



Gainesville Regional Utilities Turns to TOUGHBOOK for Digital Recordkeeping and Mobile Accessibility

Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) is a multi-service utility owned by the City of Gainesville, Florida and the fifth largest municipal electric utility in the state. Offering electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, and telecommunications services to the city, GRU has its own IT staff, giving it the autonomy to select and implement its choice of technology. For years, GRU's Water/Wastewater Department (W/WW) relied on a paper-based work management system, with field staff filling out daily work orders by hand and office staff manually re-entering the data into the computer system as they got submitted. Oftentimes, it took several months for work orders to be fully digitized due to volume and time required for data entry. Read on to see why they turned to Panasonic to standardize mobile devices and implement a fully digital mobile work management system across the department.

CHALLENGE

GRU W/WW completes numerous daily work orders every day that track labor and equipment. Across crews and tasks, requirements and data gathering can vary significantly. Previously, GRU's W/WW department relied on hardcopy work orders to satisfy its needs, affecting the timeliness of service and repairs and often making decisions difficult as real-time information was not available.

GRU W/WW uses a work management platform to maintain all horizontal assets and monitor projects daily. Before going digital, numerous, daily hand-written work orders from each crew were typed into the computer system, which could take up to 2-3 months given the backlog of documents. This dramatically reduced efficiency and delayed access to the most current information across teams, resulting in multiple crews working on the same job, duplicate work orders written up for the same job, and lost paperwork. With only two transcribers across the department, access to accurate data and important documentation was heavily delayed.

CASE STUDY



GRU W/WW needed to transition from paper-based documentation to a fully digital mobile work management platform. With this, GRU W/WW also recognized the need for standardized mobile technology across crews to optimize repairs, collaboration, and overall service.

SOLUTION

Panasonic offered GRU W/WW a highly personalized demo experience, sending various TOUGHBOOK models for each crew to test out in the field. First, Panasonic representatives brought together a user group meeting with crew supervisors, service operators, O&M managers and technical analysts within the department and gave walkthroughs of each device. Workers were able to see firsthand what each device would look and feel like, and what each is capable of. Taking things one step further, Panasonic worked with GRU's IT team to install its work management system onto each device so that workers could demo the devices in the field. With their trusted software installed, workers experienced how each computer would perform in their own environment.

For six months, each crew tested demo devices in the field to determine which model best fit their needs. What's more, each crew was supplied with accessories for each device. With cooperation from partners who offered docking solutions, hand straps, and rotating mounts, GRU workers were able to live test Panasonic TOUGHBOOK devices as if they were their own.

When deciding which technology provider to go with, GRU W/WW quickly realized that with such a wide variety of rugged devices that suit different crew functions, Panasonic was the right fit. Having previously used some TOUGHBOOK computers in the field, GRU W/WW trusted the brand and durability of the devices. But workers quickly learned there was more to TOUGHBOOK than just ruggedness — equally important are connectivity in the field, CPU power, and ProServices support. The guidance and assistance provided throughout the process made GRU W/WW's transition as smooth as possible.

RESULT

All crew leaders now have TOUGHBOOK devices on which they enter their daily work orders in the field, complete with multimedia data of each project. Because workers can input their own documentation in real time, this information is immediately accessible on the work management system and there's no lag time between work completed and data entry.

Steve McElroy, Technical Systems Analyst Coordinator at Gainesville Regional Utilities, is happy with the switch. "Since deciding to fully transition to TOUGHBOOK devices, not only

has our efficiency increased, but we also spend less time on each job and are able to respond to any customer issues much quicker than before. With a paperless system, we're able to resolve customer issues on the spot and have the data and multimedia evidence to prove the work we did. All teams within the department are so pleased to have immediate access to the data they need."

Before its partnership with Panasonic, when a customer would call with a question or concern, documentation from the specific job may have been deep on the waiting list to be transcribed. Without this data readily available, GRU W/WW could have been wrongly blamed for damage or property loss. Now, with the input of multimedia data via TOUGHBOOK laptops or tablets, GRU W/WW is able to immediately access documentation from a specific job, complete with picture and video evidence of the work completed, improving customer service.



After equipping crews with computers from the same technology provider, GRU W/WW simplified the way it receives tech support. Instead of working with various manufacturers, the department can contact Panasonic when repairs or replacements are needed, saving time and avoiding added stress. Panasonic ProServices offers quick responses, timely repairs and rental devices to replace others while they are being fixed. Reducing downtime is key in the utility industry, and now workers can get back in the field as quickly as possible.

Three years after fully transitioning to TOUGHBOOK devices, GRU W/WW continues to use various models across crews. As new TOUGHBOOK devices are released, GRU W/WW has had the opportunity to upgrade, and in response to ongoing expansion, continues to implement both CF-20s and CF-54s. Each crew continues to use different models to meet their specific needs, thanks to Panasonic's range of purpose-built devices and personalized support.

