

CASE STUDY

ORION®

Radio Frequency System



City of Milton Municipal Water Utility

ORION® Brings New Efficiencies to Small City

By: Ted Schaar

Water Works Operator John Berg of the City of Milton Municipal Water Utility is the department's only employee, which is one of the many reasons he likes the Badger Meter ORION® system.

Making the job easier

"I need all the help I can get, and ORION is definitely making my job easier," Berg said. "To show you what I mean, with ORION, I can read all the meters we have installed in a 96-unit apartment complex by simply pulling in one driveway and out another. It's that fast, and it provides to-the-gallon accuracy."

Milton is located amid the rolling farmlands of south-central Wisconsin, about 20 miles north of the Illinois border. It has a population of 5,384 and was first settled in 1836. The Milton Water Utility supplied 175 million gallons to customers in 2003 and operates three wells ranging in depth from 722 to 1,106 feet.

Many tasks

"I've been with the department for 25 years," Berg continued, "and I am always working hard to keep up. I'm responsible for maintaining the entire system and performing a long list of miscellaneous tasks such as locating water lines for other utilities and contractors as part of our 'digger's hotline' service."

During the regular quarterly meter reading, Berg is helped by two employees from the city streets crew. "For many years, we had to go into the basement of every customer to get reads," he said, "but in the 1990s we put in the Badger® Read-o-Matic® system, which made the collection process a lot more efficient." The Read-o-Matic system allowed a remote device to be run from the meter to the exterior of a customer's residence, so it was no longer necessary to enter the home.

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About the Author:

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About two years ago, Berg attended a rural water technical conference and saw a demonstration of the Badger® ORION® system. “Maria Klasinski, our Badger sales representative, had already mentioned the system to me, so I knew something about it. After I saw it at the conference, I asked Maria to give a demo to Howard Robinson, the director of public works, and myself.” Berg and Robinson were impressed.



*Water Works Operator John Berg of the City of Milton
Municipal Water Utility*

Ease of operation

“Next, I talked with other utility personnel who had switched to automatic meter reading (AMR) and they said ORION had the reputation of being the most complete system and the easiest to operate,” Berg continued. “With other systems you had to push buttons and do various things, but with ORION, you just drive or walk and the system does most everything for you.”

In addition to simplifying the reading process, Berg said that one of the goals of AMR was streamlining the billing process. “We used to run paper books and it would take a great deal of time to input the reads at City Hall,” he explained. “In fact, before we switched to ORION, from the time we started to read meters to when the bills were sent out took about three weeks.”

Efficiency improvements

Even though Berg said only a small percentage of Milton’s meters have been converted to ORION so far, the department’s use of handheld ORION units has greatly improved the efficiency of the reading and billing process. “It’s quicker to enter the Read-o-Matic® numbers using the keypad, and for the City Hall billing person, it’s a simple download that just takes a few minutes. Once we get ORION fully installed, we think we’ll be able to read every meter in town in just one day.”

Berg is doing the upgrades himself: “Basically, any new meter that I put in is ORION-equipped, and any meter that needs to be physically checked for any reason is upgraded to ORION. To

convert to ORION, all I have to do is change the head, not the whole meter, and I’ve done some conversions in less than two minutes.”

Long service lives

Berg pointed out that when he physically checks meters, he sometimes discovers Badger products that have been in service for many years. “Five years ago I found a Badger meter that was made in 1947, and another from 1939. It’s amazing that they are still working after all these years, and it says something about their quality.”

Better than advertised

Berg also gave high marks to the ORION system. “Maria is providing a high level of service and, if anything, she was conservative in describing just how good ORION is. For example, the read range in my experience is much better than the 600 or so feet that she mentioned. In fact, I’d say it is unbelievably fabulous. Everything about ORION and Badger is first-rate in my experience.” ■