

Keep Field Service On Track

With a field service automation solution, Cubic Transportation Systems has eliminated manual processes and can respond to calls faster.

Cubic Transportation Systems is responsible for manufacturing and/or maintaining the ticketing and fare collection systems for some of the busiest public transit systems in the world, including the Transport Network in London; Atlanta's MARTA system; Brisbane, Australia's go card system and RailCorp in Sydney; the MTA in New York City, among others. In addition to implementing and operating fare collection systems, the company also provides maintenance services for its customers. Cubic's technicians have to be available 24/7 to respond quickly and efficiently to their customers' repair needs.

A few years ago, Cubic's management realized that in order to maintain its position as market leader, it would need to automate many of its customer service and maintenance management functions. Previously, the company managed its maintenance activities on paper and using Excel spreadsheets. "It was a completely manual operation," says Mary Crossno, head of IT operations for Cubic Transportation Systems in Tennessee. "If the technician did something in the field, they

would have to write it down, and that information would have to be key entered into our systems later. We knew it was time to evolve."

The company deployed the Metrix 4e ProductService automation software from Metrix Inc. to help lower operating costs and improve service call response times and productivity by automating its contact center, field service, warranty management, inventory, and repair center operations. The system has been integrated

with Cubic's central fare collection and back end transaction processing systems, which also include a customer service database, as well as system monitoring, asset management, and maintenance capabilities.

The central solution was initially deployed in London, where Cubic manages the London Underground, London Buses, Docklands Light Railway, Croydon Tramlink, and London Overground. The company's first U.S. Metrix deployment was in Atlanta. Metrix manages

call handling, field service repair center logistics, and asset management for Cubic and its maintenance contract customers. If there is a problem with any Cubic equipment in the field, customers will contact the company's call center to report the issue. A dispatcher enters the service request into the Metrix system and then dispatches a field service technician who issues orders for the parts needed for the repair. If a piece of equipment (such as a card sales terminal) is moved, the system automatically updates the location data so the company knows where each item is at all times, and the company can access the maintenance history of the equipment. The solution has been so successful that Cubic has sold the system to customers who manage their own maintenance and field service operations, with Cubic acting as the integrator. Now, Cubic is deploying the Metrix Mobile application to keep technicians connected to the application in the field.

Mobile Solution Keeps Technicians Connected

While the technicians currently use cell phones to communicate with the dispatchers, Cubic is piloting the Metrix Mobile field service application, which will allow them to connect directly to the Metrix system on handheld computers via a secure NetMotion Wireless virtual private network (VPN). Cubic is also using AT&T's TeleNav Track online application to locate field technicians using the GPS capabilities built into their cell phones and mobile devices. The company is piloting the solution in Atlanta with 25 technicians using Motorola MC35 handheld computers, and Crossno says the company is also testing the application on Intermec CN50 devices.

Using the mobile application, technicians will receive on the mobile computer all the information they need for the service call. Cubic has customized the system so that technicians don't have to key enter any information about the repair; everything is driven by drop-down menus. That's because each customer has a fairly unique solution in place,



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"The nice thing about the mobile application is that it operates in a 'store and forward' mode."

by Brian Albright

with unique data entry requirements based on their equipment and how the transportation system is designed. “That was a big issue in the beginning, because we had 10 different solutions to the same problem,” Crossno says. “You never get accurate reporting like that, so everything on the application is menu-driven. They have all the part and device information, and it all goes back up to the Metrix server in Tennessee.”

Cubic also uses bar coding to help eliminate data entry errors in the field. All of the company’s equipment is bar coded, so when technicians arrive they simply scan the device that is being worked on, rather than typing in a serial number. The new mobile devices also have built-in cameras, so techs can gather even more information at the job site. Technicians can also use the mobile computers when they are out of wireless range. “The nice thing about the mobile application is that it operates in a ‘store and forward’ mode,” Crossno says. “We do work underground where there are no cellular towers. The system keeps polling, looking for a wireless connection, but it holds all the information the technician needs on the device.”

Customized Field Service Solution Improves Response Times

Training the Atlanta staff took approximately two weeks, and Crossno says the technicians and dispatchers adapted well to the new system. The biggest challenge was the degree of customization necessary to make the mobile solution work the way they wanted it to. “The way Cubic Transportation does business is that we have a unique solution for every customer,” Crossno says. “If we’re talking about MARTA in Atlanta, the solution has to know the technicians will encounter certain types of equipment, certain types of problems, and specific solutions. That capability doesn’t come out of the box, so we had to get the coding

right to change everything to a point-and-click or drop-down box.”

So far, the mobile solution has helped Cubic deploy technicians more quickly and has improved service call data collection. “We don’t have all of the data yet on our response times,” Crossno says. “But, our times have improved, and we capture and interpret the data we gather in the field.”

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