

TRIAL OF NEW VIDEO BADGE TECHNOLOGY

Working with leading technology companies can bring about innovations to help both collectors and debtors

By Gareth Hughes

AT Marston Group, our latest innovation is the recent launch of a pilot programme trialling state-of-the-art video badge recording technology. If the trial is successful and the badges are deployed across our workforce, it will enhance the way in which enforcement agents approach debtors and will help to champion the company's drive towards increased transparency in the enforcement sector.

Developed by Edesix, these video badges – also known as body-worn videos (BWV) – are currently being trialled by a number of our enforcement agents to record doorstep visits. Where used by police officers and other public service operatives, BWVs have reduced disputed interactions and have provided valuable footage for use as evidence in court.

The BWVs being trialled are lightweight, easy-to-use camera systems that are designed to support lone workers of all kinds. Weighing just 130g, the badges are the size of a credit card, yet are able to record high quality footage over long periods of time.

Unlike some other video recording devices, all digital footage produced by the BWVs is encrypted and securely stored. These cameras are therefore an ideal way to securely obtain footage of visits on a daily basis.

Reducing risk and confrontation

The aim of deploying the BWVs is to reduce risk to the organisation, staff and the general public. They are also intended to reduce potential confrontations and complaints, improve health and safety protections for enforcement agents, and increase openness and accountability for stakeholders.

The trial has been the subject of careful preparation, including provision

of comprehensive training on use of the equipment and also the design of specific protocols to ensure correct and appropriate use. Lastly, in order to comply with data protection regulations, we have changed our registration with the Data Protection Register to include the use of digital recording technology.

A full evaluation will take place at the end of the pilot to analyse the effect on incidents and complaints,

Where used by police officers and other public service operatives, BWVs have reduced disputed interactions and have provided valuable footage for use as evidence in court

together with feedback from agents and customers. Both our audit and compliance director, along with the newly formed independent advisory board, will then review our BWV policy in order to ensure that the cameras are effective, useful and add value to our risk reduction strategy. These results will then help to determine the feasibility of a national deployment.

Personal alarm technology

Next on our agenda is to consider whether these video badges can be integrated with the personal alarm technology that we trialled earlier in the year.

The six-week pilot programme, which commenced in April, tested personal alarms that incorporated a speed-dial facility with amber and red alerts. The facility was linked to Reliance's 24/7 emergency response centre, which monitored and recorded visits by enforcement agents.

The pre-programmed speed dials enabled enforcement agents to leave amber alerts that recorded locations

with the response centre, and red alerts for those who felt in any way threatened. Red alerts were monitored by operators and sent to the police if necessary.

Eight red alerts were activated during the trial period, demonstrating the value of these alarms. We have since deployed the technology to a large proportion of our agent workforce. As a result, Edesix and Reliance are also now working together to examine options for developing and integrating these two technologies.

Early indications show that it is possible to fuse both BWV and personal-attack alarm systems into one

integrated system. Whilst amber alerts can be incorporated into the mobile phones used by enforcement agents, red alerts can be incorporated into video badges which, when activated, will stream live video to Reliance's call centre.

The piloting of these BWVs marks a significant step forward in enhancing the operations of enforcement companies and, if widely adopted, will do much to improve transparency and reduce the risk of confrontational situations and reputational impacts.

It is also an excellent example of a modern approach to partnering with leading technology companies to deliver value to a range of stakeholders.

We will provide an update on the results in due course. **CCR-2**

Gareth Hughes is deputy chief executive of the Marston Group
gareth.hughes@marstongroup.co.uk

