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Cleaning Up with Record Simplicity

A case study on the use of the a-Log attendance monitoring system

It is probably true that few people would think to look at the cleaning industry for examples of the benefits of implementing information technology. However, Dacorum Borough Council's Housing Cleaning Department has more than recognised the efficiencies that computerisation can bring with its installation of the a-Log attendance monitoring solution.

Dacorum Borough's selection of the a-Log system began from seeing an advertisement in a trade magazine. As Steve Tarbox, the Housing Cleaning Manager recalls, "I didn't believe from the advert that a solution could be that simple!"

Recording Problems

Dacorum was seeking an answer to the problem of collecting and analysing the records that the Department holds on the 562 sites that it cleans. As Steve Tarbox explains, the previous manual system was time consuming and inefficient to maintain, "We had wipe boards in each location that the cleaner would write on to confirm that they had cleaned the area. Unfortunately this record could be easily erased or defaced and we had immediately lost any proof of the service we were providing. In addition, the cleaners were completing handwritten attendance records which were then being keyed into a spreadsheet to produce

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management reports and analysis of the properties that had been seen in the week. But still I had no real evidence that a site had been visited if a complaint arose and the Borough would invariably have to pay compensation to the resident for the alleged non-performance. In the year prior to the implementation of a-Log this amounted to around £9,000."

The a-Log system operates with two main physical components: A purpose-built handheld device and identifying buttons. The cleaner uses the handheld unit to touch the button each time they visit a location. A record is then automatically generated that details who attended the property and at what time. When the cleaner returns to base the wand is connected to a computer running the a-Log software and the records are transferred for instant reporting.

The simplicity of the system was a very persuasive factor in Dacorum's choice of a-Log and has been borne out in the subsequent implementation. The 54 cleaning staff are all using the system to register their attendance at any location. The handhelds and identifying buttons have proved to be robust and reliable tools.

Dacorum Borough Council's Civic Centre, Hemel Hempstead

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Some Surprising Benefits

Steve Tarbox has enjoyed seeing the benefits that he expected together with some surprising bonuses as he explains, "The reports generated from a-Log automatically tell me how long a location has been cleaned for and if my team have not attended a site over any selected period of time. I have also been able to identify cleaners that could be operating with greater efficiency through more appropriate route planning of their workload. In one case, a weekly average of 360 miles has been reduced to 130 miles and obviously means that now more time is being spent cleaning at a reduced cost."

The system implementation has also seen direct cost savings from the drastic reduction in claims from residents. Prior to the arrival of a-Log, the Department was dealing with an average of 12 to 15 complaints per month. Each of these had to be investigated, documentation reviewed and the results confirmed in writing to the tenant. This has now reduced to between 2 and 4 per month and, with the irrefutable proof of the electronic attendance record provided by a-Log, no compensation has been paid out since the installation. As Steve Tarbox comments, "Our investment in the a-Log system has actually paid for itself in less than 6 months. In anybody's terms that is a very rapid payback period."

Future Ideas

Based on the success of the Housing Cleaning Department, the use of a-Log has spread to other areas within Dacorum Borough. Council electricians are now proving that they are performing lighting checks every three months. Other inspection reporting that a-Log may help with is also being reviewed such as public toilet cleaning records, grounds maintenance teams checking equipment in parks and also street lighting inspections. As Steve Tarbox concludes, "The potential is there for a-Log to assist with recording and analysing any routine visit or inspection operation performed by the Council. From an operational point of view, it is very easy and, for my Department, the product has proved its worth all the way through."

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