



## **CASE STUDY:** Dorset Probation Area

### *Automating a Basic Skills Assessment Questionnaire Using Pumatech's Satellite Forms® Software*



**NATIONAL PROBATION SERVICE**  
for England and Wales

"With no time to fill the form in properly, accuracy was quite low, and it was a costly questionnaire to process. Pumatech offered very good advice plus excellent follow-up support. Their expertise was crucial to a successful project plan and forms development. Satellite Forms Server gave me centrally-managed access and application ownership. I liked the user interface and the ease of generating forms."

– Andy Morgan,

IT systems support officer,  
Dorset Probation Area

#### *The Company: Dorset Probation Area*

Helping offenders stay out of trouble is the responsibility of the National Probation Service for England and Wales. Established under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act in April 2001, the National Probation Service is responsible for 42 Probation Areas. Its aims are to protect the public, supervise offenders, and prevent recurring offenses. Dorset Probation Area has 40 probation officers looking after 2,021 offenders. Nearly half of these offenders suffer from poor literacy and mathematical skills. In an effort to accurately measure their skill levels and make improvements, Dorset is fielding a new questionnaire developed by Oxford University's Centre for Criminological Research. If the questionnaire achieves positive results at Dorset, the program will be made available nationwide.

#### *The Challenge: Paper-based Forms*

On a monthly basis, the Dorset staff is required to complete 200 four-page questionnaires that measure offender's reading, writing, and mathematical skills to assist in pre-sentence reporting. The paper-based nature of these forms caused several problems, such as questions often being skipped, scores sometimes not being calculated, and completed forms destined for key departments getting misdirected. Incomplete assessments compromised service standards, which, in turn, had budgetary implications. The main objective was to increase accurate completion rates for a better understanding of offenders' needs. Although a PC-based form seemed ideal, probation officers preferred eye contact and correct body language with violent offenders. Desktop and laptop PCs were ruled out in favor of Palm OS® handhelds.

#### *The Solution: Pumatech's Satellite Forms Software*

To meet its objective, the Dorset Probation Area required a handheld application that was cost effective and robust, with an easy-to-use graphical interface and the ability to have two-way interchange of data between the handheld and Lotus Notes. Following a short trial alongside the paper forms, several officers switched to Handspring Visor handhelds in March 2001. Offenders' personal details are automatically extracted from the court and offender database into an assessment project database. The questions, held in the same database, are linked to the downloaded form, ensuring the latest version is always used. The electronic questionnaire, created with Pumatech's Satellite Forms software, consists of a series of check boxes and drop-down lists for multiple-choice answers. The form, once completed, is HotSync-ed back into the Lotus Notes database via Pumatech's Satellite Forms Server software and made available county-wide within minutes. Users consider the system an effective and productive tool for accurate assessments. Information is now easily shared with key departments including Research & Information and Education, Training & Employment. Offenders gain by being better understood and receiving appropriate training. Full deployment across Dorset Probation Area is the next step.



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