TOUGHPAD IS THE TRAIN DRIVER'S NEW FRIEND

THE FINNISH TRAIN OPERATOR AND LOGISTICS COMPANY VR GROUP HAS PROVIDED ITS TRAIN DRIVERS WITH PANASONIC TOUGHPAD FZ-G1 TABLETS.
Toughpad is now the drivers' most important tool after the engine and train.

VR Group has taken 1,300 Toughpad tablets into use. The Toughpad devices replace the drivers' paper timetables, work instructions and manuals.

"In practice, we no longer need paper in our work at all. We now have all the work-related material in electronic form. We start the shift with the Toughpad by signing in and receive the timetables and all the train-related information in the device. On the train, the tablet is in constant use", says train driver Erkki Kauranen.

Each engine has a docking station that keeps the Toughpad device available and in clear view as conveniently as possible - usually directly in front of the driver.

In addition to the timetables, the tablet shows possible delays, frost damages, electrical power supply failures and other temporary speed limits sent to the rail network by the Finnish Transport Agency. They are combined with the timetable data so the train driver is able to follow the running of his train against the timetable.

Work is guided by Kulkuri

Integrated in VR Group's Toughpad devices is the train drivers' application Kulkuri ("Vagabond"). It provides the key information that the train drivers need during their shift. The application was developed with the help of the train drivers. Every driver has their own personal Toughpad

"I check my upcoming shifts at home with the tablet so I'll know whether to pack the toothbrush for an overnight stay", says Erkki Kauranen.

Kauranen is also pleased about the fact that Toughpad FZ-G1 is a fully rugged Windows 8.1 device. "I can use it for the VR intranet and with one swipe bring up again the timetable data which for drivers is the most important piece of information."

Thanks to the tablets' data link, network connection is available always and everywhere. "I like using the Internet during my rest periods, too. VR also allows limited entertainment use. We can load films on the Toughpad and watch them in the breaks."

The train drivers' choice

Project manager in charge of the VR Group driver terminal project, Antti Vuorinen, says that the company wanted to improve the drivers' working conditions and job satisfaction, whilst also enhancing communication and become more environmentally friendly.

The environment is already being saved as there is less printing taking place, and in the future the driver shall have a key role in the management of train energy consumption.

VR Group decided on Panasonic's Toughpad after a device review project that lasted a whole year. A large number of tablets were inspected and tested during the review.

The end-users and train drivers participated heavily in the decision-making. An assessment group compiled of the drivers tested the devices, and in addition devices were placed in the drivers' break room for anybody to try and evaluate.

VR Group chose the Toughpad because of its ruggedness, screen that can be viewed in challenging lighting environments and its Windows operating system, to mention some of the reasons. "The Toughpad is just the appropriate device for our operational environment. The durability, lifecycle and functionality of the device support the train driver in his job."

Antti Vuorinen praises the cooperation with Kaukomarkkinat Ltd and Panasonic. "Cooperation has been smooth. Kaukomarkkinat familiarized themselves with our operational environment, and the whole project has been very interactional. Our requirements have been met", says Antti Vuorinen.

Drivers say thanks

Train driver Erkki Kauranen also praises the Toughpad tablet's hardy structure and functionality.

"A 'tough man's device' is what is needed in these working conditions. We wait for trains on the platform in freezing weather after which the tablet has to be up and running in 30 seconds inside a warm engine. The qualities of the screen are crucial in our work. We sometimes drive towards direct sunlight and then through wilderness in a pitch-black night. The Toughpad screen is bright enough in sunshine and in night mode so dim that it does not interfere with the driver's vision", Kauranen commends.