

CASE STUDY

ORION®

Radio Frequency System



Garth Ratza and John Nitz from the Village of Millington DPW using the ORION® laptop and software.

This Small Town is No Podunk in Adopting New Technology

By: Dave Marsh

Prior to the Civil War a small settlement in the county of Tuscola, Michigan was named Podunk. While the residents of most small towns today would probably resent being referred to as “podunk,” this was a time before the word grew to represent small rural areas resistant to change and innovative thinking. Today the staff of the Department of Public Works (DPW) that serves this community, which is now named Millington, probably would chuckle at the irony of the village’s ancestral name.

Small village leads the way with technology

Millington is a small town laid out within one square mile and home to about 300 families. But its small size has not prevented it from making some big advances. Millington has the distinction of becoming Michigan’s first community to upgrade its water meters with Badger Meter’s technologically advanced ORION® Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) System. This is unusual because Michigan’s larger urban areas, such as Detroit and Grand Rapids, usually lead the way in adopting new technology. But Millington recognized early on how upgrading its water meters with the ORION radio frequency (RF) AMR system would benefit the utility and its customers. Village leaders saw how DPW productivity and customer service would be improved with ORION RF technology. The new system would enable the four DPW staff members to read meters remotely as they drove or walked by customer addresses.

Prior to the implementation of the ORION system only Millington’s commercial customers were metered. Its 360 residential customers were charged a flat rate regardless of their individual water usage. The residential rate was determined by a single meter at the well house. “With the old system it would take us about four hours just to read our 102 commercial meters,” said Ron Daenzer, DPW Director. “If our residential customers were also metered it would have taken about two days to read everyone.”

ORION improves productivity and water conservation

With the department’s many other responsibilities, it would have been difficult for Millington DPW to read meters for all of its customers. “Our department does a little of everything around here,” said Daenzer. “In addition to water, we’re responsible for the sewers and lagoon, grading and plowing the streets, maintaining the sidewalks and all of the other things you’d expect from a department of public works.” Keeping the village running smoothly with a small staff is the reason productivity is important to village leaders. “With the new system we can read all of the residential and commercial meters in about an hour, a

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fourth of the time it used to take us to read our commercial customers alone,” said Daenzer. “It’s a big time savings.”

One of the biggest benefits to the community has been in water conservation. Because residential customers are now billed for all of the water they actually use, residents have become more water-conscious. “We used to have people that watered their lawns all summer long,” said Daenzer. “Now they realize over-watering comes at a cost to them.”

Some of the meters in Millington’s old system were 15 years old and had lost some accuracy. So Millington decided to replace them as part of a major water project involving new water mains and a new well. Because the DPW was pleased with its old Badger® Meters, Badger was the first place it turned to for new meters. The deal was sealed when it learned how upgrading to the ORION® AMR system would increase the productivity of its small DPW staff. “We had Badger meters before, and we really liked the concept of being able to read the new meters quickly



From the Village of Millington DPW: Garth Ratza, Ron Daenzer and John Nitz.

using a computer while driving past our customer locations,” said Daenzer. “It was just wonderful.”

Advanced technology and reliability too

Municipal Supply of Portland, Michigan supplied the 473 meters that ranged in size from ¾ inches to 3 inches. Installation began during the fall of 2002 and

was completed during the summer of 2003. DPW began billing under the new system in January 2004 and it has been quite pleased with the performance. “It’s a very reliable system,” said Daenzer. “Out of all of these meters, I’ve only had to send back four for warranty work, which I think is fabulous. They are very reliable.”

ORION AMR systems have been successfully installed in over 180 communities across the US ranging in size from 120 to 55,000 meter services.

Millington, Michigan is proof that a community doesn’t have to be a major metropolitan area to benefit from the state-of-the-art RF technology behind these affordable and dependable walk-by and drive-by meter reading solutions. ■