

case study Solihull MBC

Capacity Building and Resource Efficiencies from ndl-metascybe's Mobile Building Control

When Solihull Building Control decided to explore options for alternative ways to deliver its site inspection service, the council produced a business case that would foresee the benefits of investing in a remote working application for Building Control Surveyors working in the field. Solihull wanted a technological solution that would streamline site inspection work practices and improve productivity, whilst saving time and money so they could utilise efficiency gains in other areas of work.

the challenge

Traditionally, Building Control Surveyors at Solihull MBC would need to visit the office each morning to collect information they needed to carry out that day's inspections. This included hard-copy site reports of any previous inspections carried out on sites under construction. During the actual site visit the Surveyors would make hand-written notes of the site visit. At the end of each working day, the Surveyor's would return to the office to manually type up their site notes into the main Innogistics FastCONTROL application held in the council's back-office.

Being predominately paper based and relying on the memory of the inspector to write a full and detailed inspection report, the whole process, inevitably lead to some details of the site visit being forgotten or the notes being inaccurately written up.

A further issue that needed addressing was the time the Surveyors spent travelling to and from the office to collect information and update the FastCONTROL database. It was easy to see when mileage costs and travelling was taken into consideration that time and money was being wasted and Surveyors would be able to visit more sites each day if these inefficiencies were reduced.

Looking at the situation, Solihull realised they needed to invest in a technology to allow Surveyors to enter inspection notes during the actual site visit. Paper needed to be cut from the process and in its place, the inspector should be able to do the entire job electronically through some type of mobile device. The challenge however was to find a solution that could link to and fully integrate with the Innogistics FastCONTROL database.

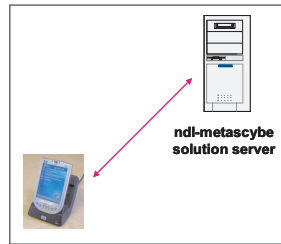
the approach

Having identified the need, Solihull went to the market and looked for solutions capable of integrating with the existing back-office application. Their investigations identified ndl-metascybe, who subsequently proposed an application tailored to integrate with the Innogistics FastCONTROL product.

In the end, ndl-metascybe was chosen to provide the solution, not simply because its was a unique, easy to use product, but importantly because it gave huge scope and flexibility for future developments. Now, using their new PDA's Surveyors follow three steps throughout their daily routine;

Stage 1: Before Inspections

At the start of the day, the Surveyor docks the PDA into its cradle in the office or from home and it is connected to a server running the ndl-metascybe Mobile Building Control software. Any updates to the Auto-Phrase glossary (a unique application containing many often-used building control phrases, which



substantially eases the burden of writing site notes and promotes consistency in the way site works are described) are optionally downloaded from the server to the

PDA. The server then connects to the SQL Innogistic FastCONTROL database and runs a query to return all relevant inspection data for valid applications that are yet to be commenced and current jobs under construction. The inspection data is then converted into XML format and downloaded to a database held on the PDA and readable by the Surveyor.

Stage 2: During inspections:

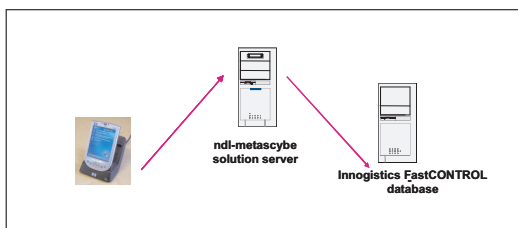
During the site visit the Surveyors actually complete their site inspection notes directly to the PDA using a combination of standard phrases from point and click drop-down lists and typed notes using a wireless keyboard.



Stage 3: After inspections:

When the Surveyors return to base or home and dock the PDA, all the new data added during their visits is uploaded to the server. The server then adds this data to the Innogistic FastCONTROL software so that it is available for any other user to access and view. The system also automatically notifies the administration team by email of any completion inspections so that a completion certificate can be issued.

Being an electronic process, the authority and its Surveyors are up to date with modern technological advancements for mobile working.



Importantly, should the day's inspection schedule change, the Surveyor has all the relevant information available when undertaking additional requests for inspection of work, without returning to the office for information relating to that job.

improved working and efficiency savings

Solihull needed to justify the expenditure required to invest in a remote working solution for Building Control. By identifying the savings possible from a moderate investment that built on the existing system this task became less onerous. The final solution recognised the following benefits; **Time and Cost savings** – by not typing notes into the FastCONTROL main application back at the office, each surveyor would save 1 hour per day which is equal to a £50 cost saving per Surveyor each day. Also, less unproductive time would be spent travelling to and from the office to type notes into the system saving each surveyor approximately 30 minutes, adding another saving of £25 per Surveyor, per day. A total cost saving of £75 per Surveyor per day.

Resource and Cost savings – a reduction in equipment costs was also seen. The old system required a PC for each surveyor to type in their inspection details each day back at the office. With the new system, Surveyors do this automatically out on site thus meaning maintenance costs, IT support costs and purchases of software licenses are all dramatically reduced. The cost saving of this amounts to approximately £2000 per PC (with a 3 year replacement cycle). Another resource saving can be met through a reduction in accommodation needs. If there is less equipment to hold, less floor space is needed giving a reduced central support cost of £800/m2.

Increased levels of compliance – through a programme of targeted, risk-assessed inspections

and extra time saved through remote working, Surveyors can concentrate more time to the less competent contractor, raising the standards of compliance where it matters most. This can help reduce enforcement costs and promote long-term improvement in compliance generally across the borough. Jobs are signed off as complete much faster, reducing back-log of outstanding work and chase up visits, saving the council time and money.

Increased job satisfaction – Building Control Surveyors and the Technical administration staff have more control over the delivery of the site inspection service. Surveyors can chose to work from home or the office as the need arises and this has the benefit that the service is available to customers for a greater proportion of the working day. Retention benefits/improved motivation leads to higher productivity levels and greater quality of work, a benefit for both staff and the council. Also, teams can take ownership of their work and make important decisions where needed. Staff will have more responsibility for creating, editing and maintaining standard phrase lists giving them more control over the use of the system and more input where they feel necessary.

Return on Investment – with the new system there is a very quick payback, less than 4 months for the council to start reaping the benefits of remote mobile working with ndl-metascybe integration technology.

final comments

Steve Elliott, Head of Building Control at the council comments “ndl-metascybe is just so very easy to work with. They made time to get to know and understand the job of a Building Control Surveyor and proposed a solution that would meet all of our needs. The product itself is intuitive, very useable and works, straight’ out of the box’ with little additional development needed. ndl-metascybe were very responsive to our needs and quick to deliver the complete solution.”

He concludes “We were provided with a trial version within 4 months of placing the order, in keeping with our time constraints and budget limit . The product was very cost-effective compared to other solutions and crucially also supported the Innogistic FastCONTROL application. We couldn’t have asked for more.”

ndl-metascybe is the result of the coming together in 2005 of two long established UK software suppliers.

ndl-metascybe is providing real time, bi-directional integration to most of the leading Local Authority back-office applications.

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