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BT

BT & Crown Castle Roll Out Complex Document Management System in Only Four Weeks to Deliver Huge Project Savings

BT Wholesale, the provider of network services and solutions to communications companies, network operators and service providers, has recently formed an alliance with Crown Castle UK to open up its network infrastructure to other mobile and wireless operators. This means that BT Wholesale, in conjunction with Crown Castle, now allows other companies access to over 650 prime location exchanges throughout the UK, allowing them to install communications equipment for their services. Under the agreement, Crown Castle leases space on the exchanges from BT Wholesale and then sublets them to its customers, while BT Wholesale manages and maintains its exchanges. Together, BT Wholesale and Crown Castle have selected the best locations to build the necessary infrastructure and enable operators such as Vodafone, Orange, to connect to the core network.

The project, called 'REACH', is vast and involves managing and sharing engineering and site information with hundreds of relationship managers, planners, engineers and security and emergency teams. To manage the vast amounts of information required to maintain and operate these sites efficiently, BT Wholesale decided to implement a document management solution from Sword CTSpace.

The business objectives of the BT Wholesale and Crown Castle alliance were to allow access to the mobile operators to help them eliminate coverage black spots and to help them achieve the extra coverage they need with their planned 3G rollouts.

In order to achieve the business goals BT quickly realised that it required a centrally located information management system that would enable all of the different personnel quick and easy access to the thousands of site drawings, maps, plans, photographs and contracts held for each exchange from anywhere in the UK. In addition, version control was of key importance to ensure that personnel always had access to the most up to date information, for both safety and time efficiency.

For example, if a microwave dish was installed on a particular location or changes in electrical wiring made, it is vital that only the most up to date version of the documentation is available. This ensures the safety of personnel going to the sites and helps to reduce repeat visits due to engineers not having the most up to date information at hand prior to a site visit.

Benefits

Reduce overall project costs

Flexible, out-of-the-box functionality

Robust information management system

Project roll-out within a matter of weeks

Reduce storage and shipping costs

Reduction in duplicate documents

One central document repository

Easily accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Reduce generation of paper documentation

Effective management reporting

“For BT Wholesale the Sword CTSpace system is central to the success of the REACH project. It enables us to operate efficiently and provides us with peace of mind that we have project control at all levels”

Mike Luzio, Systems Manager, BT

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According to Mike Luzio, Systems Manager at BT: “It was instantly apparent that a project with such a vast scope as REACH needed a robust information management system.”

Selecting the Right Solution

BT selected the Sword CTSpace solution not only for its ‘outof-the box’ functionality, but also the flexibility that it offered. In addition, BT Radio Structures, a team within BT that manages a network of over 250 radio transmission towers across the UK, had already implemented a document management solution from them. The team used the software to manage and distribute data used by mobile engineers and planners for routine and remedial maintenance and enhancements to the towers. BT’s working practices became more efficient and their manpower costs reduced significantly from 150 people to just 8. The new Sword CTSpace system also enabled BT to dramatically reduce the amount of paper generated and distributed, helping in the goal to achieve ISO14001 environmental certification, and to reduce costs by freeing up prime London office space previously used to store this information.

When Mike Luzio was tasked with the REACH project he instantly thought of the solution offered by Sword CTSpace that had delivered so many benefits to the Radio Structures team.

“We chose the Sword CTSpace solution because it was already proven within BT as it was being used by BT Radio Structure to manage the vast array of information on our 250 radio towers. In my mind there was no other option; the Sword CTSpace solution was the only system that could meet our requirements in time to achieve our business goals.”

The REACH Solution

Prior to the implementation of the Sword CTSpace solution, BT were receiving an average of 30 – 40 CDs from Crown Castle on a weekly basis, each containing hundreds of documents, emails and images. One of the initial challenges to ensure quick and easy retrieval of information was to define generic naming conventions to ensure that both BT and Crown Castle users followed the same pre-agreed format.

The system was then installed on a Sun Solaris Server located in BT’s Angel office in London. The BT server is connected to another server held at Crown Castle so that BT now automatically pulls across related information, eliminating the need for the creation, dispatch, upload and storage of thousands of CDs. Electronic mark-up, routing and approval of modifications to documents streamlines the review processes. The electronic approval process means that any change can be marked on a drawing, and updated by a draughtsman. The change then gets approved and the engineer is notified ensuring the most up to date information is provided at all time.

BT now store a vast range of information in the system including spreadsheets, Word documents such as contracts and planning approval requests, photographs, emails and drawings. BT use the system to store all of the information about each exchange so that they can see exactly what stage Crown Castle have reached with each site. This information is used not only for management reporting but also to trigger payments, which are directly related to exchange development progress.

The Sword CTSpace system currently stores over 1 million files which are accessed by some 1,300 users but this is due to increase shortly to 2,000 users with full access rights, along with another 3,000 users who will have view and print capabilities.



Reducing Project Costs

By replacing physical libraries of documentation, site plans, safety manuals, maintenance records and contract details with a database of electronic documents, BT staff can now access all of this information from one central electronic repository from any geographic location at any time. This has resulted in savings by reducing the necessity to hold duplicate documents in different departments and the costs associated with document storage, retrieval and distribution.

One of the key business benefits was enabling BT to get the REACH project underway in a very short period of time. Working closely with BT, Sword CTSpace consultants had the solution in place from concept to rollout in just four weeks. The project delivered immediate financial reward as the system enabled Crown Castle to select the key exchanges to lease space on, which in turn triggered payment to BT.

Since the installation of the Sword CTSpace solution BT has seen a number of benefits directly related to the storage and management of all of the REACH information in one place. These include the ability to ensure version control to help reduce errors and safety risks, reductions in time to upload information from Crown Castle and reduced shipping and storage costs.

Plans for the Future

The REACH project currently only covers 10% of BT's exchanges and plans for Crown Castle to lease further exchanges are already in place. In order to try and reduce decision time even further BT is now considering allowing secure access to selected REACH information to third parties, such as surveyors.

Also as a result of REACH, BT became aware of the need for the Wideband Planning Engineers, who are responsible for planning fibre optic connections between their exchanges and their customers, to create site diagrams. Sword CTSpace recently developed a cost and time effective solution called CIMSketch for the BT Wideband Fibre Records project. The solution allows planners to enter details of a new diagram into Sword CTSpace as searchable document index information.

Sword CTSpace then takes this attribute information and automatically inserts it into the title block of a blank template diagram. This new diagram is then edited using AutoDesk's AutoSketch application in which the planners can drag and drop fibre connectivity symbols onto the diagram from a predefined library. This is then saved back into the Sword CTSpace repository, where it is then subject to the revision, security, and audit controls provided by the solution. Additionally, the native AutoSketch format diagram is automatically converted into TIFF so users who do not have the native application may view it, saving BT many thousands of pounds in both potential software and training expenditure and time

In addition, BT is soon to roll out a Job Pack Solution for Wideband and other planners from BT, based on an integrated workflow solution accessing the REACH information via a portal and tracking job progress to identify areas where more resource or process improvements could be utilised to further improve productivity.

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