

# Alpine Council harnesses iPads, public cloud

Victoria's Alpine Council has acquired a fleet of 18 iPads and says one application – using iPads to replace printouts for councillors – will pay for itself in two years.

"We estimate that we spend \$6,000 a year preparing documents for council meetings and consultations," said Craig Collings, the Council's IT Manager. The Council now distributes those documents using public cloud service Dropbox, and Councillors download them to iPad apps and view them on-screen.

The apps allow annotations, so Councillors can make notes in documents.

Another application for the iPad is infrastructure inspections. For this app, the Council has created its own app and used Apple facilities that allow corporate applications to be kept out of the public App Store. "The app is licensed to a particular iPad's serial number," Collings explained, so that even if an unknown user was able to access and install the application they would not be able to run it on their iPads.

The inspection app offers users a range of fields to record information about bridges, footpaths and other infrastructure around the local government area (LGA). Alpine Council's iPads are equipped with wireless broadband, but the app is also happy to store-and-forward data as the LGA covers mountainous and remote terrain and wireless coverage is not always available.

"It's easy for inspections because staff only need one device, instead of bringing a PDA, a hotspot and a GPS," Collings said.

Council's third application advertising sales for its visitor information centres. Staff there use the iPad to show previous advertising campaigns to prospects, and Collings said the tablet's ability to switch on instantly is a powerful feature in this setting.

Overall, Collings feels the iPad has proved ideal for all three tasks Council has asked of the device.

"It is a happy medium between a laptop and a PDA," he said. "PDAs are hard to type on and laptops are too heavy. Tablet PCs don't have much industry support, and are heavy and expensive. Also, trying to use Windows directly on a tablet that hasn't been configured specially for touch screens is hard work."

Council is now working to mount its iPads on a quad bike, which will be to conduct asset inspections in out-of-the-way locations. Collings said the Council hoped to mount the iPads on a Segway personal transporter, but struck insurance issues that made the quad bike a more palatable option.



Alpine Council staff inspect a bridge and take notes about its condition using a custom iPad app.