

# On the move



**M**obile software solutions are increasingly being used in the cleaning sector for a whole spectrum of applications. They can help a contract cleaning company quote for a job, for example. They can also be used for accounting and payroll functions; they can update reports and help re-order products as well as calculate costs and carry out health and safety checks.

One of their chief uses in the cleaning industry, however, is to keep an eye on staff to maximise productivity. One such product is Feedback Data's Nahmad staff checking system. According to technical sales director Hugh Mackie: "Monitoring the workforce has always been a key issue for companies keen to save money. By installing a system that automatically monitors staff you avoid the need for someone to have to drive around between customer premises to check up on employees."

The Nahmad system comes in three formats: an iButton version; a fingerprint recognition system and a new NFC (near field communications) system. NFC allows contactless data transactions to be carried out between two devices held a few centimetres apart.

"We launched the NFC version by popular

Which mobile software solutions are proving to be most popular in today's workplace? Ann Lafferty finds out which products are most in demand - and asks contract cleaning companies how software solutions are helping.

demand from countries such as Finland and Estonia," said Mackie. "The advantage of NFC tags is that they can be used for other applications as well and can be supplied in a badge format with the staff member's name and even bearing the company's colours."

The iButton Nahmad consists of a disc around the size of a coin that can be put on a key fob. This identifies the member of staff and the information is sent along with the date and time to a host that cross-references where the person is and what job they are on. The third format - the fingerprint recognition version - is currently the most popular with customers, according to Mackie.

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"Once you have taken the fingerprint template there is no cost involved, which is a major selling point," he said.

He adds that any privacy fears relating to employees' fingerprints being on file are unfounded. "The Nohmad system does not actually take a picture of the fingerprint – it produces a mathematical template," said Mackie. "So if a member of staff were to commit a crime they could not be identified from their fingerprints. However we would be able to tell if they were the last person to leave the building."

He claims that staff monitoring via mobile software has become an essential part of any cleaning company's remit. "People are investing heavily in this type of technology," says Mackie. "It saves money and cuts down on fraud. It also proves that people are getting value for money and their staff are where they say they are."

According to managing director of Business Performance Geoff Jones it is his company's quality monitoring systems that are currently most in demand among customers. The CheckMate system allows the contractor to make quality checks and record any faults via an android device.

"A key advantage is that most mobile devices have a built-in camera and often a GPS function as well," said Jones. "This means that when an operative takes a photo it records the date, time and location of any problems that may occur."

#### Record changes

The system also allows faults such as cracked windows and broken light bulbs to be noted, and enables operatives to record when a room changes in specification.

"If a store room is turned into a treatment room or office, for example, the cleaning regime is going to change. Only a minor amount of cleaning will be required in a hospital storeroom whereas cleaning will be much more critical in a treatment room. Such changes of use may not always be reported but staff will naturally take longer to clean a treatment room, which means there may be time management issues."

Customers who use the Site Manager application from CleanLink particularly appreciate its versatility, according to founder

Norman Haines. "Managers working on site have immediate access to all the information they need from stores to staff contacts – and even the days when rubbish is collected at individual locations," he said. "Site Manager also helps companies to deliver on their 'green' aims as it promotes a more environmentally friendly way of working by using less paper. And it allows managers to use their time more effectively since they always have the data they need on them and there are no more inconvenient trips back to base to update records and print out reports."

#### Paperless office

The Site Manager system stores this information on an iPhone, iPod, iPad or Android smartphone or tablet. "Staff recruitment and appraisals can be carried out easily and there is the facility to take photos and add them to reports to illustrate problems or explain actions," said Haines.

Peartree Cleaning Services is among the companies currently using the Site Manager application. Managing director Bradley Reames says: "The system improves efficiency and helps the environment by encouraging a 'paperless' office. In 2011 we reduced our paper purchase volume by 44 per cent against 2010."

He says he finds the 'traffic light' function of the system particularly useful since this alerts the company's operational managers to any problems – for example, a red dot indicates that an audit is overdue while an orange dot advises it is due in a week's time.

"Data can easily be recorded and site photographs added in the knowledge that this information will be captured and reports will be compiled and saved," he said. "The system also helps provide training for our staff; generates documents and reports for our clients and facilitates the e-ordering of cleaning products and consumables."

Another contract cleaning company that finds mobile software solutions invaluable is OCS. The company has been using an internally-devised PDA system since 2008 – specifically for health and safety purposes in the window cleaning sector.

"The OCS system is tailor-made to our business and fits the window cleaning industry perfectly," said OCS cleaning director

Paul Thrupp. "Communication between managers and operatives are enhanced through improved access to information on works completion and better site-specific health and safety information. Meanwhile, better site visit records and training information are provided."

The system also helps to carry out risk assessments and pre-work safety inspections, and an electronic sign-off by managers is required before cleaning can be carried out.

According to Constilium Technologies ceo Colin Reid it is the freedom and flexibility of the company's software systems that are most valued by his customers. Its TotalMobile Enterprise Mobility Solution allows remote cleaning staff to stay connected with back-office systems and they can fill out forms, order new materials and access information about their next job while their supervisors keep track of them in the field.

"The fact that operatives have access to schedules of upcoming jobs on a mobile system saves time and fuel and facilitates more flexible working," said Reid.

#### Automatically updated

"Meanwhile the ability to fill out forms saves on administration since back-office systems are updated automatically. And remote staff can access equipment manuals, maps, case histories, health and safety info and any other documentation they may need to complete a job."

The latest version of the software – TotalMobile 5 – was launched in February and is designed to work across all major mobile platforms including Android, iPad and iPhone, BlackBerry and Windows.

"This gives flexibility of choice for various types of remote workers across an organisation and makes the solution 'future-proof' in the ever-changing mobile hardware market," said Reid.

"In the current economic climate many organisations are seeking to reduce their cost. Mobile technology is one of the few ways savings can be made without impacting on the services provided to customers."

CleanLink's Norman Haines adds that a good mobile software solution can even help to boost business. "Our clients tell us that the Site Manager app is actually helping them win new business because their clients have been very impressed with what it can deliver," he said.

And as far as the economic side is concerned, Business Performance's Geoff Jones goes one step further in his own plans for the future. "Many of our key target markets such as hospitals and government departments have little money, and we feel price should not be a prohibiting factor for markets that need our systems," said Jones. "So we want to make them more affordable and within reach of institutions that require them."

*Les logiciels mobiles peuvent servir à une diversité d'applications de projets, en particulier pour l'établissement de devis, le contrôle de l'équipement et de la sécurité des lieux, le calcul des coûts et le contrôle d'équipes de nettoyage. Quelles sont les applications les plus demandées dans des contextes pratiques actuels? Nous interrogeons des fournisseurs de logiciels et des entreprises de nettoyage sur le valeur des solutions logicielles pour les activités de secteur.*

*In der Reinigungsbranche gibt es vielfältige Einsatzmöglichkeiten für mobile Softwarelösungen. Infolgedessen Abgabe einer Preisangebot für einen Auftrag, Prüfung der Gesundheit und Arbeitssicherheit, Kostenrechnung und Überwachung von Reinigungszeiten. Aber welche Anwendungen haben sich am häufigsten erwiesen? Wir fragen Softwareanbieter und Reinigungsunternehmen, wie sie in ihrer Arbeit von Softwarelösungen unterstützt werden.*

*Le software mobili di settore possono essere utilizzati per numerose applicazioni nel settore del cleaning, per esempio fare il preventivo per un lavoro, effettuare controlli di salute e sicurezza, calcolare i costi e monitorizzare le squadre di pulizia. Ma quali applicazioni si rivelano più apprezzate nei luoghi di lavoro di oggi? Chiediamo ai produttori di software e alle imprese appaltatrici di servizi di pulizia in che modo le soluzioni di software siano di loro aiuto.*