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Helpdesk software from Integrated fm's fm facts range is helping Microsoft improve levels of service to internal customers, as well as enabling tighter control of planned and reactive maintenance. The system covers the Microsoft Campus at Reading, as well as other Microsoft offices in London, Edinburgh, Manchester and Chertsey.



Microsoft has recently appointed Coflex as its facilities management provider, and took the opportunity to re-evaluate the operation of the helpdesk. The previous service provider had operated a remote system, with requesters faxing tasks through and it was recognised there was scope to change to a system that would be easier for customers to use, as well as enhancing reporting and management functions.

"We looked at several systems and decided that the fm facts Helpdesk module was robust and flexible enough for our needs," recalled Microsoft facilities manager Jim Ellison. "The new service is not only much easier for our internal customers to use, it also incorporates a range of reporting features that are proving just as user friendly. As a result, we can monitor our services more closely and keep track of the SLAs and KPIs of our sub-contractors," he added.

The helpdesk system is hosted on secure, remote servers and accessed via ASP (Application Service Provider) services using Internet Explorer. "Microsoft has very high IT security and introducing new software to the system is very complex. The ability to have the software hosted remotely on ASP made everything much easier," Mr Ellison continued.

Another major change to the system is that the helpdesk operators are now located on the Microsoft Campus, as part of the Coflex team, rather than being at a remote location. "Our customers like to hear a familiar voice and it is useful if the helpdesk operators are familiar with the buildings when they talk to customers, said Mr Ellison.

Key criteria for the helpdesk included the ability to adapt the system to work with other in-house systems already in place. "It has proved very easy to just pick out the features and services that we want from the Helpdesk package. And I've been very impressed with Integrated fm's willingness to work with us in adjusting the system to suit our needs," Mr Ellison added.

At the moment, helpdesk tasks are 'phoned through to the helpdesk operators and entered on the system via the ASP service. The company is also currently piloting a system that allows requesters to report and track jobs directly via a web browser. This procedure is being evaluated with other Microsoft companies worldwide.

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As well as improving levels of service, the new system has helped to raise the profile of the FM department within the company. “The helpdesk is one of our most important contact points with customers and we have had very positive feedback. It also helps them to appreciate the role of the FM department more,” Mr Ellison explained.

For mechanical and electrical maintenance, helpdesk tasks are synchronised with hand-held PDAs (personal digital assistants) so that technicians can communicate with the central system using the GPRS mobile ‘phone network. “The Reading site is very extensive and a lot of time was being wasted by operatives walking back to the office after each job was completed,” Mr Ellison recalled.

“There was a lot of duplication of paperwork but this has all been eliminated by the use of the PDAs, so that each job is updated as soon as it is finished, without any paperwork being generated. It also gives us better control of the PPM schedule so that we can keep it up to date and ensure the best use of technicians’ time”.

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Unsurprisingly, Microsoft uses its own Outlook software for room booking, so the company has no need for a third party resource management module. However, Integrated fm is currently working with Microsoft and Coflex towards integrating the catering features of the fm facts Resource Management module with Outlook.

The new helpdesk system was implemented in just one month and has not only been a great success; it has also been very cost-efficient. “There was no significant cost involved in transferring over to the new system, as we lease the software on the ASP service, so I am getting a better service and higher customer satisfaction for the same money,” Mr Ellison concluded.

