



SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGY TO SIMPLIFY A COMPLEX PROCESS - AND IT'S GREEN!

Pertemps People Development Group (PPDG) is an organisation that is dedicated to helping unemployed individuals move into long-term, sustainable employment or gain access to training opportunities. Its ambition is to 'exceed all its stakeholders' expectations, successfully manage change and strive for excellence through continuous improvement'. To date, PPDG has supported over 60,000 people from its Advancement Centres which are located within the heart of the communities it serves. CEO Colin Birchall explains further: ***"We passionately believe that there is a spark of brilliance in everyone. Our task is to unearth that spark and help it to burn brightly. We find that the people we support often lack self-esteem to start with, yet our experience proves that once we have worked with them and developed them, many have exactly the skills that employers want, yet they have just been unaware they possess them. It's our job to help people discover those skills and then to find the right jobs for them, not just the jobs which no-one else wants!"***

Making a difference

PPDG is a major partner in the delivery of the Governments' Welfare to Work strategy, which has helped to support literally thousands into work. It is also involved in a new concept for tackling unemployment known as Employment Zone, which provides specific recruitment assistance for disabled people, lone parents and people who have become disengaged from the jobs market.

The first step in these programmes is to identify people who would be eligible for a specific programme and then to refer them onto the scheme. This involves gathering basic details about each person, such as name, address and National Insurance number – and then adding additional information as each case progresses. This includes things like the results of numeracy and literacy tests, details of any training which has been undertaken and so on.

In total this can amount to more than 250 separate pieces of paper per person which, when multiplied by some 10,000 people who might be recruited onto any one programme, is an awful lot of information and a sizeable chunk of forest!

...A BETTER WAY OF MANAGING THE INFORMATION IT GATHERS AS PART OF ITS WORK

Working smarter

With an ambition to 'strive for excellence through continuous improvement' PPDG needed to find a better way of managing the information which it gathers as part of its work. ICT Director Andy Pettigrew knew that technology would hold the answer. So he started to look at a range of different ways in which the latest technological developments might enable the Group to improve efficiency, whilst also saving money and reducing its own environmental impact.

"Any single programme might involve 10,000+ people, and we knew we could well be working with 20,000 or even 30,000 over the next two to three years," he explains. "On top of that, more and more of the work involves gathering information and processing it. It's very time consuming and it generates a huge amount of paperwork. It's also a slow process as our outreach workers have to fill in forms, then bring them back to the office where the information is keyed in to various different databases.

We were looking for ways to improve efficiency and we needed to find a solution which would achieve this but which would also be practical for our outreach workers. Many of them are not computer literate and they are also working in areas where it would not always be safe to be seen walking around with a laptop."

A simple solution

To gather information on the options available Andy looked to Damovo to consult on technology and best practice in the wider industry for secure remote working. Working together, they looked at the problem he was facing and Damovo proposed the latest digital pen technology, which is already widely deployed so is proven to be robust, flexible and easy to implement. Organisations with departments or individuals who operate alone or remotely in widely diverse rolls such as social services, debt recovery agencies and parking penalty authorities already make extensive use of the core technology.

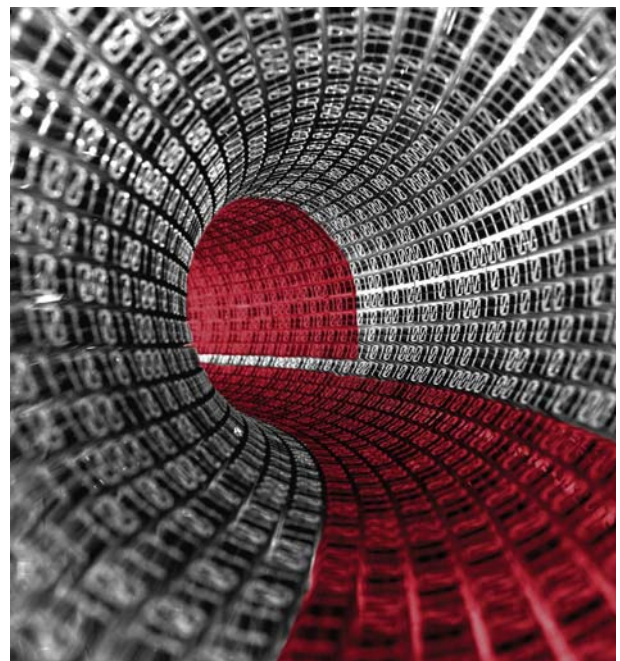
This solution combines a digital pen and a Bluetooth-enabled mobile phone. The outreach workers can fill in the forms using the pen, which contains a tiny infra-red camera in the tip. This can take 100 pictures of pen strokes per second, enabling it to 'recognise' the person's handwriting and even the sequence in which the script is written or amended. Once the form is complete, the outreach worker simply ticks a 'commit'

box and the information which is now stored in the pen is transmitted to their mobile phone by Bluetooth and then directly back to PPDG's offices via the mobile phone signal.

The other key element of this solution is the 'e-paper' on which the forms are set up. These can be, as they are in this case, preformed with boxes in specific places so that the written words can be linked to individual information requirements once the data is received back at the office. Not only will it know, for example, where a National Insurance number should appear, the technology is also smart enough to identify whether a particular 'number' has the right amount of alphanumeric characters. This means that incorrectly-entered information can be identified before the data is even sent.

Once the information is received it can be immediately entered into the company's own databases as required, but also directly into the necessary Government databases as well.

"...a solution that would improve efficiency and also be practical for our outreach workers"



AN EXAMPLE OF DAMOVO UNDERSTANDING OUR CLIENTS' REQUIREMENTS

Wide-ranging benefits

For the outreach worker who is often working alone, there are no security concerns which might be associated with carrying laptops into the shopping centres or community centres where they often work. There is also no issue if they are not computer literate. And at around £80 per pen, plus a mobile phone which would be required anyway, it is also a lot cheaper than providing each worker with more complex technology.

Because the digital pen looks more or less like a normal pen, it is unlikely to be a target for theft. There is also no issue with potential loss of data, as only one form is stored on the pen at a time and once this has been transmitted safely back to the office, the pen is wiped clean ready for the next set of information. In addition there is a significant financial saving, as each set of data can be transmitted at less than the cost of a first class stamp, with no requirement to deliver forms back to the office and no need for admin time to key in information.

Future developments

This technology also enables signatures to be captured on the form and transmitted, but until legislation changes they are not currently considered to be legal. It is hoped that this technology will be approved by the Government in the near future in order to verify electronic signatures. In addition, with the ability to time and date stamp the information which is gathered, it should also be possible to make this admissible in court, as it cannot subsequently be changed.

This is an example of Damovo understanding the requirements of our clients, the environment in which they operate and providing the right solution. Organisations need a reliable and knowledgeable partner who has the expertise to deliver excellence through communication solutions.

For PPDG's management, the new digital pen solution will make it much easier and faster to register people and to gather ongoing information. This means that outreach workers can be far more efficient and that more people can be referred onto each programme per day than was previously possible. It also reduces the burden on PPDG's back office staff, as Andy concludes:



"This system will definitely allow us to gain resource efficiencies. Everything is more immediate, so not only will we gather the information faster, we can also see how we are doing in real time. We will know how many people have been registered that day, rather than having to wait a week until all the bits of paper have come back to the office and been keyed in."

"This increased level of efficiency and the financial savings are key to our future success, as the digital pen technology will reduce our costs of dealing with our clients. But at the same time we will also protect our lone workers more effectively and do our bit towards saving the environment as well by removing literally millions of pieces of paper per year from our systems - which is a result all round I think!"

"...removing literally millions of pieces of paper per year from our systems - a result all round I think"

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