

# ESB streamlines timesheet capture process

## About ESB Networks

ESB Networks is a separate business unit within the ESB Group which serves all electricity customers in the Republic of Ireland. It employs in excess of four thousand staff throughout the country and is responsible for the distribution network which includes 170,000 transformers, and almost 150,000 kilometres of overhead lines and underground cables. To ensure the high quality of service remains, over €3.5 billion is being invested in infrastructure in Ireland by ESB Networks in the coming years.

## The Challenge

Given the nature of the business, ESB Networks have over 2,500 staff who work in the field maintaining and enhancing the electricity network. Every week, each staff member submits a timesheet containing overtime, allowance and costing information.

The ESB's payroll and costing teams faced a number of challenges in 2004. The organisation wished to centralise its four geographically dispersed payroll offices each of which had a different organisational makeup. Its offices were at the time located in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Sligo.

In addition to calculating payroll data accurately, the company also needed to produce 'cost centre' information. With the electricity sector now regulated, ESB Networks needed to produce a financial report on all the tasks undertaken, by 'cost centres'

At the time ESB were using timesheets which were completed manually, verified and sent to the appropriate pay office. This was hectic, physically challenging work that spanned the week. Payrolls would be run every Tuesday and payroll, costing and allowance data would be inputted manually from Friday to Monday.

"The centralisation of Networks payroll operations to one location presented a number of challenges" said Billy Boland, Payroll Systems Development Manager. "There was the physical job of keying in the information and the utilisation of the knowledge of the people in the four separate offices – now all of that was going to be needed in one office and we had approximately 2,500 timesheets to get through on a really tight time schedule."

ESB Networks soon realised that this would be an impossible task to get all the timesheets delivered unless it allocated extra staff, so it began to look at alternatives.

## The Project

After considering outsourcing the data entry function, ESB decided to use a scanning solution and visited a number of companies engaged in that market.

At the end of that process ESB selected Inpute Technologies and their recommended solution based on Cardiff Teleform and Inpute Document Server software.

Inpute began the process of writing the specification and assisting the ESB redesign the timesheet to maximise the benefits of OCR and ICR technologies.

The specifications for the timesheet had to be done in such a way that the rules and knowledge of the process could be automated. This was vitally important as these details ensured the correct payments were made. The specifications also included validation of payroll rules and being able to determine what time is overtime, double time, time and a half and so on. In addition the costing data had to be accurate to ensure correct and valid data would be submitted to the Regulator.



“We had to increase the detail and accuracy in the allocation of costs to support a regulatory environment whereby program reporting to the regulator is a critical business requirement. So with that in mind we had to have two streams of activity – one payroll stream and one costing stream.”

“I’d say the specification write-up, analysis and documentation from Inpute was excellent,” said Boland. He also admitted that previously the costing output would not have been a dominant issue, as staff payment would have been given the highest priority in a narrow processing time window. While recognising the above constraints and a lack of automation, the business decided the new system would have to reinforce costing rigour

The whole project was a technical challenge for ESB and Inpute as it involved using three different servers and multiple databases platforms including Oracle. Initial hardware and software issues were ironed out and with Inpute in full support mode the project moved along and has had a few adjustments since the initial completion.

ESB Networks timesheet capture solution now takes full advantage of forms recognition technology. Weekly timesheets are scanned between Monday and Tuesday at ESB’s payroll centre in Dublin. Once scanned, data from each form is extracted using ICR (hand writing recognition). Characters that can not be read by the system or data that fails business logic (for example an invalid cost code or staff number) are flagged for review by the relevant team. Payroll related fields are marked for review locally while costing data is reviewed by the Limerick and Cork based costing team.

In addition to producing validated cost centre data, the solution also calculates and exports to ESB’s payroll system validated payroll data including overtime and allowances. Timesheet images and their associated indexes are exported to the Inpute Document Server to facilitate future retrieval.

Management information and audit logs are available from the system via a thin client interface.

The result is a solution that captures, validates and exports both payroll and costing data from 2,500 handwritten timesheets, within the weekly payroll processing window.

“The system is very good. We’ve had to do some modifications along the way for minor things and Inpute responded to that very well,” said Boland

### **A Beneficial Relationship**

After such a huge and complex project the biggest yardstick of Inpute’s success is the fact that ESB Networks has decided to continue to use the Inpute scanning solution in its SAP Payroll implementation in 2007. “They did a good job for us the first time around. In fact we saved five man years thanks to Inpute’s work” said Boland.

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