

Hand-held healthcare

Healthcare providers in five NHS Trusts are using the new Panasonic Toughbook, thanks to help from UK Trade & Investment and the NHS Technology Adoption Centre



Panasonic

FAST FACTS

Company: Panasonic

Country: Japan

Industry: Consumer goods

Website: www.panasonic.co.uk

Since Japanese electronics giant Panasonic set up in the UK in 1972, its growth has been substantial. Panasonic UK has become a leading supplier of consumer and business-related electronics and one of the company's most successful bases overseas.

"The UK has been a major part of our global success," says Stephen Yeo, Marketing Director for Panasonic Computer Products Europe. "It is the third largest market for our computer division worldwide after the US and Japan. It has a good business climate, an excellent talent pool and is open to new technologies such as Toughbook."

Hardwearing hardware

In recent years, Panasonic has expanded into new sectors, including healthcare. It was immediately clear that there was a need for a hardy, mobile PC in this market and initially, the Toughbook CF-18 was found to be perfect for

use on NHS ambulances. Then, the NHS told the company that it was looking for a mobile clinical assistant for use on wards. It would need to be tough, water resistant, lightweight, easy to use and have a long battery life.

"The NHS was looking for ways to improve productivity of its staff by reducing their workload," says Hide Harada, General Manager of the Overseas Sales Group, IT Products Division at Panasonic. "With our extensive experience of designing and producing hardwearing products, we knew we could come up with something that would allow them to access and amend records electronically on the spot, without having to write up hand written notes later on."

Strong support

In 2009, development agency International Business Wales and UK Trade & Investment team at the British Consulate-General, Osaka, Japan, made a joint courtesy call to

Panasonic to see how they could help with its latest project. As a result of the call, the company was encouraged to carry out market testing for the new CF-H1 in Wales. Meanwhile, the South East England Development Agency visited Panasonic jointly with UK Trade & Investment team in Osaka and provided information about various collaborative projects between Japanese companies and British universities already underway in the UK, along with material that would help Panasonic to market the new product within the NHS.

Whilst the inspiration for the new Toughbook had come from within the NHS itself, Panasonic still had to gain wider acceptance for the product. So, the company approached the UK Trade & Investment team in Osaka for help in negotiating the procurement procedures of the NHS.

“UK Trade & Investment introduced us to people within the NHS who would be interested in the CF-H1,” says Stephen. “They also introduced us to directors of the NHS Technology Adoption Centre, which is always looking for new technology to help healthcare practitioners. We invited them to our R&D facility, explained what the product could do, and listened to their feedback. They were impressed, and agreed to help us to navigate the unique NHS market.”

Positive feedback

It was important to Panasonic to liaise with potential end users as part of the ongoing product development, to make sure it was shaping up to meet their everyday needs. They even researched hand measurements with 100 NHS nurses to check that the Toughbook would be comfortable for them to hold and use.

“The NHS is ready to work with Panasonic and other overseas companies to provide better services to the UK patient as well as doctors and nurses,” says Julie Tindale, National Clinical Lead for Midwifery, NHS Connecting for Health.

Panasonic also presented the Toughbook at the Mobile Point of Care Conference, which took place at the British Medical Association, and had excellent feedback.

Today, many thousands of CF-H1 Toughbooks are being used in the UK, making it the largest market for this product worldwide.

“We believe our customer’s voice is crucial to inform the design of our products,” says Hide. “In terms of the CF-H1, UK Trade & Investment and the NHS helped us to conduct a survey of over 100 hospitals and workshops with more than 60 clinicians, which we used to define the specifications for the product. We have already made great progress in encouraging take-up of the Toughbook. Without help from UK Trade & Investment and the advice from the NHS Technology Adoption Centre, we believe we still would be struggling to find the right decision makers in NHS.”

Brian Shaw, Managing Director of UK Trade & Investment’s Business Group says:

“The UK is the ideal location and partner for developing products for the global market. UK Trade & Investment welcomes Panasonic’s decision to select the UK as its partner in developing its CF-H1 Toughbook Mobile Clinical Assistant device for the global market, and assures the company of its continued support.”

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The NHS Technology Adoption Centre

The NHS Technology Adoption Centre aims to improve the uptake of new technology within the NHS, identifying technologies that can improve patient care and working with NHS trusts to utilise them.

“The Toughbook appears to have all the features our nurses were asking for” says Marg Parton, the then Chief Executive of the NHS Technology Adoption Centre.

“We knew that standard laptops were not effective for some purposes whereas the Toughbook appears to offer both a robust and cleanable solution for use in clinical settings. Due to this we were happy to advise the Panasonic team about how to get buy-in from NHS Trusts around the UK.”



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