



TELUS Business Solutions Success Stories
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Vancouver Coastal Health

wireless field inspection pilot pays for itself in two months

“This pilot was a very positive experience, not just from my management position, but also for the end users. In fact, any suggestion to take the solution away from our 6 pilot users would be met with a revolt. Instead, we’re adding 20 users at a time, starting immediately, until the solution is an operational standard for our organization.”

— Domenic Losito, Regional Director of Health Protection, Vancouver Coastal Health

situation

- Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) routinely inspects more than 6,000 food service establishments and 3,000 food stores and processors annually
- VCH has equipped each of its 100 inspectors with tablet laptop computers, enabling them to complete reports electronically on site
- Each computer carries the full VCH database, which is synched once a day with the database at head office using a data replication solution – a process that can take half an hour or more out of an inspector’s day
- VCH is planning to upgrade to a new Web-based field inspection application
- VCH decided to test the concept of wireless field inspections and reports, and to get a jump start on the upgrade

approach

- TELUS stepped up to partner on the pilot
- As TELUS is the telecommunications provider to VCH and all other B.C. health authorities, the partnership gave VCH a high degree of comfort
- The TELUS EVDO network was chosen to provide VCH inspectors with access to high speed wireless coverage
- VCH created a small team of technical employees and end users to work closely with TELUS in designing the pilot and analyzing the results
- Six inspectors were provided with wireless air cards for their existing tablet computers
- TELUS and VCH worked together to overcome the fact that the current application is not designed for wireless use

business benefits

- Inspectors enjoy greater flexibility and efficiency, and can transmit inspection data directly from the field, without the daily need to synch their laptops at the office with the VCH database
- Each inspector is able to make an average of one or two additional calls per day, and now prefers the wireless experience
- Clients are provided with better service as inspection reports can be emailed or faxed at the point of inspection, giving the owners of establishments immediate access to the results and any deficiency orders, as well as an opportunity to discuss the report with inspectors while they are still on site
- Inspectors in the field can now wirelessly access the Internet and the VCH intranet to download educational videos and presentations for clients
- VCH achieved financial ROI on the pilot within just 2 months
- VCH is currently looking into expanding their use of wireless communications to enable inspectors to do more of their administrative work on the road, minimizing the need for them to come into the office

Vancouver Coastal Health

solution details

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) provides a full range of health services to residents of Vancouver, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Richmond and British Columbia's coastal mountain communities. Within its coverage area, there are over 6,000 food service establishments and 3,000 food stores and processors – and VCH must inspect them all, both routinely and in response to complaints from residents.

VCH has equipped each of its more than 100 health inspectors with a tablet laptop computer that enables them to complete their reports electronically on site, using a stylus and user-friendly drop-down menus. The laptops each carry a full copy of the VCH database, which is updated during inspections. The laptops must then be brought into the office to synch once a day with the information management system at VCH, a process that can take half an hour or more per computer. To avoid this loss of productive time, VCH decided to test a wireless implementation for both efficiency and user satisfaction.

“We were looking for a solution that would make the application more usable in the field and that would cut down or eliminate the need for data replication,” explains Domenic Losito, Regional Director of Health Protection at VCH. “Basically, we wanted to be able to update the database live, in real time.”

TELUS is the telecommunications provider to all B.C. health authorities, so VCH was comfortable working with an organization they know well. The first step was for VCH to create a small group of end users and technical staff to work with TELUS in designing a pilot wireless field inspection solution. Six VCH inspectors were then provided with wireless air cards for their laptop computers, giving them high speed connectivity via the TELUS EVDO wireless network, which reaches extensively into most of their coverage area. No modification of the application was required, nor was any special integration needed.

However, the original application used by VCH wasn't created for wireless usage, so the TELUS and VCH pilot implementation team encountered a problem almost immediately. “When you first boot up in the morning, there are a lot of files that have to be uploaded,”

says Losito. “This took a lot of time in wireless mode. TELUS and our tech support worked together to incorporate a workaround where the application is initialized in live mode and connected to our LAN, before the tablet computer is taken out into the field. After that, we had no issues with data transfer times or hesitation.”

Another concern for VCH was the impact on inspectors traveling to remote areas outside the TELUS wireless coverage footprint. TELUS incorporated an application that would make any interruptions seamless to the user. As soon as the inspector re-enters the coverage footprint, the technology simply picks up where it left off, transmitting without any data loss.

Inspectors involved in the pilot have been able to fit in one or two additional inspections per day, which VCH considers a successful measure in terms of efficiency. In addition, Losito was interested in understanding how the solution could improve client service. “We want to know whether we've improved our service to business owners and to people who've registered a complaint. To me, one of the big pluses is that when we're at an establishment, we can now send a report to the client while still on site via either email or fax, affording clients an immediate opportunity to ask inspectors any questions they may have. Also, thanks to the wireless cards, our inspectors can access the Internet and our own intranet to download educational videos and presentations while they're on site and walk through them with the client as needed. It really enriches their ability to use their computers to the fullest advantage and provide more responsive service, rather than just carrying around expensive word processors.”

VCH calculated that the payback period for their investment was within 2 months. Also, they will soon be upgrading to a new Web-based version of their information management solution. With wireless enablement, the solution can be accessed anywhere, creating a completely equipped mobile field inspector. Thanks to this pilot, VCH knows that the wireless field inspection concept improves productivity, convenience and service, and will be accepted by their field staff. As a result, they have begun rolling out the wireless solution to their entire field staff, 20 inspectors at a time.