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Toughbooks in Action

Aurora Energy implements Panasonic Toughbooks to improve performance and reliability.

Aurora Energy, a Tasmanian electricity distribution and retail company, is using Panasonic CF-18 Toughbooks as part of a strategy to improve the performance of its distribution system and increase the reliability of its network.

Aurora Energy has operated in mainland Tasmania since 1998 and provides a contract service to the Bass Strait islands on behalf of Hydro Tasmania. Aurora's distribution system consists of 15,100 kilometres of high voltage lines, 7,400 kilometres of low voltage lines and 1,623 of underground cables around Tasmania.

The company's aim is to provide a safe, reliable electricity supply across an area of approximately 67,800 square kilometres.

Aurora Energy has implemented a number of strategies over the past five years aimed at improving the performance of the distribution system. The company was looking to supply their field workers with computer equipment to facilitate better fault response times and reduce the number of planned interruptions with increased use of live-line techniques.

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A number of alternatives were trialed over a period of 18 months. According to Adam Levis, Infrastructure Manager, Information Technology Systems group,

Aurora Energy, the Panasonic Toughbook fully rugged laptops provided the best return on investment.

“Some of the notebooks we trialed consumed large amounts of power, required constant recharging and suffered overheating issues,” explained Adam Levis. “We found other notebooks to be limited in anything other than field applications. The Panasonic Toughbook performed best in both power consumption and applications, representing the best return on investment.”

Panasonic Toughbooks have been deployed so far within both Aurora Energy’s Network Division and Network Services Division. Weather conditions such as extremely strong winds and storms negatively impact on the performance of the distribution network and according to Aurora Energy, nine separate incidences of wild weather in 2005 took a heavy toll

on its overhead distribution system. For this reason in particular, the Toughbook’s ability to withstand even the harshest outdoor environments made it an ideal choice to equip Aurora Energy’s field workers with.

Aurora Energy’s Network Division is responsible for the management and development of assets including poles, lines and substations, asset stewardship and network management, maintenance activities, operations and asset management including arranging contract and service agreements for carrying out construction. Panasonic Toughbooks were initially implemented in this division as a trial in the Guaranteed Services Level (GSL) scheme. This scheme was designed to ensure customers are compensated when supply reliability fails to meet agreed standards. As such, the necessity for reliability was paramount.

The Network Services Division oversees the distribution resource and response centres, distribution live line crews, stores and logistics, works management and the designing and programming teams.

The Toughbooks are used by the Network Services Division to manage processes such as streetlight auditing, a process of identifying and allowing the collection and reporting of streetlight outage information. Through the implementation of the Toughbooks, outages are now resolved more quickly and efficiently.

Pole inspections are also carried out using Toughbooks. A Distribution Asset Information System (DAIS) was developed for use on mobile platforms such as the Toughbook and allows the capture of information. The data is then used to identify poles that require maintenance or replacement.

Concluded Adam Levis, “The future bodes well for the Toughbooks’ use within Aurora Energy. They have been very well accepted by the field workers and I envisage that we will be acquiring more over time to fulfill further roles. We see this implementation as an ongoing process.”

“Overall, the Panasonic Toughbook has been found to be of far greater use within Aurora than all previously trialed solutions.”



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