Pen Computing – The Natural "Next Step" For Field Personnel

In an effort to stay ahead of the curve in government technology, HTE recently acquired selected assets of pen-based computer company McEvoy Mobile Computer Systems, Inc. of Hartford, Connecticut.

Pen computing can be thought of as hand writing on a computer screen. The pen acts like a mouse for choosing icons and enables the computer to process its user's handwriting.

Pen-based technology is in the pilot stage for public safety agencies; however, HTE plans to expand pen computing into other areas such as city and county governments and utilities.

In public safety, pen computing cuts down on paperwork, increases accuracy of reports, and provides officers with information out in the field without having to contact dispatchers.

Because officers can fill out incident forms right on the screen, it eliminates the redun-

HTE's Sandy Evoy looks on as Hartford, CT Police Department's Patrolman Richard Calderone uses a pen-based computer.

dancy of data processors keying in the report.

"With the acquisition of pen-based technology and the skills base to support it, we can now provide people in the field with the functionality that previously was only available on desktop," said HTE President Dennis Harward.

The pen computing system was developed by Sandy Evoy, a former programmer for the Hartford Police Department and former owner of McEvoy Mobile Computer Systems. She now joins HTE as Product Manager of Mobile Systems.

"Pen technology has a lot of potential, but with a small company like I had, it was difficult to find the resources," Evoy said. "The merger will mean an expansion of pen computing into a lot of different areas."

HTE applications to which pen computing could potentially be applied are Work Orders, Code Enforcement, and utility meter reading. Essentially, wherever there is a form to be filled out, the pen-based device can be used.

"Pen technology is a natural interface for an officer who is used to using a pen and notepad," said Captain Jim Donnelly of the Hartford Police Department. "Plus, it reduces the tedious nature of police report writing in a significant way."

Also pleased with what pen-based technology offers public safety personnel is Jim Lightbody, Management Analyst for the Crimes Analysis Unit at the Chico Police Department, California.

"By going with pen computers, we hope to take some of the load off our data entry people," Lightbody said.

Pen-based computer screen displays an Incident Report form.

Officials from Escambia County Utilities Authority (ECUA) knew they had an efficient computer system when it took them one day to do what another utility took three months to do.

When Florida passed a state sales tax, utilities had to bill that tax to commercial customers. It took ECUA just one day to implement the tax into their computer system. The other area utility requested a three-month extension to reprogram their system.

This is just one example of how HTE's software has made the ECUA more efficient in their operations, according to Susan Ragland, Senior Programmer Analyst for ECUA.

"Because the computer applications are rules-based and user-defined, we can change them very easily. We don't have to do programming changes or modifications," Ragland said.

ECUA has been an HTE customer for over 10 years, and from the start, HTE has been the sole application vendor of the utility. ECUA found a total solution in HTE's software, which is completely integrated throughout the entire organization.

Established in 1982, ECUA has experienced long-term savings with HTE's system. ECUA, which is located in Florida's panhandle, has grown significantly over the past 10 years — with an increase of 12,600 water and sewer

CORNERSTONES: How HTE Customers Build For The Future

Escambia County Utilities Authority Reaps Benefits Of Software

By Cynthia Massino

Van Van Dever, ECUA Executive Director, and Susan Ragland, Senior Programmer Analyst.

customers. Recently, ECUA added an additional 51,000 sanitation customers through the purchase of a sanitation operation.

"The computer system has made it flexible for us to bill the way we needed. Even after buying the sanitation system, we haven't had to make any special modifications," Ragland said.

As far as the long-term savings is concerned, Van Van Dever, ECUA Executive Director, commented, "Anytime you have a system that effectively crunches your data and gives

you the reports you want in the formats you need, it is going to save you a lot of time and money."

"When we acquired the sanitation operation, we converted all the data via the software instead of hand punching everything. It probably reduced the time spent on the job tenfold."

Officials at ECUA said that the main advantages of HTE's software are the flexibility of the applications and the interfaces between them. There's no need to manually take information

from one application and enter it into another one.

Another area that improved at ECUA was payroll. Before HTE's Payroll application was operational at ECUA, employees would not receive overtime pay until two weeks later. The "daily time entry" enhancement allows ECUA to shorten the period of time between the end of the pay period and the time the employee actually gets paid for that period.

Currently, ECUA is concentrating on the reorganization of their company. They've established five regions in the Escambia County area with five regional managers. The idea is to cut down on travel time and increase service to customers. Before, about 30% to 40% of work time was spent traveling.

"Among other things, we'll be able to downsize by 31 positions, all of which will translate into an annual operating savings of between $400,000 and $500,000," Van Dever said.

HTE's Work Orders/Facility Management application will play a big part in the reorganization. Because ECUA already has HTE's system in place, they can track the work across the region. Because the system is integrated, it will make tracking the work much easier.

"Work orders will be sent to the appropriate region based on a code that we enter. The Work Orders application allows you to track the work, the payroll process, and the materials used," Ragland said.