



Motorola's MC75 helps AE Smith off the paper trail



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Company Overview: AE Smith

AE Smith (www.aesmith.com.au) is the largest privately owned mechanical services contractor in Australia, and has 112 years of practical experience. Its team of more than 650 professionals is organised into four separate but complementary business units with offices spanning Australia from Cairns to Tasmania and Sydney to Perth. AE Smith is the 'partner of choice' for commercial and industrial air conditioning, mechanical services, energy efficiency and building technologies.

The Challenge: The perilous paper trail

The AE Smith Service business provides a large number of Australian organisations with proactive preventative maintenance for all types of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. It has a team of more than 135 technicians, each visiting multiple sites on a daily basis.

In the past, AE Smith Service relied on a series of paper based processes to manage its technicians' work processes. These include 'tasking' to ensure a set series of activities are completed during each site visit; documenting issues when called out to investigate a system breakdown; purchase ordering; and lastly, as part of a technician's pre-start safety evaluation which is a critical aspect of Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) compliance.

Aldo Cevaal, Group General Manager of AE Smith Service elaborates, "Like most people, technicians absolutely hate paperwork. They want to get in there and fix the problem without worrying about the admin. We have a shortage of labour in this industry, so one of our objectives on the project was to make the technicians' job easier so that we could attract skilled professionals to our workforce.

"The next issue we wanted to overcome was the logistics of our technicians having to bring every piece of paper back to the office on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Leaving the field to visit the office could have a turn-around time of as much as two hours, which is time that technicians

Customer Profile



Company
AE Smith

Location
Australia

Industry
Field Services

Product
• MC75 mobile computer

Partner
Datatnet



Application(s)

Motorola MC75 mobile computers are used to document information in the field and send back to the office in a format that was accurate, real-time and easy to process.

Benefits

- Cost and resource savings
- Increased data accuracy
- Improved customer service



weren't spending with our clients. With the cost of labour on the rise, it didn't make sense to have all 135 of our field staff making regular trips back to the office." said Mr Cevaal.

Additionally, once the paper work was returned to branch office's admin, the staff was required to manually enter documented information into the IT system, which was a time consuming process open to human error. AE Smith also has a high number of technicians for whom English is a second language, and at times, admin staff would struggle to transcribe the hand written information recorded within the paperwork.

Mr Cevaal continues, "The Motorola mobile computing solution also provides our customers with the added security of knowing mandatory WHS requirements are fulfilled by AE SmithService technicians electronically onsite and as required.

"The outmoded paper trail processes of old were inefficient and impacting both our gross margin and ability to service customers to our high standards. In the service business, it's the administration, and the time that staff spends away from customers that ultimately affects your bottom line.

"We wanted a mobile device that would make life easy for our technicians and internal admin staff. We needed to speed up our ability to document information in the field and have that data sent back to the office in a format that was accurate, timely and easy to process. We knew this would help to improve both our customer service and our bottom line.

"We also wanted to introduce technology that would positively enhance our Service delivery to customers. If they so desired, the mobile solution we were looking for would empower our customers with the technology to: track the financial and energy performance of their HVAC system down to an individual piece of equipment if needed; make informed capital decisions based on historically accurate system reliability information; interface online and in real time with AE Smith Service; and rigorously strengthen the practical delivery of the 'committed to zero harm' AE Smith WHS policy and procedures by of our staff and customers."

The Solution: AE Smith introduces the MC75

AE Smith had been investigating enterprise mobility

for nearly ten years before it made a final decision. The first generation of handheld devices it researched were large, cumbersome and difficult to use. The company also felt that its back office systems weren't mature enough to support mobility at that time.

More recently, AE Smith considered a Korean device but was concerned about the vendor's ability to provide efficient service levels. Nor was the device rugged enough to meet the demands of its technicians out in the field.

"I also went over to America," explains Mr Cevaal, "and investigated a mobile device that was being used by a crane company in a similar fashion to what we wanted to do. We gave our technicians the opportunity to play with each of the devices we researched and ultimately it was the Motorola product that they felt most comfortable with."

AE Smith has rolled out 135 MC75s to its technicians across Australia. This mobile computer combines an unparalleled number of business capabilities into a compact, rugged device. With 3G and wireless capabilities, integrated GPS, 1D and 2D bar code scanning, a high resolution 2 megapixel digital camera, Bluetooth and IrDA connectivity, the MC75 has been designed to endure all day, everyday use outside the enterprise.

"Our technicians were particularly impressed with the large size of the MC75's full VGA screen which makes it very easy to view information. From a business perspective, we found Motorola's customer service appealing and also liked the fact that they have branches spread across Australia, so we wouldn't have to invest in shipping devices across the country for repairs if needed.

"The ruggedised nature of the MC75 was very important because our technicians are often climbing ladders, scaling walls and roofs, so the device is being knocked around a lot. The MC75s are highly compatible with Telstra's 3G network which was also appealing to us because the technicians needed to send information back to the office from inside buildings and remote areas."

AE Smith staged its deployment on a branch-by-branch basis during an 18-month period, to ensure that each region received proper support and training.

“We have 135 technicians and each of them was averaging two hours turnaround time to deliver their paper work to the office. By giving them the power to complete all their required documentation on the MC75 and send it directly back to head office in real time, we have achieved significant savings in both time and money - not to mention happier staff and a superior outcome for AE Smith customers. Our estimated ROI on the complete mobile computing solution is 8 months.”

- Aldo Cevaal, Group General Manager, AE Smith Service

The Benefits: Less paper, more efficient processes

AE Smith has experienced a range of benefits from the MC75 implementation. The most significant advantage has been removing paper-based processes from the technicians' daily tasks.

“There is a huge cost saving here. We have 135 technicians and each of them was averaging two hours turn-around time to deliver their paper work to the office. By giving them the power to complete all their required documentation on the MC75 and send it directly back to head office in real-time, we have achieved significant savings in both time and money - not to mention happier staff and a superior outcome for AE Smith customers. Our estimated ROI on the complete mobile computing solution is 8 months.

“On top of that, it now takes fewer resources to process all that information because no one has to sift through all that paper work back in the office. Without all this paper work, we've also been able to set up a central call centre in Melbourne that is responsible for job dispatching across the country. This has created further efficiencies.

“There's now very little need for our technicians to leave the road and come back to the office. And when they do, it's for meaningful things such as training and safety demonstrations.” said Mr Cevaal.

The MC75's colour camera was another critical part of AE Smith's selection process, and the company is now able to attach photographic evidence to its invoices, to show customers what work has to be done during any particular visit.

“There are times when repairs to a customer's HVAC system are significant and unbudgeted. We find that it helps some customers better understand how their money has been invested if we can show them clear and easy to see before and after pictures of their new or repaired HVAC system.” Mr Cevaal explains.

AE Smith is also using Motorola's Mobility Services

Platform (MSP), which allows it to remotely automate and troubleshoot the staging and provisioning of its mobile devices. According to Mr Cevaal, the ability to monitor device issues and battery life in real-time is only one benefit of the MSP service.

“A by-product of the MSP service is that we can monitor whether our staff is actually using the devices. If a technician tells us that he didn't receive a particular job dispatch, we can check whether that job went through or if that technician even has the device with him. It means that our technicians have to be more accountable which helps us improve customer service overall.

“We're really happy with Motorola's commitment to ensuring that our mobile solution is running smoothly. It's not often that we get staff contacting us about issues with the MC75s, they've proven to be quite reliable which is great.” said Mr Cevaal.

The Future

AE Smith is enthusiastic about the future of mobility within its business, and its relationship with Motorola. In the near future it plans to refine its use of the MC75's GPS system, allowing call centre personnel to match the location of individual technicians with the nearest job to improve resolution time for customers.

“We also have plans to leverage the MC75's bar code capabilities, which will allow us to prove that we have visited a piece of equipment. This is important for customers who have to comply with maintenance regulations. It will also allow us to better track what work has been done on individual pieces of equipment, so that we can improve the long-term advice we offer to clients.

“I think we're ahead of many of our competitors when it comes to mobility. I believe that the whole service industry is heading in this direction, and having taken on the benefits of mobility earlier than most, puts us ahead of our game.” Mr Cevaal concluded.



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