

How can local government make savings and improve services? Go mobile, says Anuj Khanna, CEO, Wireless Expertise

If “Quantitative Easing” is out of the question, how can local councils cope with a burden of spending against limited ability to raise council taxes? This is the question going through the head of every local authority chief where they are trying to improve standards of services and cut spending.

We at Wireless Expertise estimate that the UK government can save up to £9 billion a year by making better use of mobile technology and flexible working practices.

The Mobile Data Association carried out a survey of 392 local authorities in England and Scotland and received responses from over 1,200 employees. 85 per cent of the respondents acknowledge that there is already a project in a pilot stage where their local authority is considering mobile and flexible working.

50 per cent of the respondents, however, felt that embarking into mobile had risks and were not confident about the success of their projects.

Let us bust some myths about mobile as the technology has come a long way in the last five years.

Mobile Myth no 1: Mobile is expensive

With a cost of text message costing less than ten pence it is far cheaper than post and voice calls.

With a 5GB 3G data card (some call them dongles) costing just £10 per month, it is far cheaper to enable mobile working for field employees than asking them to complete paper trails and drive to the office to submit reports and melt the arctic with propped up CO2 emissions.

Mobile Myth no 2: Mobile is complicated

Grandmothers and teenagers use it, using mobile cannot be simpler.

There are more phones than people and Brits send over 65 billion text messages a year. 25 per cent of the UK population use mobile internet services. You can send an SOS if your boat has capsized, book a taxi, vote for Big Brother, book concert tickets or divorce your spouse with a simple text message.

Myth busting

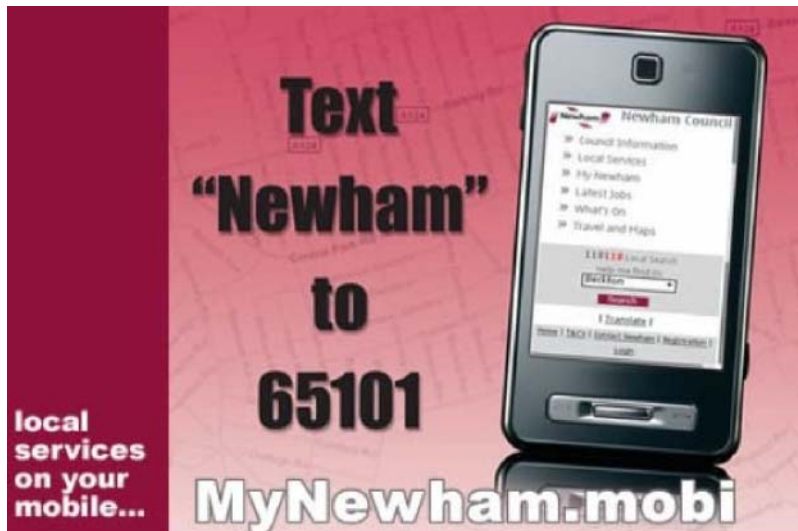


Mobile Myth no 3: It needs specialist software

Unlike IT vendors, mobile application service providers focus on services rather than expensive software development.

There are specialist service providers for text messaging, WAP portals and field service automation, which can provide packaged mobility solutions rather than scoping large IT projects.

With the widespread availability of 3G data cards and wireless LAN many existing applications can be mobilised. Given below is the list of some examples where mobile technology is being put to good use in the public sector by improving services and cutting costs.



The London Borough of Newham, in partnership with Transport for London, has unveiled a new service for its residents, visitors and businesses. They can now access all the council services they need, from being able to find jobs, to reporting graffiti, on their mobiles, through one simple mobile website.

The service not only enables access to council services on the move, but also delivers a range of local information, maps, access to local and national transport information, search from directory enquiries company 118 118, or even allows you to plan a night out with the latest pubs and clubs news and reviews.