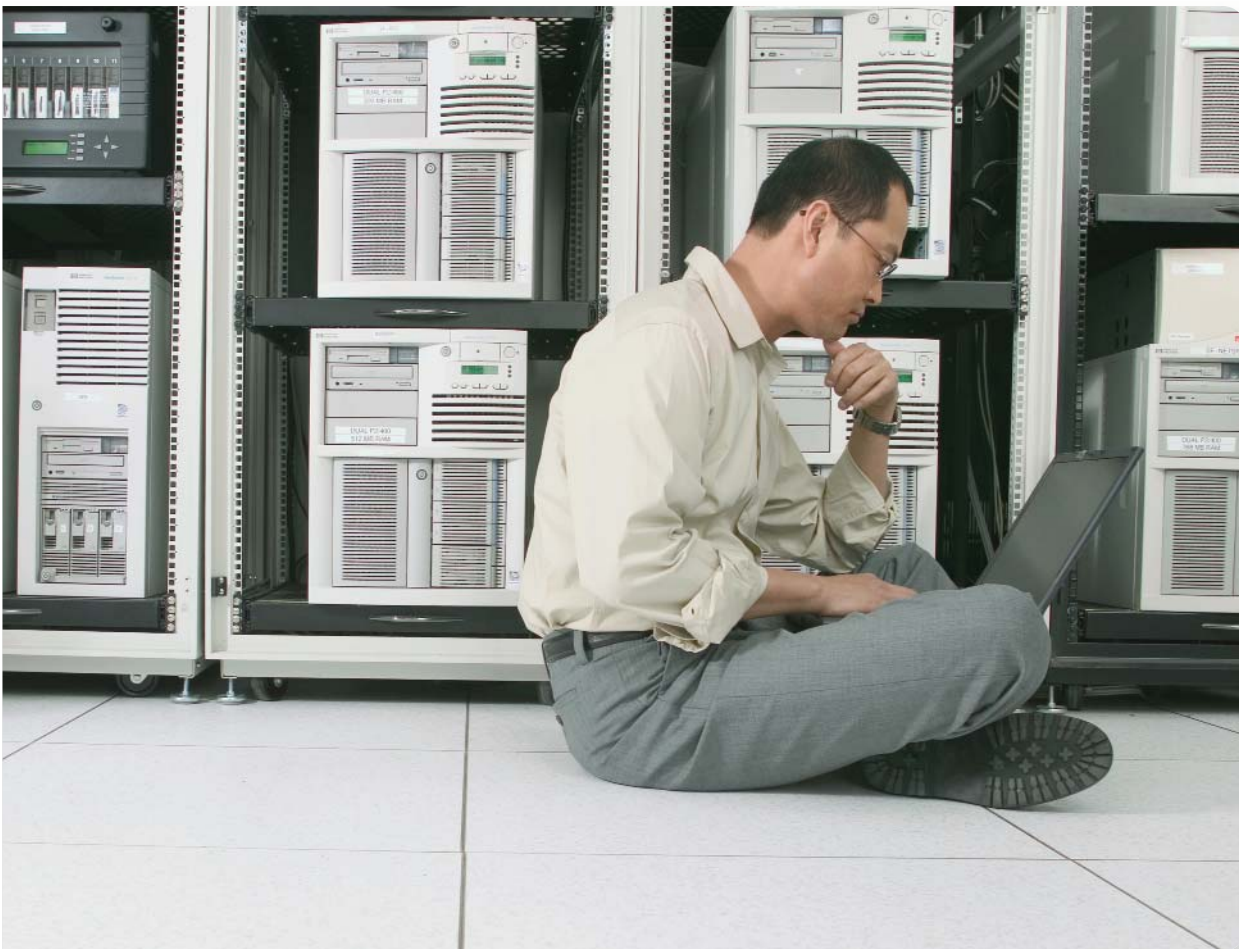


A Vodafone Business Case Study on Sun Microsystems

Effective communication with Vodafone Mobile Connect GPRS data cards



“Vodafone technology is making life a lot easier for our field engineers and we are enjoying very positive benefits.”

Andy Maitland

Field Services Team Manager for the South-West and Midlands, Sun Microsystems



Sun Microsystems is a leading global provider of industrial-strength hardware, software and enterprise solutions. In its UK field services operation, teams of engineers are employed to carry out front-line maintenance on systems at clients' sites around the country. Their tasks include everything from replacing components on site to full-scale installation of new systems.

The need

The majority of engineers are constantly moving between locations but some of them are based at larger customers' sites where Sun Microsystems provides a fully managed service. Wherever they are, the engineers need to keep in constant touch with their central office management systems.

By using bespoke handheld Field Information Appliances (FIAs) they were able to register ongoing details of calls, including attendance time, actions carried out, spares needed and any further action required. This data would be downloaded online via a secure communications link to update the central Sun case management system which kept track of exactly what each individual engineer was doing on a real-time basis.

However, the FIA devices were becoming outdated and the private communication connection was expensive to run.

Sun began looking for an alternative way of using standard wireless technology. As Sun's established mobile communications provider, Vodafone was asked to suggest a better way of doing the job.

The Vodafone solution was to use Vodafone Mobile Connect GPRS data cards linked to engineers' laptop PCs. Now Sun Microsystems' mobile field engineers have a constant, reliable and secure connection via the Vodafone GPRS network that enables them to get their work done, more effectively, while they are on the move.



“The Vodafone solution was a major change for us because we’d always been looking at a bespoke secure communications system which was very expensive. We can now just use Vodafone GPRS straight off the shelf – proven technology that is also very cost effective,” says Andy Maitland of Sun Microsystems.





“Vodafone technology is making life a lot easier for our field engineers and we are enjoying very positive benefits. The SoSmart application is doing exactly what we want and it’s still developing. The system’s success speaks for itself; from starting as a UK pilot it is now being implemented in all of our European and US operations.”

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The solution

The Vodafone Mobile Connect data card is an out-of-the-box, easy-to-use remote access solution that gives fast connection to office networks from a laptop PC via the Vodafone GPRS network. The main advantage of Vodafone GPRS for Sun Microsystems was the opportunity to replace its proprietary system with readily available standard technology, bringing significant cost savings.

Vodafone provided Mobile Connect GPRS data cards compatible with Sun Java Desktop System, so that the existing ‘SoSmart’ application already running on the Field Information Appliances could be transferred to new laptops. The resulting Java standalone application runs on Java Desktop System and communicates through GPRS in exactly the same way as the original FIA. Sun put the application on over 100 laptops used by engineers in the UK.

“The main resulting benefit of using Vodafone is cost,” says Andy Maitland. “We were using a secure link before with the old FIA that was costing just in excess of half a million dollars per annum. The GPRS cards don’t cost anywhere near that. Even taking into account the cost of purchasing the data cards, we have made a significant return on our investment without a doubt.”

A key issue in costing the solution was the difficulty of estimating the amount of data traffic the new untried system would generate. Vodafone provided a very safe way for Sun to move over to GPRS by offering a capped tariff to make the monthly costs predictable.

Apart from using the GPRS connection to manage job scheduling, engineers out in the field can now also use their laptops to access email and download technical documents that can help them in their daily operations. Detailed information and guidance on current key processes for carrying out a field repair, for instance, are now always available where and when they are needed, helping engineers to fix problems faster and without having to return to the office to collect technical information.

Sun Microsystems can also demonstrate the effectiveness of its mobile solution to customers, emphasising that with Linux, a standard Intel laptop and standard GPRS technology from Vodafone, it delivers a fully integrated system that drives engineer productivity at highly competitive costs.

In the very near future Sun is looking at ways of further increasing the efficiency of job scheduling by using a complementary application to pinpoint the exact location of engineers. This will enable the Sun Microsystems central scheduling team to dynamically allocate engineers to the nearest available jobs. This should again increase productivity and customer satisfaction whilst reducing operating costs.

The potential advantages of wider bandwidth through Vodafone’s 3G network will also come into play to give Sun’s engineers even more freedom. “The benefit of operating within a standard technology means that as Vodafone’s 3G network

expands we can use that,” says Andy Maitland. “The majority of our field engineers currently use a broadband connection. With 3G cards, we’ll be able to give them broadband speed without having to tie them down to a fixed line.”

Benefits

- › Making the transition to standard technology allows significant cost savings over a proprietary system.
- › Efficient, real-time updating of working schedules makes the workforce and the management of the workforce more efficient and productive.
- › Access to email and office documents helps engineers carry out their work faster and more effectively.

For more information visit:

www.vodafone.co.uk/business

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Job Division

Service Engineer

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Vodafone Mobile Connect



GPRS data card

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Vodafone Limited, Vodafone House, The Connection,
Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 2FN

www.vodafone.co.uk

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