

CSO Benefits from Forms Processing Solution

SUMMARY:

- CSO is an Irish government agency
- 700 staff based in 3 locations plus 150 'field personnel'
- Inpute client since 1998

SOLUTION:

- Cardiff Teleform used to design, capture, validation and export CSO questionnaires
- Today over 500,000 forms based on 17 different questionnaire types, are processed through the system annually

BENIFITS:

- CSO staff can design and implement new questionnaires and associated validation processes quickly and easily
- Streamline form capture and validation processes resulting in the reduction of the amount of staff time required to process questionnaires
- Scalable solution that handles multiple questionnaire types and form volume
- Images of completed questionnaires saved automatically as the data is processed. This allows staff instant access to all questionnaires captured for validation and customer service purposes

About the Central Statistics Office

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is the government agency responsible for the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of statistical information relating to the economic and social life of Ireland. It is also responsible for coordinating official statistics produced by other public bodies and for developing the statistical potential of administrative records.

Currently, the CSO is based in three locations with one office in Cork and two in Dublin. The office employs around 700 people in addition to approximately 150 'field' personnel who conduct household interviews and pricing surveys

The Challenge

A sizeable proportion of CSO surveys utilise paper-based questionnaires and as such, there is a significant effort involved in capturing and processing the data using traditional data entry methods.

In 1998 the CSO decided to go to tender for the supply and support of an automated data capture solution using OCR and ICR technology.

Essentially, the key drivers behind going to market for a scanning solution were the introduction of more efficient forms processing and a reduction in the time associated with manual data entry. *"There was a lot of manual intervention in the process,"* said the CSO's John O'Reilly. *"Our aim was to streamline the processes of receipting, scrutiny, data capture and validation."*

The organisation went to market to seek a solution initially for its tourism surveys as the preliminary project. *"The tourism surveys were high volume, however the forms involved were relatively straightforward and lent themselves to a scanning solution,"* said O'Reilly.

The Project

After an open tender process, Inpute Technologies were awarded the contract based on its ability to provide software, hardware, consultancy and training to meet the CSO's requirements, plus Inpute's relevant experience. Inpute's solution was based on a combination of Cardiff Teleform and Bell & Howell Spectrum scanners.

The project was implemented on a phased basis and the first survey questionnaire was up and running within a few weeks.

As part of the project Inpute was also involved in training and transfer of skills to the CSO's own development team – another reason why it won the business. *"One of the drivers behind choosing Teleform was we didn't want to be tied to consultancy long term."*

By developing in-house expertise we now have the flexibility to grow and expand the system ourselves to cater for changing business needs ” said O’Reilly.



The implementation and integration of the first two surveys was a joint venture between Inpute and the CSO. Thereafter the CSO developers took on the rest of the work thanks to the training received from Inpute. *“We’re now up to 17 different surveys and all the development work is done in-house “ said O’Reilly. “The forms are designed and business validation rules defined within Teleform’s Designer module. Once we had undergone the required training we were up and running very quickly.”*

Evolving Relationship:

The CSO and Inpute have now been working together for over eight years and the relationship between the two companies continues to thrive with Inpute providing technical support and maintenance. Any software problems the CSO encounters are immediately dealt with by Inpute. *“We also liaise with them for training and they keep us in the picture regarding developments with Teleform and in the marketplace generally.”* said O’Reilly

Benefits of the System for the CSO

Today the CSO processes, through the Teleform system, over 500,000 business survey forms annually. For those business areas within the CSO where the system is rolled out, it provides a substantially more efficient way of processing forms and capturing data.

To illustrate this better, every two years the CSO undertakes a large scale agricultural survey involving an eight page questionnaire covering over 60,000 respondents.

Traditionally, some of the processing, particularly at the data input end, would have been outsourced or additional staff deployed from other areas. When the questionnaires were received in the CSO offices they were receipted and the time-consuming process of preparing and keying the data into the host processing system begun.

With Teleform that receipting stage is eliminated. Once a form is scanned, the reference number is automatically receipted, and the data is captured and validated. *“We’ve gone from two processes down to one - all we have to do is verify any exceptions that Teleform throws up. So, there’s quite a saving and we’ve eliminated the need to outsource data entry or deploy additional CSO staff.”* said O’Reilly.

Inpute’s implementation of Teleform has also meant significant time savings in terms of staff being freed up to perform other duties. In addition the CSO business areas have desktop access to all form images stored on the network. *“Access to form images is of major benefit in validating data and in handling any communications with our respondents.”* said O’Reilly.

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