STREAMLINING TOOLS - TOOLS TO MAKE GOVERNMENT MORE EFFECTIVE and EFFICIENT

REMOTE FIELD INSPECTION DEVICES AND SOFTWARE

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Remote Field Inspection Devices (laptop computers, PDAs and cell phones) for use by building departments have been in place for over 20 years; but only within the last five years, have the technology and costs made it more widely available to most.

BENEFITS

Remote Field Inspection Devices, and their associated software, enable building inspectors to instantly issue to the builder/contractor and to the building department data gathered during their on-site inspection of construction for conformance with the approved plans for that structure.

SAVINGS TO GOVERNMENT

- Increased speed and accuracy of inspection reports, reducing staff time conducting inspections and issuing reports by 30 percent, enabling the jurisdiction to conduct more inspections per day.
- Improved accuracy of code compliance and compliance in construction with the approved plans while at same time reducing travel costs for the jurisdiction and wasted time for inspectors going into and out of the office.

SAVINGS TO PUBLIC AND TO PRIVATE SECTOR

In jurisdictions applying IT to these services, architects, contractors, home builders and home owners reported that it increased customer satisfaction with jurisdictions' services by saving cost of time builders had to wait for inspectors to show up on site and then receive the results of their inspections.

BACKGROUND

There are four general categories of devices with many sub-categories underneath each. These general categories are: portable computers, PDAs, mobile phones, and other devices. The following is a greater detail of each.

Portable Computers

This category includes the traditional laptop, ruggedized laptops, Tablet-PCs, and Ultra Mobile PCs (UMPC). For general use, a laptop will handle most department needs. These devices can cost up to and in some cases, over $3,000. Ruggedized laptops are very popular, but tend to be more expensive, ranging from $1,500 to $6,000, with the lower-end models having basic processing speeds. Tablet-PCs are divided into convertible tablets – having a keyboard that lets the user use the tablet like a traditional laptop in the field – and slate tablets, which are designed to use only the stylus. Tablets can be difficult to use, so some departments purchase convertible tablets so that they function well with a wide range of user computer skills. They range from $1,500 to $5,000. Ultra Mobile PCs (UMPC) are a new category, launched in late 2005, designed to combine a touch-screen style tablet capability with stand-alone multimedia capabilities and a target price of $750 to $1,000.

Personal Data Assistants (PDAs)

This category has long been recognized as the traditional remote field inspection device. There are a wide range of Palm-OS and Windows Pocket-PC / Windows Mobile manufacturers to choose from within this category. In general, the lower priced devices, under $200, are not well suited for field inspection use. There are devices that are very rugged, but they can cost up to $3,000.

Mobile Phones

Fortunately, for most remote field inspection needs, this category can be narrowed down to the Smartphone category. Some manufacturers have designed a PDA in to their phone, while others design a phone into their PDA. Not all Smartphones have touch screens. The lack of a touch screen does make the device more durable, but will not allow you to capture signatures. Prices range from less than $100 to $500 for a typical Smartphone. *Other Mobile Devices are described on Alliance website:*

EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION AND JURISDICTION CONTACTS

Phoenix, AZ - Has significantly increased code compliance by builders in the jurisdiction and enabled jurisdiction to conduct more inspections each day. Contact: Amy Barko, City of Phoenix, Email: Amy.barko@phoenix.gov

New Orleans, LA - In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, mobile inspection technology enabled New Orleans to conduct over 125,000 damage assessment reports and transfer the data electronically into FEMA forms rapidly speeding up recovery. Contact: Curtis Mann, Phone: 504-658-7200, Email: cmann@cityofno.gov

SUMMARY

The type of device has a lot to do with the success of your remote field inspection success. Keep in mind the level of user experience with technology when choosing a device.

Beyond the device, other things to consider are the monthly service charges, software compatibility with your current records management system, coverage maps for the wireless network, network transmission speeds, and future software/hardware upgrades.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: VISIT THE ALLIANCE'S WEBSITE AT:
www.natlpartnerstreamline.org and click on "TOOLKIT." On the Toolkit page, click on "Remote Field Inspection Devices."