

THE PROBLEMS

- Handwritten notes on service requests and work orders
- Data on paper had to be manually entered into a computer
- Poor communication lines between managers and field crews

THE GOALS

- Eliminate the paper service request/work order sheets
- End manual data entry
- Real-time connection between managers and crews

THE RESULT

- Service request/work order information is recorded on iPads into Cityworks Server using Freeance Mobile
- Data clerks no longer enter information into a computer. They are being converted to data quality inspectors
- Managers and field crews are connected in real time



EFFICIENCY GAINS GETTING NOTICED IN HOUSTON

“It puts you in control. One of the greatest things for any man who is serious about the work he is doing, he likes to be able to say, ‘I did this... and I did it right.’ ” – Albert Brown, Houston Streets and Drainage Department inspector

HOUSTON – Productivity gains from using Freeance Mobile for Cityworks have made the Street & Drainage Division (SDD) a model for others in the City of Houston’s Department of Public Works and Engineering.

Tracy Samuel, Administrative Manager in SDD said the software connects managers and field crews in real time, and helps get work done quickly and accurately.

SDD has been managing service requests and work orders using Freeance Mobile since August 2013.

About 30 employees, ranging from top managers to equipment operators, document their work using iPads.

Samuel said that the new system is a big improvement over the days when the process from service request to completed work order was handled on a

single piece of paper with handwritten notes.

A clerk would manually enter a record of the work into a computer only after it was done.

“That was very time consuming. We had a lag in processing a lot of our work orders and service requests,” Samuel said.

He said Freeance Mobile allows service request information to be entered into an iPad in the field, linked to a work order, and assigned to the appropriate team.

The crews can then get their instructions; complete the work; record labor, equipment and materials; and close the order without ever setting foot in the office.

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It also has reduced the need for data entry clerks, who are being reassigned to inspect the quality of service request and work order data.

“We weren’t implementing it to eliminate any positions,” Samuel said. “We were just trying to become more efficient.”

“Our boss wanted an electronic process. He wanted to get away from the manual process. And that’s what we’re trying to accomplish.”

Samuel said that managers chose Freeance Mobile for the company’s relationship with Azteca’s Cityworks, which Houston already uses.

“By (Freeance Mobile) partnering with Azteca, you know how that database works and it seemed liked a seamless and easy decision,” he said.

SDD took a low-pressure approach to training crew members on how to process their work on the iPads. It started with about 10 days of training spread over several weeks.

“Most of the people who are utilizing the application and the iPad struggle with technology. We let them know that they are going to make some mistakes until they get totally comfortable.”

One practice that has been successful for the division is having the first workers trained help instruct others.

“That has helped out quite a bit because some of them are able to buddy with guys out in the field and show them how to operate the iPad along with the application,” Samuel said.

“The guys seem to be a little more comfortable (being trained by other crew members). They cannot be afraid to ask what they consider a silly or dumb question.

“Once they became comfortable with it and knew how to use it, they are pleased with it. The application is very good. Our management team is very pleased with it as well.”

After only eight months of using Freeance Mobile for Cityworks, the field



Albert Brown, Houston Streets and Drainage inspector.

crews and their managers are already noticing reduced paperwork and other efficiency benefits.

“Before the app, in some cases we had several weeks or a couple months lag time in documenting our data because it was done manually. However, with this application, now we more or less get close to real-time data on our reports,” Samuel said.

In addition, he said that the mapping capabilities have proven especially useful.

“Every time we responded to a missing (sewer) inlet cover, we would have to call in to our dispatch to get the asset number,” he said.

“With the map being available in the

field, now they can look up the asset number there on site through the GIS feature. They can create work orders from that map, highlight the asset and move forward.”

Samuel said Freeance Mobile for Cityworks has closed the gap between managers and the field crews.

“If they have an emergency, they can make the assignment through the iPad and it will hit the guys out in the field instantly. Before, they would have to call somebody or radio somebody out in the field. But now they can just make that assignment through the mobile app and those guys will get it.”

Streets and Drainage inspector Albert Brown said Freeance Mobile for Cityworks as made him more efficient.

With real-time data available in the field, Brown said he no longer has to contact dispatchers in the office for instructions.

“It puts you in control,” Brown said. “One of the greatest things for any man who is serious about the work that he is doing, he likes to be able to say, “I did this... and I did it right.”

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