To improve the way Signpost Housing Association communicated with their maintenance teams, we pointed them in the direction of SMS messaging

Now part of Spectrum Housing Group, Signpost is a Housing Association based in Blandford Forum, Dorset. The Association was established in 1990 under the name of North Dorset Housing Association. It was set up to undertake the development and management of affordable housing initially throughout the North Dorset area. The primary objective of the Housing Association was to purchase the Council's housing stock, manage it professionally and attentively to ensure that residents in the region could enjoy excellent standards of housing management and benefit from additional affordable housing.

The Challenges

Signpost is committed to providing good Customer Service. Their customer care charter clearly states that 'the customer comes first' and sets out guidelines on how staff are required to deal with queries from members of the public. Also included are tips on how customers can help Signpost to resolve their issues. Good communication is therefore essential.

A large part of a Housing Association's responsibility is the day-to-day maintenance and upkeep of properties. A mobile team of 250 specialist trade people are employed and managed by Signpost Services.

In 2004, Signpost identified a need for a suitable and effective means to track and communicate with maintenance teams. Information on job updates, MOT reminders etc needed to be communicated to these employees. They do not have access to computers, but all are issued with a mobile phone. Making calls to mobile phones is also expensive.

Texting is an obvious choice. Because of its popularity with users, texting is easily accepted. It is also simple and cost effective. Texts were sent by members of the office based services team on an individual one-off basis, but this was time consuming and provided no record of transactions. Plus, voicemail inboxes easily filled up, so messages were often not able to be left.

SMS technology provides a quick and robust communications medium. An SMS solution which would enable texts to be sent from the desktop to field based teams within seconds would solve the problem.

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The Solution

In 2006, ProcessFlows provided Signpost with their SMS text solution – Text Message Server. Text Message Server is fully-featured 2-way communications software developed by ProcessFlows. Text messages can be created, sent and received from within any email client and third party software such as CRM, ERP and Web, with enterprise reports and developers tool kits.

The software is easy to install, integrating seamlessly with existing systems and operates through a very clear interface. The scaleability means that Signpost can create new services as and when required to enhance their investment.

The text solution gained momentum in 2007 and is used extensively by the joint repairs team. Charlotte Notley (Opti-Time Planner) says, *"Using Text Message Server allows our operatives to efficiently report start and completion times on all jobs that coincide with our tracking system. This is a great and simple way of keeping in touch."* Repair team members notify the office by text when they commence and complete a task at the specified location. This simple method of time management gives office based managers an accurate picture of where resources are deployed and which team is available soonest to respond to another call.

The Benefits

Text messaging means that Signpost has been able to reduce operating costs by removing a lot of the consumables associated with communication – such as paper and postage and reducing their call costs to mobile phones.

An unexpected use and benefit of the text solution is as an emergency notification method. Signpost use this facility to notify IT support if there is a power failure and the UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) switches to battery.

Texting will continue to grow within Signpost. The Association is looking to implement texting in customer services. Residents will be able to text Signpost with queries or requests and notification of scheduled repairs and information updates will be delivered directly to their mobile phones.

> *"This will not detract from the personal customer service we offer our clients, either over the phone or when calling into our offices. We want to offer more choice to better improve communications and tenant satisfaction."*
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> Laina Tucker, Customer Service Supervisor