transfer.
- Number of Staff in the field.
- Scalability of the Communications module.
- Functionality.
- Capability of communications with field staff.

With a growing workforce and client base, Lowri Beck needed to continue to guarantee its customers a very high level of service, with the ability to:

- Provide full visibility over its mobile workforce productivity.

- Maximise the field operatives' active time.
- Reduce costs per visit.
- Improve information available to field based staff.

Microsoft's .Net technology allowed Portech to make better use of the handheld hardware and the back end communications software increasing the speed of both usage and data communications. With the speed of growth being experienced, Lowri Beck required partnership with a company which provided excellent before and after sales service, outstanding technical knowledge, experience in mobile software and the ability to support Lowri Beck's needs as the company grew and as its customers' requirements changed.

Portech's 'can do' attitude and responsive technical support in its previous contact with Lowri Beck was crucial in winning the software development contract. Portech's size also counted in its favour. As a small company, it offered Lowri Beck a bespoke solution and the agility and flexibility that its competitors could not match.

The Solution

The PortechFMS software solution is a centrally configurable data collection application for handheld PCs. Its primary role is as a workflow management tool to organise and handle job tasks for the service industry. Other features include the ability to provide Lowri Beck with a real-time insight into how field staff are operating, allowing staff to send messages to head office, book holidays and submit timesheets and mileage each evening.

Regular backups, security of information and centralised management of the software are crucial to Lowri Beck's requirements, with over the air updates to both the software itself and job definitions.

Lowri Beck found PortechFMS simple to install and operate on its fleet of pocket PCs and rugged handheld devices. The PortechFMS solution also offered Lowri Beck enhanced functionality with features including:

- Work Navigator - a list of jobs sent from head office in a tree structure, grouped and separated by due date, postcode or job type.
- Validation - data is validated as it is entered to ensure data integrity.
- Tight integration with the mobile phone hardware built into the devices to enable business and emergency only phone calls, and track calls, contact field personnel at any time, while maintaining control over call charges.
- Scheduled download of field staff activity to monitor productivity every hour or on demand
- Communications in the field which avoids paperwork and mobile field staff only uploading information at the end of the day.
- Bespoke screens for different client companies allowing field staff to service multiple clients per day.

In September 2006 Portech delivered a PortechFMS, on time and within budget, which implemented all of the requested features. Roll out of the software was done with a minimum of disruption by Lowri Beck's Hand-Held Helpdesk team. Today PortechFMS serves all of Lowri Beck's mobile field staff.

Tracy Sanderson, Business Analyst at Lowri Beck commented:

"Portech has been essential to the success of our business. The PortechFMS ensures the delivery of business critical information to our customers and automates this process through its simple to use mobile workforce technology. The system is constantly improving and the service is incomparable – the Portech team are friendly and approachable and work with us on a true partnership basis. The PortechFMS has improved our competitiveness: we find that our field staff can attend more calls, even adhoc calls, we can update the mobile software remotely, we have access to full communications while our staff are in the field, and our operatives are equipped with an easy to manage console which speeds up data input and reduces cost per call."

The Future

Portech continues to work with Lowri Beck to deliver mobile solutions. The existing solution is to be enhanced further through the introduction of GPS mapping. This additional feature will provide Lowri Beck's operatives with real time location and route information to speed up call times. **Chris Walker**, Operations Director continued: "PortechFMS is a strategic solution for Lowri Beck and will remain at the core of our future mobile workforce strategies as we continue to grow. It has consistently proven to best fit our needs and integrates easily with our home-grown databases."



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