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Mobile Apps Secured by AirWatch Help Pierce County Deliver Essential Public Services

The Challenge

From public safety to parks and recreation, Pierce County government delivers essential services to the second largest county in Washington State. Pierce County is, in many ways, similar to a large company, with more than 3,000 employees serving 800,000 public customers. At the same time, the County has 24 separate departments with very different technology needs.

Mobile technology has played a key role in helping Pierce County meet its mission despite a struggling economy and tight budgets. Tablets prove to be a cost-efficient way for elected officials and upper management to stay connected and be more productive. However, the County faced several key challenges when it came to deploying 200 new tablets, including how to safeguard sensitive information and control what apps could be installed. Pierce County needed an over-the-air, central management solution. They turned to AirWatch® – a proven leader in the field of Mobile Device Management (MDM) – for help in monitoring the new devices.

The Client

Pierce County is one of the fastest growing areas in the Pacific Northwest, and county government serves a diverse population living in both urban and remote, rural areas. However, layoffs and other budget pressures have made it increasingly difficult to provide these necessary services. Local government relies on the latest technology to speed work processes and improve communication.

In 2011, Pierce County launched a pilot program to see how tablets could help government leaders work more productively away from the office. "In February of 2011, we began talking about a pilot to see what tablets could do for us – particularly for our management team," Kevin Mattsen, system engineer at Pierce County, said. "Through this test run, we quickly learned using the native device configuration tool was not going to be the best answer. We needed an MDM solution that could best maximize our investment and deliver better governance to our residents."

Pierce County

Solution Overview

- Customer: Pierce County
- Industry: Government
- Geography: North America
- Features: MDM, MAM, VPN
- Devices: 1-500

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The Solution

Pierce County investigated several vendors and decided to partner with AirWatch. Not only was AirWatch named a top MDM provider by the leading analyst report, but the company also offered robust management tools at a competitive price. AirWatch also helped county staff meet an aggressive deadline to deploy the tablets within 60 days. Once deployed, staff could remotely configure and monitor all the devices from a single web-based console. AirWatch's tools also provide enhanced password controls and the ability to remote lock and wipe any lost or stolen tablets.

"Users could access the network using a network passcode and the VPN in the past, but it was cumbersome. What the tablet gives users is instant, on-demand access to an entire workflow wherever needed, "Mattsen said. "We configure the VPN to automatically connect so users can instantly get into their files – that's a critical function when your goal is being amongst citizens and bringing government to them."

One of the most important services that AirWatch provides is the Internal Application Catalog, which allows technology staff to control what applications end users can download to their devices. "We've also worked with AirWatch to offer a Pierce County store of approved apps, keeping our users from downloading unauthorized apps. The store also gives users quick access to applications we build in house," said Mattsen. Not only does the catalog protect users from downloading unsafe or inappropriate apps, but it also serves as a central "store" for in-house apps. A number of these apps are used for emergency management and public safety, so it is important that officials can easily access them.

Pierce County is planning to expand mobile device services in the near future, including possibly supporting smartphones. Additionally, the county plans to develop more custom applications that will be distributed by the Internal Application Catalog. One example is the award-winning damage assessment app that allows emergency responders to track property damage caused by a disaster. Mobile apps help local government prepare for any emergency, from floods to earthquakes to possible volcanic activity on Mount Rainier. "The end-goal is to be better public servants. I think, in time, these assessment apps via AirWatch will bring the public even closer to officials and open up new ways to better govern through mobile technology," Mattsen said.

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– **Kevin Mattsen**
System Engineer,
Pierce County