

FCS Software Provides Seamless Billing Integration for Seattle Public Utilities

Field Collection System a Versatile Solution for Utility's Mobile Meter Reading Needs

As with many other industries, hardware and software improvements in the utility industry are continual, offering utilities frequent opportunities for process optimization. Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), a water provider to more than 1.45 million customers in the Seattle metropolitan area, has a history of investing wisely in many of these industry advancements, ultimately benefiting their ratepayers. SPU relies on Itron for many of these product and solution enhancements; most recently, conversion to automatic meter reading (AMR) with radio-based endpoints and advanced handheld technology. So when it came to finding data collection software that would complement their progressive meter reading equipment and integrate easily with their existing billing interface, SPU again looked to Itron.

OPPORTUNITY

For years, SPU has utilized Premierplus4, Itron's versatile client/server meter software that automates all aspects of reading operations, in conjunction with Itron handheld computers. These products work in collaboration with 60W ERT modules, which SPU is currently installing. Advances in technology led to the discontinuation of the handhelds in use at SPU, and Itron began offering meter reading technology with a more modern architecture. Realizing the benefits of its ergonomic design, expansive memory and contemporary battery platform, SPU chose to implement Field Collector 200 (FC200) handhelds. As Itron's hardware options evolved, so too did the corresponding software and Seattle Public Utilities was faced with selecting new data collection software.

The utility's long history of purchasing reliable and affordable solutions from Itron led them to consider two of Itron's software reading systems, Field Collection System (FCS) and MV-RS[®]. Both solutions are robust enough to support manual meter reading, walk-by automated meter reading (AMR), and drive-by AMR, but depending on the needs of the utility, they offer different advantages. Since SPU is a mid-sized utility, they decided initially to go with MV-RS.

SOLUTION

That's when Terri Izzi, Itron's senior technical consultant for implementation, visited SPU to share details of an upcoming version of FCS that would allow the customer to

CUSTOMER

Seattle Public Utilities

CHALLENGE

Implement a reading system that collects and provides data for various meter types and easily integrates with existing billing interfaces.

SOLUTION

Itron Field Collection System, the premier data collection engine for handheld and mobile AMR systems.

BENEFITS

Collection of data from multiple meter types, reliably and accurately.

Data provided to both meter data management and customer billing applications.

The Microsoft Windows-based product uses web services, client/service architecture to provide superior flexibility and ease-of-use.

Compatible with optical and water probes and integrates easily with third-party software applications for billing, meter data management and data analysis.

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Bob Alpers

Customer Billing Services, SPU

continue using the same billing interface they were accustomed to with Premierplus4, which is also what their electric utility utilizes with their G5 handheld computers.

“Interface was the big issue – we were going to implement MV-RS, but then Itron completed a product that would allow input of Premierplus4 MRI files to convert to FCS,” said Alpers. “From beginning to end, support from Itron was first-class. Terri and her team worked hard and our internal team worked hard.” This culminated in a successful implementation in less than three months. Their successful go live occurred in August 2007.

BENEFITS

When considering their purchase of FCS software, Seattle Public Utilities took into consideration these advantages:

- » Its ability to collect meter data from an array of Itron handheld systems reliably and accurately.
- » Processing handheld routes with the speed of a mainframe for far less equipment and maintenance costs.
- » Improving customer satisfaction by providing more information to handheld and meter readers in the field.

Field Collection System has worked very well thus far for SPU, said Alpers. It is meeting all their expectations and requirements for customer billing applications and has, of course, integrated with their other Itron ChoiceConnect™ AMR solutions.

Aside from the benefits inherent to FCS itself, SPU experienced further advantages through Itron’s expedient and exceptional customer support. Itron dedicated additional time during the implementation, working to help the client resolve variations between Premierplus4 and FCS.

“Our read type code wasn’t working properly because we tried to load more than 30 entries which is the maximum allowed. This application was all new to Itron so I can understand why it was missed,” said Alpers. The Itron support team provided a simple solution to this unique challenge allowing SPU to complete the project with only a configuration change.

Today, FCS is allowing Seattle Public Utilities to continue to seamlessly deploy 100W ERT modules for a water meter base of approximately 187,000 meters.

“Itron told us FCS was designed to reduce costs by being flexible, backwards compatible, easy-to-train and easy-to-use,” said Alpers. “We have found each of these statements to be true.”

SEATTLE PUBLIC UTILITIES

In addition to providing more than 1.45 million customers in the Seattle metropolitan area with a reliable water supply, Seattle Public Utilities provides essential sewer, drainage, solid waste and engineering services that safeguard public health, maintain the city’s infrastructure, and protect, conserve and enhance the region’s environmental resources.

**FIELD COLLECTION SYSTEM
VALUE SUMMARY:**

- » Investment in industry-standard technology
- » Increase meter reading efficiency with best-of-breed solution
- » Improve performance while lowering total cost of ownership



At Itron, we’re dedicated to delivering end-to-end smart grid and smart distribution solutions to electric, gas and water utilities around the globe. Our company is the world’s leading provider of smart metering, data collection and utility software systems, with over 8,000 utilities worldwide relying on our technology to optimize the delivery and use of energy and water. Our offerings include electricity, gas, water and heat meters; network communication technology; collection systems and related software applications; and professional services.

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CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

2111 N Molter Road
Liberty Lake, WA 99019
USA

Phone: 1.800.635.5461
Fax: 1.509.891.3355