



Longboat Key Public Works and Utilities Department

For Longboat Key, consumption activity is key to speeding up service, tracking water by the hour

FREQUENT POPULATION TURNOVER REQUIRES MORE ACCURATE, FREQUENT DATA

Longboat Key, Florida is close to many people's idea of paradise. Unless you're spending nearly a week every month driving a golf cart through sun, wind, and rain; leaving the cart by the side of a busy road; and then using an unreliable touchpad to manually read the majority of the island's 3,000 water meters. Until 2013, that was the case for the Town's Public Works and Utilities Department. Adding to the difficulty was the mix of aging meters – some at least 30 years old – along with a limited data logging system. "It would only go back 30 days and was kind of spotty," said Service Worker Brad Sicard. In a community with an extremely transient population throughout the year, this was inadequate.

For Public Works and Utilities Director Juan Florensa, another problem was "the inability to perform audits to confirm high reads, or to communicate to residents what had been happening with their water." Faced with these challenges, the Department spent a year performing research on automatic meter reading (AMR) technologies, interviewing other cities and towns about the systems they used, before sending out a request for proposal.

WHEN NEPTUNE® ANSWERED THE REQUEST, LONGBOAT KEY LIKED WHAT IT SAW.

"Specifically, there was the ease of use, no need to program endpoints, the customer support, the long battery life [of the combination encoder register/meter interface unit], and the ease of installation and maintenance," said Florensa.



CUSTOMER

Public Works and Utilities Department, Longboat Key, Florida

SERVICE TERRITORY

Longboat Key is a town in Manatee and Sarasota counties along the central west coast of Florida. The town's population was 6,888 at the 2010 census.

SOLUTION BENEFITS

Mobile reading takes five hours/month, a 90% reduction

Identified improperly-sized meters, recovered revenue

Improved customer service with 96 days' hourly consumption activity

Opportunity to migrate to fixed network AMI when they are ready



Other advantages Neptune offered, according to Sicard, were the quality control and support that result from having its own foundry and manufacturing facility in the U.S. He added, “In choosing our system, we kept in mind that it could easily be converted [from mobile data collection] to fixed network.” Working with Neptune Senior Territory Manager Terry Gullett and distributor Sunstate Meter & Supply’s Jeff Kimbrough, they found their answer – an R900® System for mobile AMR based around the E-CODER®)R900i™ integrated absolute encoder/RF MIU.

GATHERING CUSTOMERS’ HOURLY DATA WITHOUT SPENDING EXTRA DAYS READING

Beginning in early 2013, all meters were replaced and the Neptune System was installed. Immediately, accuracy improved. “We found that some of the larger meters [from the old system], like those in condominiums, had either slowed down or weren’t the proper type for the installation. Revenue started straightening out that we’d been missing over the years,” said Sicard.

In addition, the R900 System’s reverse flow detection has already caught several major backflow events early, where a plumber had installed meters backwards.

In spring 2016, the last large meters were changed out, completing the implementation. Gone is the golf cart, along with walks along the side of the road. “It’s a lot safer now, with our staff using the truck,” Florensa said. And with the MRX920™ mobile data collector, it’s a lot faster as well. “We’ve gone from reading six days a month to just five hours a month, gaining five-and-a-half days each month of a full-time employee who can go do things we struggled to do before,” including service calls, needed water system maintenance, and effective consumption activity gathering.

With its Neptune System, Longboat Key can now go back three months to get a fuller profile of a customer’s water consumption – especially useful when a sizable portion of the population is comprised of residents with vacation homes. Upon a customer’s request, Sicard can schedule an appointment at their home to gather consumption activity data. Equipped with his R900® Belt Clip Transceiver, and either pairing it with a handheld unit or a tablet running the Neptune NGO™ app, he can “show the customer right there, while I’m there, their usage on a chart. We can go back hourly or daily. It’s nice to look at, and I can even email it to them.”

“We’ve seen an uptick in calls from condominiums on their usage,” said Florensa. “When they question their bills, I can tell them that they’re finally getting a true reading, saying, ‘You’ve been getting a break for the last ten years, but this is what you owe.’ Before, we could not document usage and time – we couldn’t tell them the day [a leak or excessive consumption] happened, much less the exact time. Now we can bring up their hourly usage for a whole week or month and print it out for them as a PDF. I can ask a homeowner, ‘When does your pool man come?’ And then I can show them where he left a hose on sometime after ten o’clock. Then they know it happened on their side of the meter, not ours. It gives them trust in our staff.”

“We gather consumption activity histories almost every day, about ten times a week,” said Sicard. “We get people asking for them, newcomers as well as long-term residents. Often they’ll have four or five bathrooms they don’t even visit, and that’s where we’ll find it’s been a toilet running all that time.”

ROUTE TO METERING EFFICIENCY STARTED WITH MOBILE AMR

The switch to Neptune has resulted in “a lot better efficiencies,” according to Sicard. Whereas the prior system “had a little bit of everything” – a hodge-podge of older meters and components that grew obsolete – the R900 System provides for continuity in more ways than one. “It made a lot of difference to us that Neptune [mobile and fixed network] systems have the same set of meters and registers, if we wind up moving to AMI [advanced metering infrastructure]. I don’t want to have to take people out of service, and we don’t have to with Neptune.” In the meantime, he’s satisfied with the new system. “It’s meeting all our expectations.”

Neptune’s N_SIGHT[®] software has seamlessly integrated with the Town’s finance software, while providing efficiencies of its own. “We can run reports for high usages, leak detection, backflow detection, and final reads for move-outs,” said Florensa.

Citing the increased productivity, improved safety, ability to expand upon a flexible, migratable system, and consumption activity that enables the Department to “show customers when a leak happened, almost to the minute,” Florensa is extremely pleased with Neptune metering technology. “It’s fantastic. Looking back, I should have done this a long time ago.”



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neptunetg.com

Neptune Technology Group
1600 Alabama Highway 229
Tallasse, AL 36078
800-633-8754 f 334-283-7293