

UK TV Station Improves Efficiency and On-Air Image with BlackBerry



As the No. 1 breakfast show in the United Kingdom, GMTV knows how to appear polished and professional on-air. Part of that equation is finding a way to reliably connect their field producers and reporters to the on-air operation. Sales and IT teams, as well as executives, also need a way to keep in touch. Until recently, they relied on mobile phones and dial-up connections with laptops.

Everything changed when GMTV deployed BlackBerry® devices on the BlackBerry Enterprise Server™, equipped with the Mobile Data Service (MDS) feature. In less than four months, they expanded their deployment and the IT team took advantage of the solution's extensibility and built an in-house browser-based application to offer access to the company's extranet for on-air run times. Plans are already in the works for developing more productivity-enhancing applications for sales and IT.

BlackBerry proved itself as the most reliable tool for wireless communications and versatility to meet the organization's business goals. Some of the benefits GMTV are enjoying with BlackBerry include:

- Improved efficiency in communicating with reporters and producers on assignment
- Streamlined scheduling through wireless web-based application
- More professional system that offers a better screen image to the public
- Increased responsiveness to advertisers
- Better management of IT resources, such as laptops

Delivering the news is an extremely time-sensitive business. When a story breaks, the flow of information between correspondents and the news operation must happen reliably, effortlessly and on-demand. GMTV reaches an audience of 25 million across the United Kingdom because of its skill in reacting to news events. For this high-pressure organization, BlackBerry has made a powerful impact on their efficiency and their public persona. The solution has been lauded as a success not only by the programme department, but also by sales and IT teams.

Industry

Media

Environment

Microsoft Exchange

Applications Deployed

Browser-based access to extranet

Situation

GMTV wanted a way to stay in touch electronically with field reporters and producers, as well as sales people and managers on-the-go.

Organization Profile

GMTV is the UK's No. 1 breakfast show, reaching almost 50% of the UK population. They specialize in children's programming and offer 3.5 hours of unique on-air programming every day.

Solution

The BlackBerry Enterprise Server was installed and devices were deployed to programme staff, sales teams and managers. Using the MDS feature, the company developed their own browser-based application to offer field personnel access to on-air running times. In less than four months, they expanded their device deployment.

Results

By offering key mobile personnel a way to communicate wirelessly, GMTV has improved efficiency and accuracy while reducing frustrations. With more people traveling with BlackBerry, they've decreased the need for laptops. The solution ultimately contributes to the professional on-air personality that is key to GMTV's success.

"We're a breakfast television station – which means we need to be news reactive," says Geoff Wright, Chief Engineer and the person responsible for the roll-out of BlackBerry. "At the end of the day, our business is about looking good onscreen to our public. BlackBerry has enabled us to become a slicker organization and look good on-air."

Before BlackBerry

GMTV's programme department comprises producers, correspondents and production managers responsible for filling the 3.5 hours of on-air programming offered every morning. Many mobile employees, such as correspondents and producers, work from other countries throughout the world. One day they could be covering a story in Iceland, and another day they'd be in Italy. They relied solely on mobile phones to communicate.

It was natural that GMTV first looked at mobile phone solutions when they wanted to improve the way they stayed in touch electronically. One solution they investigated involved sending basic messages on mobile phones. They also considered using SMS and adding 3G cards to their laptops.

"We looked at various offerings of mobile phone companies, but nothing came close to the level of functionality that BlackBerry has given us," says Wright. "Along with the flexibility of the solution, it also allows us to write our own applications and deploy them to the field."

Before BlackBerry, GMTV also used laptops to keep up with email, but the solution was not viable for a reporter on the move. Often they would have to find an Internet café, or use hotels, to get their laptops online and send an email back to the station.

The Power of Instant Communications

Working with their mobile provider, GMTV was introduced to BlackBerry. Their initial deployment involved three groups: the programme department, sales people, and managers in groups such as IT. Almost instantly, the solution became indispensable for voice, email, calendar, web browsing and access to an application developed in-house. With an increase in devices deployed in a Microsoft® Exchange environment, demand shows no signs of slowing down.

"You really can't underestimate the value of BlackBerry in the field," says Wright. "For example, one of our producers was getting footage in Iceland. Before, he had to hunt for an Internet connection to let us know about the story. Instead, he was able to communicate exactly what he had, when he had it with the BlackBerry device."

The air-time sales team was also a target group for BlackBerry. Devices were deployed to them when an important toy fair was taking place in Hong Kong. Since a large part of GMTV's programming is for children, it is essential for them to maintain good relationships with advertisers. BlackBerry meant that sales people could be at the event 10 hours a day, without having to connect to email back in their hotel rooms. More in touch meant more responsive to advertisers who are essential to the business.

The IT team was also positively affected by BlackBerry. One of the areas Wright is responsible for is the integrity of the transmission network while the show is on the air. If the signal fails, anywhere from hundreds to almost a million viewers cannot see the show. "I used to get data via fax from the contractor who manages the transmission network," says Wright. "It wasn't the most effective system because I am usually in transit when that information is arriving. With BlackBerry, I receive the information electronically on the station platform. If a transmitter fails because of a technical fault, I now know about it immediately and can act on it right away."

Throughout the organization, people have reported the value of push-based email, integrated phone and at the management level, the wireless calendar. Since many of the executives have appointments booked by assistants, updates to their schedules can be made at the office and relayed to their BlackBerry device.

When traveling, many people appreciate the convenience of leaving their laptops behind and relying solely on BlackBerry. "Some of our programme people, who write scripts, still need a laptop," says Wright. "But with BlackBerry, we have not had to increase the number of laptops we have out in the field."

Extending the Solution

GMTV recently developed a browser-based application in-house to connect to the station's extranet. They tapped into an existing database that showed run times of the various segments of the show. Run times are moments, throughout the on-air hours, when the station cuts away to live reports from the field.

"Historically, the only way a reporter could have found out what time we were going to cut to him or her story was by making a call and talking to a producer," says Wright. "But producers are busy people and weren't always available on the phone. Often, as soon as you put the phone down, the whole running order changed."

Now, reporters at a remote location log into a web page on the BlackBerry device that shows the running order of the show, so they know when they have to be on camera. This schedule changes all the time, but with BlackBerry, updates are simple. The web page is coded to refresh every 30 seconds. Reporters now have much more accurate information about when they will be on the air.

The web-based application Wright's team created involved two days of work and took advantage of the MDS feature on the BlackBerry Enterprise Server. Using the existing database already on the web, all they had to do was link up to the server and simplify some of the information to coordinate with the screen size of the BlackBerry device. With just a little effort, Wright believes the journalists have significantly more accurate information.

Going Forward

The extended solution has been so successful that GMTV is inspired to do more. Next, they plan to build a browser-based application to tie into the major newswires, such as Reuters. That means that while the journalists are on a story, they would have the ability to research other news available on the topic.

Wright sees the possibilities of out-of-the-box solutions as well. For his IT team, he's looking at solutions to remotely manage servers that would reduce the need to have a technical person onsite around the clock. For the sales team, Wright is investigating ways to tap into the existing CRM solutions to build out customer service.

Benefits

In a business that thrives on speed and accuracy, BlackBerry has proven itself as a valuable tool. Some of benefits include:

- Improved efficiency communicating with reporters and producers on assignment
- Streamlined scheduling through a wireless web-based application that ties into the show's running order
- System that provides a more professional public image to viewers
- Increased responsiveness to advertisers
- Better management of IT resources, such as laptops

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*Geoff Wright,
Chief Engineer*