

# The future of valuation reporting

## Mobile revolution: a case study from e.surv and Landmark Quest

A technology revolution is taking place in the mortgage valuation space, with the onset of mobile tablets and other devices. This case study looks at how e.surv Chartered Surveyors, the country's largest provider of residential valuation services, and Landmark Quest is adopting a new mobile strategy across its business, to deliver a number of advantages

**T**oday, e.surv carries out more valuations for mortgage lenders than any other surveyor in the UK. To put it into numbers, e.surv completes one valuation instruction every four minutes.

With such a high volume of daily instructions being received and a guarantee to return completed reports back to the instructing lender within 24 hours, e.surv's team of 365 chartered surveyors typically carry out anywhere between five to 10 appointments per day.

The range of instructions vary from

'drive-by' valuations, which are less detailed, through to physical inspections, which take more time to conduct due to the level of data that is required. The surveyor's working day is therefore typically spent on the road from 8am until mid-afternoon, where they then return to their office to complete, verify and sign-off the reports so they can be returned to the client for mortgage processing purposes.

Although instructions are sent and received electronically via Landmark Quest – a provider of mortgage valuation technologies – the site-note reports

have been, until now, captured manually by the surveyors using paper and pen. The surveyors would manually fill out the site-note information, and dictate the report content verbally to the company's typing pool, and upon returning to the office would have an electronic version of the report within the Quest DataWeb system that they would be required to check for accuracy, complete any missing information, and then sign-off. The site-notes were sent for scanning by a third party supplier.

As David Wareing, chartered surveyor at e.surv explains this process was ripe for a refresh to help streamline the process: "At the start of each day, I would print off the paper forms for each instruction of which there would be at least six or seven pages. I would then print additional pages, such as the property description, a page for site plan notes, an additional page to capture property price comparables, plus any other information that I might want to include. This was not only cumbersome, but took time to organise and used a huge amount of paper each day.

"At each property, I would then fill out the information, which once completed, I would dictate the details to the office so the report could be typed up

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Q-Mobile from Landmark Quest is an intelligent property data capture solution that aims to replace the paper-based reporting of site notes for residential mortgage valuations.
- **The valuer uses a mobile tablet device onsite and has access to electronic comparables and other useful supporting data. The software also improves audit capabilities, reduces human error and reduces the amount of printed documentation required for each valuation instruction.**
- The software highlights any outstanding information or 'unchecked' data, so you can easily see on each page what is still required.
- **Other supporting features that the surveyor can use include an accurate floor plan drawing tool that maps data into the site notes and form. There is also a tool that automatically calculates the rebuild cost and total floor measurements.**
- All data for every instruction is held together in one central place. Site notes are automatically attached, with photos and comparables, meaning everything is easy to locate, notes are decipherable and there is less risk of error due to data only having to be input once.





in DataWeb, ready for when I return to the office at around 2pm. I would then return to my desk, verify and complete the reports, with the aim of having everything signed-off by 5 or 6pm. It has been the same process since I began working in the industry.”

## Time for change

With a large emphasis in the financial industry on transparency and audit, it was clear that a new approach was needed that would not only create time and efficiency savings, but crucially enable e.surv’s surveyors to complete site notes electronically, while enforcing standards on site.

Alison Traversoni, executive director of e.surv’s surveying division, confirmed: “The task of managing valuations has become complex – we have high standards to achieve, and when you have approximately 1,700 inspections taking place each day, mistakes can potentially be made when the information is being captured manually. In a bid to drive standardisation and improve accuracy across the board, it was clear that we needed to automate the site-notes process and so we embarked on a project to

identify the right software and technology that would enable us to do this.”

Enter Q-Mobile from Landmark Quest. Q-Mobile is an intelligent property data capture solution that aims to replace the paper-based reporting of site notes for residential mortgage valuations. The secure software, used in conjunction with a mobile tablet device, improves workflow and creates efficiencies whilst on-site by providing access to electronic comparables and other useful supporting data. It also significantly improves audit capabilities, reduces human error and reduces the amount of printed documentation required for each valuation instruction.

Q-Mobile has been designed to look like Quest’s DataWeb solution, which is the PC-based system that e.surv’s surveyors have been using to input their valuation data in the office to date, therefore making the application intuitive for experienced surveyors. It effectively enables e.surv’s surveyors to complete site notes electronically and enforces standards on site.

Having worked with Landmark Quest for many years for the management of its valuation instructions, e.surv

was interested in hearing about the newly developed Q-Mobile solution and embarked on implementing a pilot of the software and tablet solutions to see how this could work for them.

Explains Alison Traversoni: “We had originally looked at possible technology solutions in 2004 however at the time it simply wasn’t fit for purpose. We stayed working closely with Quest and it came to 2010, where we could see that now many original barriers to entry had been removed: technology is today portable, 3G connectivity has advanced, pricing isn’t a barrier, availability has improved and so it was clear that now is the right time for our industry to be moving into its new digital phase.

“With the deluge of tablet technology since the iPad inspired consumers, price is becoming a much less significant barrier, even in the professional space where ruggedized, outdoor viewable products are required. Now is the right time for our business, and indeed the profession as a whole, to be moving to this way of working as it creates major advantages all round. I am however pleased that e.surv is the first to be launching Q-Mobile, in partnership with Landmark Quest, and so is leading the way.”

## Valuations captured on the move

With Q-Mobile, there are a number of subtle changes to the surveyor’s working day that add-up to create noticeable



**Alison Traversoni**



efficiencies; whether it's the ability to access price comparable data whilst at the property in question, through to being able to use the tablet to take photographs that can be instantly attached to the valuation report with a press of a button. It's the culmination of a range of benefits that make the physical task of carrying out a valuation easier, as David Wareing confirms: "With Q-Mobile, I now have the opportunity to enter more data on site. This means, I'm not having to back-track on data when I'm at my desk later in the day. Q-Mobile highlights any outstanding information or 'unchecked' data, so you can easily see on each page what is still required. This is a very good 'aide memoire' to jog your memory: so although I may spend a little bit more time on site, the benefits are that I'm not spending as much time in the afternoon having to check the file."

Having the mobile device with the surveyors at all times also helps ensure they have less 'wasted time' in their days. For example, there may be times when the surveyor arrives at a client site early and has to wait in their car for the client to arrive at the property with the keys. "Now, I can sit in my car and do some work on the device, such as checking the content of the previous valuation

or adding in additional supporting data that I locate online such as comparable data from Rightmove Plus. I'm not wasting time anymore and I feel as though my day is more complete," reports Wareing.

Q-Mobile also contains a range of other supporting features that have been widely welcomed by e.surv's team including an accurate floor plan drawing tool that maps data into the site notes and form, an intelligent tool that automatically calculates the rebuild cost and total floor measurements, and verification modes that validate that the correct information has been included and supporting data presented before the report is signed-off. It also means e.surv's surveyors have the option to 'sign off' completed valuations while on-site for some instructions.

With Q-Mobile, e.surv is meeting RICS' requirements to ensure that all data for each and every instruction is held together in one central place. Site notes are automatically attached, with photos and comparables, meaning everything is easy to locate, notes are decipherable and there is less risk of error due to data only having to be input once.

Traversoni adds: "Q-Mobile is also helping towards our valuation audit

process, as there is less room for human error. Site notes cannot be mislaid and the layers of verification included in the application makes it more accurate. Now, a surveyor can't forget to fill in the answer to a question in the report, as Q-Mobile alerts them of this. This means our audit team can now be more focussed on other areas of the business."

## The future of valuation reporting

A structured roll-out of the new Q-Mobile solution is currently underway at e.surv, with all of its surveyors anticipated to be using Q-Mobile via tablet devices by early 2013.

When asked whether he would ever return to pen and paper for valuation reporting, Wareing concludes: "The answer is 'absolutely not'! I have been using Q-Mobile since the pilot started and find it provides a number of time savings that add up during the course of the day. The more I use Q-Mobile, the easier it gets and I'm sure I will identify even more efficiencies as we continue to delve into it and via our ongoing training and support. It really helps me streamline my working day."

Another advantage is Q-Mobile enables surveyors to plan their working schedules more effectively. Adds Wareing: "Now with Q-Mobile, I can see what jobs I have planned for the week, which means I am able to manage my workload more efficiently. By looking ahead I can go ahead and collect the keys from agents in my spare time, for tomorrow's jobs."

Reflecting on the benefits Q-Mobile will deliver, Traversoni adds: "We are already witnessing productivity gains, as now at the end of the day, the surveyor's work is done: it means they can check emails, run queries, obtain comparables while they have spare time in their cars. The car becomes their office and the benefit is they are working smarter, plus there is a reduced chance of errors due to the system helping pick-up missing elements."

It really is a major advancement for e.surv and the industry and going back to paper and pen would be a retrograde step and so will not happen. Both e.surv and Landmark Quest are leaders in the market, and together, via Q-Mobile, we are showcasing how the future of valuation reporting will look." ■

## Return on investment

e.surv is the first chartered surveyors firm in the UK to adopt the Q-Mobile system to manage the entire report capture process for its mortgage valuation instructions. Via Q-Mobile, it is setting the standard for creating efficiencies in the mortgage valuation space, as well as improved accuracy of reports via the intelligent software that helps detect potential errors or incomplete data fields.

As a result of implementing the mobile software and tablet-PC solution, business benefits include:

- Improved efficiencies - previously, a surveyor's day would include 'dead-time' sat in their car waiting to access properties. Now, this time can be spent researching supporting information, such as property price comparables, removing this activity from the end of the working day
- Audit support - Q-Mobile helps improve accuracy of reports via an intelligent analysis tool that alerts the surveyor to any potential inputting errors or

incomplete data fields, ensuring that the report is as accurate as possible and no errors are made. With a focus on transparency and audit in the financial sector, this layer of intelligence helps deliver greater assurances to e.surv's clients and third parties.

- Improved workflow - there is no longer the need to verbally dictate the written report to the typing pool, meaning this resource has been freed up to support other divisions of the business. This creates a time-saving for the surveyor, and eliminates the potential risk of inputting errors by the third-party typist.
- Reduction in paper resources - with each valuation report and associated site notes being at least seven pages in length (not taking into account supporting documentation that is printed for each instruction), and an average number of 35,000 instructions per month, e.surv will reduce its annual paper usage, saving £30,000 per year and a further substantial saving will be made from fewer printer consumables being required.