

Click to Connect

Achieving real 'connected FM thinking' with just a few months from project inception to going live won Chardfm and its partners the PFM Award 2009 in the e-Business category. Frank Booty describes what has made this collaboration so special

The judges said, "A new player in the FM marketplace, Chard FM has demonstrated real determination to develop 'connected FM thinking' in its operations beginning with its CAFM system developed with its partners."

CHARDFM IS WORKING in partnership with FSI (FM) Solutions, Pulsion Technology, New World Media, Northgate Vehicle Monitoring and Veecom Systems to bring together an integrated service delivery model which aligns with its company mission statement of "connected fm thinking". The system integrates all of the separate technologies provided by the partners into the Chardfm CAFM system, which is used to deliver the company's total FM service.

"This is a true partnership, with all parties presenting everything together," said Chardfm's MD Iain Murray who is also BIFM chairman. "This is actually market leading – no-one else has this depth of connection. We are miles ahead of the competition, and what put us there was our size and agility."

Chardfm, based in Glasgow, covers Scotland and the Islands, and currently stretches into Cumbria and the north-east of England. It grew 300 percent last year, says Murray, and expects to be in the £35-50m turnover band in five years' time. Chardfm won business with the Co-op Group in Scotland, which has 475 stores across the country. "We report KPIs live at all times," says Murray. "There's a live dashboard, which is the KPI of the Group's contract. The Co-op can see any jobs we are doing."

Chardfm also doubled its contract size with the Mitchell and Butlers pub chain which saw them win National Contractor of the Year for its work on a fabric maintenance contract, and twice win contractor of the month awards.

The Chardfm system works like this:

- A caller is personally greeted as the helpdesk operator is already looking at a pre-populated screen with the caller's premises and contract automatically completed.
- The operator discusses the nature of the call while populating the remaining option choices. The skill set required to respond to the call is compared, with the multi-skilled workforce database and cross-referenced with the vehicle tracking system to identify the closest available and appropriately-skilled responder.
- Closing the call simultaneously sends the job details to the identified multi-skilled technician's mobile wireless handheld device.
- The call is accepted with a screen tap, which records the response time and displays this on the client's unique dashboard.
- The vehicle tracking system can automatically email or text the client when a proximity alarm is triggered allowing them to be met on site if required, or just to inform them of how the job is progressing.

- The multi-skilled technicians tap the mobile wireless handheld device upon arrival at site, again recording the time and displaying this on the client's dashboard.
- The handheld device may require the multi-skilled technician to read an on-site asbestos register before revealing the actual task, or require them to read a risk assessment and confirm that they will undertake the work in accordance with it before revealing the actual task. They can also examine previous asset data and records including drawings directly from the mobile wireless handheld device.

Sounds straightforward but this simplified explanation belies the sophistication of the integration of several unique technologies, all which have been seamlessly brought together.

The Concept Evolution package provided by FSI (FM) Solutions is the backbone of the system, was purchased with a number of modules, including the base system: the KPI, stocks and purchase orders, workflow, dashboard, PPM planner, Concept reports and SLA modules.

The telecom system provided by New World Media is a hosted platform off-site which delivers the 0800 calls to the helpdesk operators together with a 'whisper' pre-programmed with any specific salutation. The 'call line identifier' informs the Concept Evolution SQL database who is calling, which in turn pre-populates the helpdesk screen before the call is answered.

The call is then entered onto the Concept Evolution system which in turn is cross-referencing live with the Northgate Vehicle Monitoring system and the workforce database to identify the closest available appropriate resource. This includes an understanding by the system that a multi-skilled technician working on a job which is closest, but still not complete, that they will be finished in time to meet the travel time and response SLA specified.

When the call is completed and the resource allocated the Pulsion Technology eSquiggles system draws down the fields from Concept Evolution and translates them into a mobile wireless handheld device screen-sized form, together with coupling the required data sets such as asbestos registers, risk assessment, asset instruction set, drawing, photograph and historical data, which it then pushes over the Vodafone network to the Veecom Systems-supplied Windows Mobile device. Veecom supply every new mobile wireless handheld device pre-programmed with the eSquiggles software ready to integrate each new Chardfm technician.

The eSquiggles system in turn records all



screen taps and inputs by the multi-skilled technicians prior to translation back into the Concept Evolution system on completion. The eSquiggles system also interfaces with the Concept Evolution dashboard, SLA, KPI, and stocks and purchase order modules, automatically updating all aspects of the system.

The system also costs and tracks all actions, labour and materials, and outputs this to a report pre-prepared for input into the Chardfm Sage accounting system. "It is our intention to complete the whole process by integrating this into the system over the next 12 months," says Murray, "to automatically generate management cost data and invoices."

The partnership between all of the parties who supplied the individual components of this system took only one month to setup and just over three months to deliver a 'live' system. "The open and honest way each party dealt with problems and difficulties is a testament to collaborative partnering and we are proud to have been the catalyst for this," remarks Murray. The key players in the integration project were FSI (FM) Solutions and Pulsion Technology, but all the players had a part to play.

FSI's Jon Clark and Compton Darlington said, "From the start of FSI's discussions with Chardfm, it was clear the project demanded collaboration between several best-of-breed software partners to achieve Iain's vision of the CAFM platform to underpin Chardfm's operations. The FSI project team worked seamlessly with the other software partners, including Pulsion Technology and eSquiggles, to achieve Iain's vision focussed around our Concept Evolution application."

The partnership was written down and all parties did sign up to the legal framework, but at no time was this required and indeed it was not made over complicated through entrenched positions by any party. The integration of the system also required all parties to reveal some of their unique technology to at least one other party, and this was done through confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements.

The eSquiggles data coupling technology gathers live data in the field and sends it back to Concept. Marrying FSI and Pulsion data capture software creates links between fields in the Concept system

Drew Wotherspoon, Business Development Manager for eSquiggles comments. "eSquiggles is data collection and risk assessment software, which was implemented at Chardfm early last year to enable mobile technicians to complete their jobs more efficiently onsite using PDAs. Chardfm is an innovative organisation which considers technology as central to its strategy for customer-focused FM service provision. This integration project has 'joined up' key IT systems including eSquiggles, providing an integrated service delivery model and enhanced levels of customer service."

Chardfm's vehicle fleet is supplied by Swift Vehicle Rental, part of the UK's leading commercial vehicle hire company, Northgate plc. Stuart Fairbrother, head of sales, non-rental Products, Northgate PLC, said, "Chardfm identified a need to manage all of its vehicles from a single software platform so the fleet could be more efficient and productive. Chard discussed its needs with Northgate's vehicle monitoring team, discovering that Northgate offered a solution which could also interface with its existing software system. Chardfm is now able to select the most appropriate vehicle and operative for each job as well as providing customers with an estimated arrival time."

Without doubt, the scale of this project and the timescale it was delivered in are an achievement for all parties, but Chardfm is also proud of its achievement in integrating the technology solution into the fabric of its business. The company was required to up-skill its entire helpdesk team, multi-skilled technicians, management team and financial team.

"Our continued intention is to drive sustainability throughout the service delivery and the management of the business and this tool allows us to explore new innovative solutions every week," Murray said.



(l-r) Drew Wotherspoon (e-Squiggles), Jon Clark (FSI), Iain Murray (Chardfm) and Compton Darlington (FSI)