

## **Alcom UK, a telecoms installation specialist, has cut down travel times for its field engineers with a CoPilot navigation system running on T-Mobile equipment**

When you read about businesses introducing satellite navigation systems for their field service staff, sometimes the technology seems to be mentioned almost in passing, perhaps in connection with the deployment of some broader mobile job management system.

However, there are substantial gains to be made simply with the navigation system itself - as Alcom UK, a telecoms installation specialist, will bear out.

Alcom carries out installations of broadband Internet, Sky TV, security systems and home cabling. Its headquarters are at Langdon, Essex, and it also has bases in Oxford and Falkirk. It was established just over two years ago, but has grown fast, and now employs around 170 people, of whom all but 15 are out on the road.

Prior to adopting its new mobile system, the company found its engineers were typically completing between six and eight installations a day. However, managing director Eddie Gammage felt that the total could be increased if it were possible to reduce the amount of time that engineers spent driving between jobs.

He recognised that they were losing a significant amount of time navigating between jobs - often trying to read a map whilst driving, and sometimes getting lost.

The solution he came up with is based on T-Mobile MDA III and MDA Compact mobile units, equipped with the CoPilot navigation system from ALK Technologies. Naturally the devices offer more than just satnav; they are fully-fledged mobile phone and data terminals, capable of handling a range of job management functions. But the inclusion of satnav within an appealing overall package of features convinced Alcom they were the right choice.

"We adopted the T-Mobile MDA Compact and MDA III devices because they provide our engineers with an extremely accurate and reliable satellite navigation system, as well as fulfilling all of their communications needs," Gammage says.

The results certainly look impressive. The travelling time saved through using CoPilot has been sufficient to allow them to complete one extra job each day on average. That may not sound much if you say it quickly, but in fact it's the equivalent of a 13 per cent improvement in productivity.

As Gammage explains: "Our engineers no longer waste precious time at the roadside attempting to find their way to the next job. They can now simply start the day by inputting the addresses they need to visit during that day, and CoPilot will then plot their route for them and give them the directions they need. This has had a major impact on our performance and efficiency."

The new equipment has also brought other savings. Prior to the adoption of the T-mobile units, engineers were supplied with both a laptop computer and a mobile phone. Now they need only the one T-Mobile device, which means reduced hardware costs. Engineers reportedly like this change, too, since they have found it more convenient to carry just one small handheld device.

An incidental benefit of the CoPilot system has been that Alcom has been able to offer a faster service to its customers, reducing the time between ordering and installation. One of its major partners in particular, a broadband supplier based in London, has seen notable benefit from this development. Alcom's engineers have been able to save significant amounts of time driving around London, as CoPilot can re-plot a route if a particular road or area is congested.

"This means that we can get to customers more quickly, and ensures that we keep to appointment times," Eddie Gammage says.

### **Increasing the number**

Over the past year, this particular company has increased the number of installations it expects Alcom UK to conduct from four each day to six - something Gammage says would have been "extremely difficult" before the CoPilot system was introduced.

Looking ahead, Alcom UK is now planning to adopt the T-Mobile devices on two other operations which currently don't use them. It also now always advises potential new clients on the benefits of CoPilot, and attempts to ensure that each project uses the MDA devices.

Gammage says he is looking forward to continuing to work with T-Mobile to meet the company's communications needs. Alcom UK will soon be introducing the latest range of T-Mobile MDA devices, which offers enhanced functionality. "We're confident that T-Mobile will continue to provide us with the products and services we need to ensure that we remain as productive and efficient as possible."