



## From local energy supplier to modern service provider

Toughbook notebooks and Toughpad tablets support Stadtwerke Bielefeld to digitize processes

Stadtwerke Bielefeld is transforming its role as local energy supplier and evolving into a market-oriented service provider. This new focus requires optimized processes, quick reaction times and better internal procedures. As part of the preliminary MDC Networks project for mobile data collection, the company selected robust notebooks from Panasonic to digitize processes and obtain mobile data access.

Digitization boosted productivity and lowered overall costs.

Drasko Rimac

**TOUGHBOOK**



For Stadtwerke Bielefeld, everything began back in 1856 with just one small gasworks plant. This went into operation at the same time as the city's first gas streetlights. In the 150 years that have followed, the company has been deeply involved in building Bielefeld's urban infrastructure. Today the company employs around 2,200 people and generates a turnover of €630 million, making it one of the larger municipal suppliers in Germany.

The service provider now supplies the city of Bielefeld with electricity, gas, water and district heating - reliably and safely. It attaches particular importance to environmental protection and family-friendly personnel policies.

#### **Mobile data replace a paper jungle**

The utility company recognized the potential offered by digitization right away. Prior to introducing a mobile solution for field service technicians, many of the company's processes were also handled on paper - with all the resulting disadvantages. "The planning processes and, in particular, the follow-up work were time-consuming. We had a high error rate because of switching back and forth between media and because of the slow flow of data," explained Drasko Rimac, who heads technical support for the Toughbook and Toughpad devices at Stadtwerke Bielefeld. "If the printed paperwork for the job happened to be in a repair vehicle, it couldn't be updated by any other employee. This was very inflexible."

To improve work processes, the company wanted to give employees the ability to access, process and share data with headquarters even when on the go. The opportunity to reduce costs, increase efficiency and improve services convinced the utility company to digitize.

#### **Comprehensive, user-friendly solution**

Stadtwerke Bielefeld selected a comprehensive solution comprising a call-out management system equipped with SAP MRS (Multi-Resource Scheduling) as well as robust, reliable hardware and the NEO Mobile Suite (NMS) software. This solution would display processes currently being used and create new collaboration opportunities. "Panasonic and NEO SOLUTIONS met all our requirements," Rimac added. Thanks to the NMS mobile application from the FRITZ & MACZIOL Group subsidiary NEO SOLUTIONS, Bielefeld Stadtwerke was able to take advantage of a particularly user-friendly front end that uses SAP middleware. SAP MRS also increases transparency in resource management.

#### **Predestined for the supply industry**

Following an evaluation phase, the company initially opted for the Toughbook CF-18 in 2007. With its convertible design, this model can be used as a notebook and as a tablet. Its robustness, which ensures reliability even in a working environment hostile to computers, played a pivotal role in this decision. The devices are used when repairing faults in the pipe network, when installing pipes and other systems, during maintenance and when changing meters. Because the notebooks are used right next to pipe trenches as well as in them, they experience increased vibrations, dirt, rain and extreme temperatures as well as a greater risk of being dropped. The robust, IP-certified devices with a Full Ruggedized protection rating hold up to these demands, making them especially suitable for the harsh conditions encountered by an energy supplier like Stadtwerke Bielefeld.

#### **Considering an investment security**

Robustness was not the only criterion favoring the selection of Panasonic. "Our aim was to introduce devices offering a balance between total cost of ownership and investment security," Rimac explained. The special devices from Panasonic are, at first glance, more expensive than consumer devices. Their breakdown rates are, however, much lower and their operating life is decisively longer. The entire Panasonic product range is geared to the needs of corporate customers - with business-relevant interfaces, easy maintenance and accessories than can be used throughout a number of product generations. Panasonic attaches great importance to customer service as well. It was, for example, able to meet the special requirements of the Stadtwerke's mobile workstations, jointly develop suitable solutions and quickly implement them.

Because Panasonic's wide product range covers various application scenarios, Stadtwerke Bielefeld selected Panasonic when purchasing hardware for other areas too. "After we introduced the first Toughbook devices during a pilot project, we rolled out additional Toughbook models over several years to meet requirements as they arose. It was important here to take into account various software solutions and areas of use. In view of this, we deployed various types of devices (CF-19, CF-53, CF-H2)," Rimac explained. "In this way, we could meet a wide spectrum of requirements with one device standard - all from a single manufacturer."

### **Users at the heart of product development**

Devices from Panasonic have been in use at Stadtwerke Bielefeld for eight years now. The devices have met with broad acceptance among the employees who use them every day. Most users cannot imagine life without their Toughbook now. Panasonic's ongoing consideration of customer feedback when developing its products was particularly worthy of Stadtwerke Bielefeld's praise. After all, this ensures the mobile computing devices meet user requirements: "Users appreciate the fact that Panasonic continuously refines its devices," Rimac said.

Productivity increases were achieved not only in back-end processes but also by optimizing call-out management in planning processes. The digitization of countless work steps involving paper-based forms helped to optimize the entire process chain, planning processes and follow-up work. Information is available at all times, even if field service staff are already on the road. The fact it's no longer necessary to switch between media has reduced error rate.

### **Toughpad tablets in the future too**

"The Panasonic device portfolio lets us equip every unit of the Stadtwerke Bielefeld Group with mobile devices that meet our requirements. We're planning to procure additional devices as they are needed in the various units," Rimac said. In particular, he sees a growing need for the durable Toughpad tablets. "We're especially interested in the Full Ruggedized-protected Toughpad tablets because they are largely based on Windows operating systems and are suitable for many of our applications."

The first field tests with the 10.1" Toughpad FZ-G1 were deemed a big success by all users and have fully met expectations. Stadtwerke Bielefeld has already identified specific areas of use for the robust Toughpad tablets FZ-G1 and FZ-E1 (5" tablet with telephone function). Stadtwerke Bielefeld has already taken delivery of the first Toughpad tablets and are hoping to use the devices to further optimize processes, react quickly and improve internal procedures.

