

Case study

Maricopa County



At a glance

Industry: Government

Applications: Distribution Asset Tracking, Inventory Management, Document Storage

Program Results: Reduced labor requirements by \$40,000 annually, Expanded services and improved responsiveness

Wireless applications help Maricopa County expand services, improve responsiveness and reduce labor

Maricopa County, which encompasses Phoenix and is home to more than half of Arizona's population, is the fourth-largest county in the U.S. but continues to grow rapidly. Normally, the combination of size and growth would strain county services. But Maricopa has successfully met the challenge with innovation. Since implementing wireless handheld computers from Intermec, Maricopa County has expanded services, improved responsiveness and reduced its labor requirements by at least \$40,000.

Maricopa County champions best practices. If one department does something well, it becomes the central provider to all county agencies. Many responsibilities fall on the Maricopa County Public Works Department, which has county-wide responsibility for inventory, asset and document management. The department's own best practices for providing these services include extensive use of Intermec 750 Series handheld computers running multiple applications from Micromation, an Intermec Honors Partner highly experienced in the public sector.

"Through our streamlining with the mobile computers we've been able to serve more

departments without having to hire anyone into our department," said Maricopa County Public Works Procurement Manager James Baker. "The system is helping improve our accountability and has eliminated human errors."

County property is now scanned at receiving, recorded into inventory and the warehouse location automatically documented. The Intermec 750 Series computer also captures the recipient's signature for proof of delivery when Public Works Department employees deliver items to other county agencies. Workers also uses the handheld computers to manage department assets and to track the documents the county keeps in storage.

Inventory Control, Delivery Management and Asset Tracking Go Wireless to Reduce Labor Costs

"With the previous system, when a road crew went out in the morning for a repair job, they often wasted time searching for the tools that they needed. There was too much down time," said Jan Schulze, Micromation's sales manager who worked with Maricopa County. "Things are now where they are supposed to be. Property

is checked out by scanning the employee ID card and the bar code asset label with the Intermec 750. The department is saving a lot of time and is making much better use of its skilled workers.”

The Public Works Department previously had a worker manually spot-check inventory of materials used the day before. The process took about two hours, then another hour for a supervisor to review the information, update records and place any needed orders. Using bar codes to scan materials in and out has made manual inventory checks unnecessary. Baker estimates the application is saving \$11,900 in annual labor alone.

The department uses the labor savings to do more work with less staff – and to prevent more than \$30,000 in new wage and benefit costs that would have previously been required to support the workload.

“We’ve been able to provide services to more departments because of the gains we’ve made,” said Baker. “Our department staff has stayed the same. Without the handheld computing system, we would have had to hire at least one more employee to support the additional workload.”

Information is also available more quickly. Most county buildings are clustered in a campus covered by an 802.11-standard

wireless LAN protected with the FIPS-140 security protocol, which Intermec supports. Transactions within the campus are reported wirelessly from the handhelds to host systems in real time.

Easing the Burden of Annual Asset Inventory

Baker is expecting a 75 percent labor savings when the mobile bar code system is first used to support the county’s annual asset inventory. When conducted manually, the inventory takes about a month. Maricopa County estimates it will only take a week when automated. To achieve this, the Public Works Department applied bar code ID labels to approximately 10,000 of its assets valued at \$50 or more, including office furniture, computers, tools and vehicles. Micromation’s IMS Asset software maintains asset records and can be used to track consumables, issue quantity level alerts, automatically generate orders and more.

“The system also gives us a tool for employee exit interviews,” said Baker. “When an employee is leaving, our human resources department can pull up a list and say, ‘Okay, you were assigned these assets. We need to verify that you returned these before you get your last paycheck.’”

Document Management

Inventory control, delivery management and asset tracking are now virtually paperless, but Maricopa County still

has nearly a quarter million inspection reports, permits, maps, taxpayer records and other documents to manage. This task has also been made easier with highly secure wireless networking and bar code tracking. Using a single Intermec EasyCoder® 3400 printer (which is also used to make inventory and asset labels), the Public Works Department created bar code tracking labels for the county’s approximately 12,000 document storage boxes and for the files within, averaging 20 per box.

The county verifies the contents of each box every time it is checked in or out. The verification and check-in/check-out process typically took between five and 10 minutes per box. The county plans to replace manual verification with bar code scanning that will decrease the process time to about a minute, which may save thousands of hours over the life of the system.

“The bar code systems are saving time for us in so many ways. The time savings allow us to save money for taxpayers and make our employees more valuable,” said Baker. “And there are so many other things we can do with the technology.”

Maricopa County continually tries to leverage its successes across operations. It will no doubt find more uses for bar coding and wireless mobile computing, which are proving themselves to be among the best of Maricopa County’s best practices.

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