

Construction Leader Relies on BlackBerry For Project Management

The Stellar Group is an international construction firm with a portfolio of design, architecture and engineering projects across many sectors. The ability to stay on top of details is central to their business, especially for their project managers, who are the liaison between the clients and construction sites. In October 2003, they invested in BlackBerry® to become more responsive to their clients and gain access to important corporate data.

Operating in a Microsoft® Exchange environment, they installed the BlackBerry Enterprise Server™ with the BlackBerry Mobile Data Service (MDS) feature and a third party solution from Onset Technology. About 125 BlackBerry handhelds were deployed to senior executives and project managers in the field.

BlackBerry has made a difference to the way The Stellar Group operates, improving:

- Access to communications on-the-go
- Wireless calendar helps improve efficiency
- BlackBerry replaces laptops for 90% of traveling users
- Access to corporate data improves productivity
- Global address book look-up keeps people in touch

The Stellar Group is not your average construction firm. The projects they take on are as diverse, as they are complex. Hotels, offices, healthcare facilities, colleges, distribution centers and warehouses and even power and utility support for refrigeration and food processing plants. Their business spans the U.S. and international markets such as Mexico, Brazil, Puerto Rico, the Americas and the Middle East.

The company decided to give its project managers – the people charged with delivering projects on time and to client specifications – access to wireless communications. Of the 125 BlackBerry handhelds they deployed, about half of them went to the project managers, who needed the best possible communications to keep projects on track.

In the process, they discovered that messaging wasn't the only advantage of their new wireless solution.

Industry

Construction

Situation

Project managers on construction sites were relying on laptops and dial-up connections to send email and manage calendars. The system did not keep people, who need to stay on top of details, in contact with the information they needed.

Organization Profile

Since 1985, The Stellar Group is one of the world's top ranked construction management firms, offering design, engineering, construction and mechanical services. Based in Jacksonville, Florida, Stellar employs more than 750 architects and maintains more than 20 strategic locations throughout the U.S. and serves North, South and Central America with business units in Mexico, Brazil and Puerto Rico.

Solution

The BlackBerry Enterprise Server with MDS was installed. Almost 125 handhelds were deployed – many to the company's project managers. METAMessage® from Onset Technology was deployed on the handhelds to provide file access and a global address book look-up.

Results

Project managers now manage their appointments more effectively with wireless calendaring, email and access to corporate data. They choose to travel with BlackBerry rather than laptops. Productivity and efficiency have improved.

Managing Logistics

"Our first objective with BlackBerry was giving our people online, immediate access to their calendars and email," says Todd Thomsen, ERP Manager. "Our project managers were carrying laptops and doing everything locally. On some construction sites, there is nowhere to plug in for dial up, so they were having a lot of trouble accessing information."

BlackBerry push-based technology means that, wherever there is a signal, The Stellar Group's project managers can stay in touch with architects, subcontractors and clients to ensure that projects run smoothly. The solution offers wireless synchronization, which requires no cradling at the desktop, so anyone carrying the BlackBerry handheld is assured of being up-to-date at all times.

Staying on top of appointments is a key consideration. Each project manager has an administrative assistant that posts appointments into their calendars. Updates happen frequently. "Having a wireless calendar option means they can better manage their schedules – nothing slips through the cracks," says Thomsen.

The introduction of BlackBerry has not reduced the number of laptops the company has – project managers still use them at their desks. But Thomsen points out that when they travel, almost 90% of them leave their laptops behind and prefer to communicate by BlackBerry alone. Not only an issue of traveling lighter, he says BlackBerry has offered a reliable way to send email and access important company data.

Extending the Value of BlackBerry

The Stellar Group has already begun to see the potential for BlackBerry beyond email. Taking advantage of the MDS feature of the BlackBerry Enterprise Server, they have enabled access to corporate data and a global address book.

The company has worked with Onset Technology to deploy METAMessage®. The solution allows them to convert all popular file formats, including documents, spreadsheets, images and slides to a BlackBerry friendly format. The ability to print to both network printers and fax machines has been a bonus.

"Faxing documents was one of the biggest drivers behind buying this technology." Says Thomsen. "It effortlessly converts faxes from .TIF images into text that can be read on the BlackBerry handheld. It's also one of those applications, that once you set it up, there's very little maintenance after the fact."

Another feature that appeals to the company is the global address book that is a part of METAMessage. Although everyone has a personal address book that they maintain, with a company this large, Thomsen says you never know what person you'll need to contact from the road.

"What happens is someone in the field suddenly discovers they need to communicate with a new contact in the company, but they don't have their email," says Thomsen. "They use the GET INFO feature in METAMessage to access the Exchange global address book and find all the necessary details. It has been a real boon to efficiency."

Building on Success for The Future

In one year, The Stellar Group has taken their wireless deployment a long way. The experience has offered numerous benefits, not the least of which is ease of integration with their current infrastructure.

"The BlackBerry Enterprise Server and the METAMessage server have been very low maintenance," says Thomsen. "We were able to get everything up and running within two weeks. The device roll out was simple. It's really been plug and play."

The Stellar Group currently uses one carrier to supply their handhelds and service. At the time of deployment, international coverage was not the primary issue. They report that since many carriers have agreements with each other to supply service, coverage has not been an issue. But the company now has an office in Dubai and has plans to deploy more BlackBerry handhelds for international usage.

Benefits

Thomsen cannot yet quantify his company's ROI with BlackBerry, but knows it is making an impact in key areas such as:

- Communications on-the-go
- Wireless calendar helps improve efficiency
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*Todd Thomsen,
ERP Manager*