



Manchester City Council: Hospitality and trading services

Background

Manchester City Council is responsible for the largest economic region outside London, with over 2.5M people in the greater Manchester conurbation. The Hospitality and Trading Services (HATS) department provides services for markets, catering (including retail outlets and schools) and managing the Town hall and other venues.

Manchester Fayre is the catering trading arm of Manchester City Council and provides school meals for over 200 primary, secondary and special needs schools in Manchester. Manchester Fayre aims to provide a service that promotes healthy eating and lifestyles in schools by working in partnership with Head Teachers, Governors and parents.

Problem

Providing such a large number of school meals, to a high standard, on a daily basis requires strong management and processes. Critical to the provision of the service is the quality assurance programme that requires area managers to regularly check all aspects of the school catering operations at the point of delivery.

HATS had operated a manual system for a number of years. This required the area manager to fill out a paper form on-site and then return to the office and manually re-key the results into an Excel spreadsheet. As well as being time consuming, the process was also open to error when the data was transferred to the computer system. Further work also had to be carried out to consolidate different survey results and produce meaningful reports that departmental management could utilise.

The IT staff at HATS were committed to using technology to reduce the administration overhead of the process and invested in a number of HP iPAQs with a pre-entered spreadsheet for the area manager to complete on site. Although this helped in reducing some of the time spent on the process, the management of the data transfer and consolidation of the different survey results was still causing problems.

Solution

HATS were familiar with systems developed by APH from other such systems in local authorities and schools. Through this relationship they became aware that APH had successfully implemented a QA solution for another council in the North West of England.

After a thorough evaluation of the QAP solution HATS decided to implement it for use in their own school catering surveys. QAP is designed to run on the latest mobile technologies (HP iPAQ or XDA2 Bluetooth mobile phone). It has been designed specifically to facilitate local authorities' school catering facilities inspections, and covers all types of school: nursery, primary, secondary and special needs.

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The flexible architecture of the solution enables the parameters to be customised to meet the survey requirements of any local authority, and captured data can be transferred back to the central database while the area manager is still on-site. This saves time and prevents the usual errors that occur when data has to be re-keyed. In addition the open architecture (SQL) of the centrally held database ensures that the extraction of information for comparison and reporting purposes is extremely flexible.

APH developed a comprehensive selection of standard reports and queries to ensure that HATS management are able to access all the information they require at the touch of a button.

Benefits

The implementation of the QAP solution has greatly simplified the administration and reporting of school catering facilities inspections. Its easy to use and user friendly interface has greatly reduced the time area managers have to spend filling in forms.

Once the survey has been completed, the summary form can present the final survey results and give an overall percentage performance. The survey can then be printed on-site for the catering manager to sign acceptance of the results. Transfer of the survey results to the central database can then be quickly carried out either via a Bluetooth mobile phone and the Internet or via a cradle connected to a PC.

Brendan Murray, IT manager at HATS, commented:

“The whole system for QA surveys of our school catering facilities now functions much more smoothly than before. The automatic synchronisation of surveys to our central database means that our managers can very quickly access reports that highlight all the key performance indicators, enabling them to compare historical and geographical data.

The time saved by our area managers will more than pay for the initial cost of the system and the quality of the information the QAP system produces has greatly increased our ability to manage the business.

We are now looking at extending the use of QAP to the civic and commercial side of our catering services.”