

<b>Field General</b>	Denise Moreau	<b>Company</b>	Garrison Square Management, Boston
<b>Experience</b>	Six years with firm, four years as manager	<b>Title</b>	Manager of finance and administration

## Hold the Phones

Garrison Square Management chose to keep its mobile phones and add on a work order and management solution. ~~ By Linn Haugestad Edvardsen

Property management is fraught with service challenges. With over 1,500 residential units in the Boston area, Garrison Square Management has its hands full. The 50-employee firm's maintenance division handles tenant and owner requests, ranging from garbage disposal blockages to water heater problems. Needless to say, this kind of business produces a massive paper trail—something Garrison Square has wanted to keep in check since its inception in 1991.

**Garrison Square equipped its field force with Nextel phones five years ago, and soon found that the equipment saved time and resources. But they also had to augment the Nextels with other technology to achieve optimum efficiency. Consequently, Garrison Square teamed up with Boca Raton, Fla.-based JumpStart Wireless to become the company's beta-test model in the Boston area for DispatchSuite, a work order and management solution. Initially, Garrison Square rolled out DispatchSuite using two-way pagers; now the company is in the process of equipping its entire maintenance division with an all-in-one solution incorporating the Nextel phones already being used.**

**This simple but seamless wireless solution has reduced paperwork considerably. Completed work orders are now sent directly to field workers, and invoices are automatically generated. The status of crews can also be tracked better, which results in improved customer service. Garrison Square is also able to maintain a consistent cash flow based on quicker invoicing turnaround. Clients are well informed and receive better service, and work orders flow easily through the system with few hiccups—a true win-win situation.**

We spoke with Denise Moreau, manager of finance and administration for Garrison Square.

**FFA:** How did your field force operate before you implemented DispatchSuite?

**DM:** Emergencies were handled via telephone dispatch, which means we would have to call our field workers to find out who was available where and when. Otherwise, work orders were printed and left for the assigned person to pick up. During the course of a day we knew that each worker had been assigned 12 work orders but that was all. We were

unable to provide clients with accurate information regarding what work had been completed or when a service person would arrive at his location. **As a result, field workers were interrupted 10 times a day with calls requesting information about their location.**

**FFA:** List some of the problems you hoped to solve by implementing a wireless solution.

**DM:** We wanted to solve a number of problems. First, we sought better coordination for our teams. We wanted to know where the teams were at all times, when they wrapped up assignments and exactly which teams were available at what times. **Another primary concern was cutting down paperwork and creating an efficient invoicing process. Before we began using DispatchSuite, someone had to enter the work order, the field force had to write up time sheets, data entry clerks had to enter it into the system, the invoices had to be printed for approval and then printed again once approved. It was essentially a two-to-three week process. Now, as soon as a worker completes a job, an invoice is generated. It is much better for creating consistent cash flow and it's better for our customers.**

**FFA:** Have the results been what you expected?

**DM:** So far the results have been very good. We've been onboard with JumpStart since they first introduced DispatchSuite. They had a good product, we saw the potential for it and we knew they were willing to work with us to accommodate the existing equipment. This was vital since one of our goals was to reduce our capital outlay. We've started slowly. We brought a portion of our workforce onboard initially and now we're in the first stages of implementing it with the Nextel phones our field force already carries.

Although the software was originally written for two-way pagers, we always planned to utilize the phones. We have 24-hour service and emergency on-call service, so the phones are here to stay. The devices were also a significant capital outlay and we hoped to avoid any unnecessary additional investment. But, more importantly, we didn't want to burden our field force with another piece of equipment. That's why coupling this new solution with our current device was the best decision for us.

**FFA:** Initially, were you most concerned about dollar-for-dollar ROI or were you focusing on making processes more efficient?

**DM:** We were definitely concerned with both. There has to be ROI, because if there isn't, then it's not worth the resources and the time you dedicate to it. We are looking at how this will benefit our clients, but also how this will affect future projects. For example, we're in the process of developing interactive Web pages, and we want them to interface with JumpStart. This way, clients can enter requests through our Web page and the information is sent directly to the DispatchSuite. There's really no need for human interaction except for actually assigning which worker would go out on the job. But, honestly, everything we do goes back to simply trying to make life easier for our residents and the owners whose properties we manage.

**FFA:** How is the system used in the field? How does it work?

**DM:** The process begins when we get a call or an email from a client. Let's say someone calls and complains that the garbage disposal isn't functioning properly. The information is manually entered into DispatchSuite and is transferred into a holding pattern until our maintenance coordinator reviews and designates the assignments. As soon as this occurs, the work order is sent out to the appropriate field worker.

At this point the maintenance worker calls the order up on his phone and reviews the job, including any special instructions. When the field worker arrives on a job, he is able to communicate his arrival to headquarters with the push of a button. After the job is completed, the worker enters information into a standard form before it is automatically transmitted back into the system. Once that information is back in the system, the maintenance coordinator can add additional information, such as parts used, and the information flows directly to the accounting department. This system cuts out repetitive and wasteful stages and virtually eliminates the use of paper.

**FFA:** How has this solution changed your business as a whole?

**DM:** So far change has been slow. As I explained, we've been developing the project bit by bit. We started with the five employees in our rental division and now the regular maintenance force is being added with their Nextel phones. We're bringing the rest of the staff on little by little. The learning curve is reduced a bit because the workers are well acquainted with the phones. And, of course, figuring out how the equipment operates is half the battle.

**The most important result of this initiative for the company has definitely been greater efficiency in the entire work order process from start to finish.** The invoices are printed immediately so we have a much faster recovery of cash flow. Additionally, the clients are happy because they're being invoiced within what they consider a reasonable time frame. It has simplified the process on both ends.

**FFA:** What type of feedback are you hearing from the clients themselves?

**DM:** **The clients are very happy. They're seeing faster turnaround and they're able to receive much more accurate information about the status of a job. Now we're able to explain exactly where a field worker is and provide an up-to-date arrival time. They prefer that. For the team in the office it gives them a much clearer view of where the workers are in the process, and allows them to send vital information out to the field without actually bothering the crew.**

**Prior to implementing this solution we were forced to reduce their productivity with constant calls. The biggest time drain occurred when a crewmember reported a project finished and was kept on the line with questions about the job. This is now done wirelessly.** The crew can include any notes before sending the work order back to the office. If they happen to be working in an area not under coverage, the information is simply stored and sent once the worker comes into range. They don't know the difference.

**FFA:** What are your plans for the future?

**DM:** We're focusing on creating the interactive site I mentioned. Clients have busy schedules and they can't always wait to contact us during our business hours. This way they can fill out a work order online. The information will be exported to the software and the crews will be dispatched automatically—without the help of anyone in the office. Our goal is to provide a viable alternative that not only benefits them but also benefits us. We're really looking to be a fully e-commerce company. It's better for us, and it's better for our clients.

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