White Paper: Reducing Costs Through More Effective Results Management

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Datacom installers certify cabling systems for many reasons – to support manufacturer warranty requirements, meet customer qualifications, or just to ensure quality workmanship. Managing the results generated by the testers is a critical and time consuming part of the certification process.

In a recent Fluke Networks survey of 880 installers worldwide, the respondents reported installing an average of 1,026 links in just the prior month. The job of consolidating all those tests into a single report can be time consuming and is a source of considerable cost. In another survey, 77% of installers reported having to deal with results management issues in the prior month. Let's look at these issues.

You save your work on your PC every few minutes. Why save your cable test results only once a day?
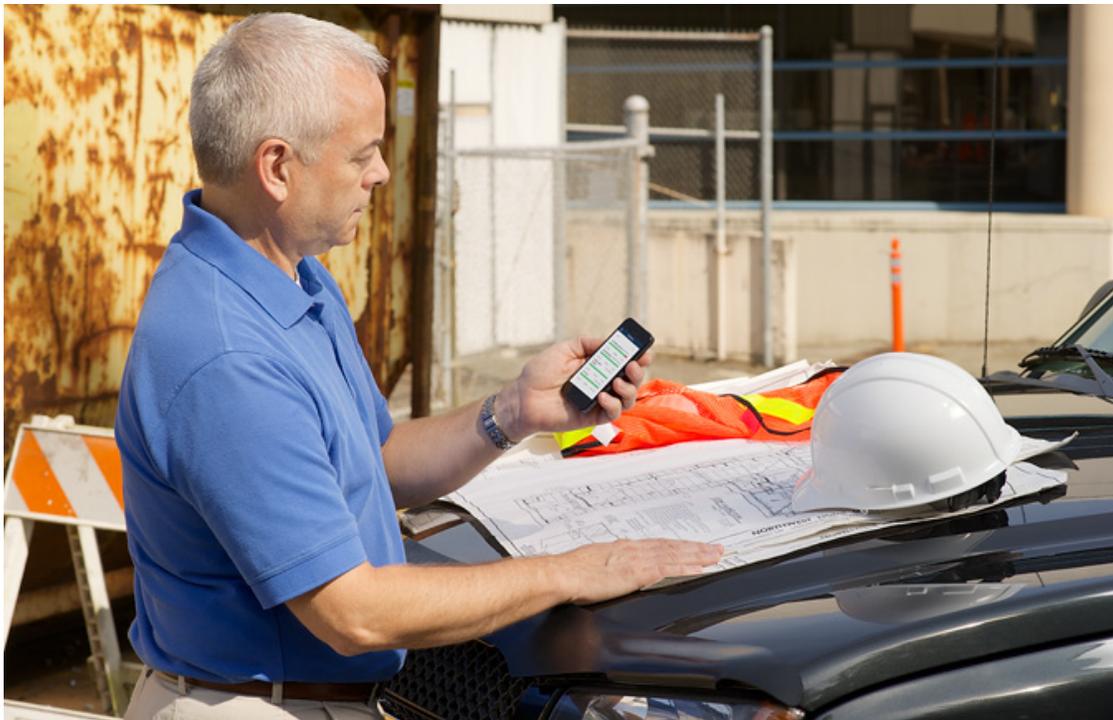
Results Management Issues

Customers report a number of problems in results management that take up time. The following three are the most common:

- Cable identifiers in the reports don't match the specifications and need to be manually edited
- Multiple test types (copper, fiber tier 1, tier two, different standards) need to be combined into a single report
- Reports have to be reworked because they are incomplete

Contractors report spending 7.9 hours per month, nearly a full day, on these issues.

This is in addition to the time required to get the results (typically stored in the tester) from the job site back to the office where the results management takes place. This also takes a tester out of circulation which may impact other jobs.

The More Testers You Have, the More Complex it Gets

For a contractor using a single tester on a single job, these problems are significant. But very few contractors have the luxury of dedicating a single tester to a single job at a time. To maximize efficiency, most contractors own or rent multiple testers and use them on multiple concurrent jobs.

Properly keeping track of results under these conditions become even more difficult, leading to a whole new set of issues including:

- Test results are stored in multiple testers which have to be hunted down and the results consolidated
- Tests from another job get into the report by mistake and have to be removed
- You're generating a report and you discover not all the links were tested, and a crew has to return to the site to finish the job

Installers report spending, on average, another 7.3 hours per month on these issues, for a total of nearly two days a month. And the more testers owned by a firm, the larger the scope of the reported problem. A related issue cited by customers is the lack of visibility in keeping track of job status under these circumstances.

Worst-Case Scenario

Other, less common, problems can be far worse. With tens of thousands of testers on the market, our tech support team sees a lot of problems that an individual customer might not consider. For example, we regularly receive calls asking how to recover inadvertently erased or corrupted memory cards which store the results. Unfortunately, in most cases, the only answer is to perform all the tests over again. Testers or memory cards with results stored on them can also be lost or stolen, also requiring retesting. Thankfully, these are not common problems, because a single lost tester or erased data card can mean losing a full day's or even a week's worth of multiple techs' time – dozens of hours lost and long delays in the project.

Cloud Services Offer a Solution

With the advent of high speed mobile networks and low cost data storage, a new approach to managing and storing data – the cloud – has become commonplace. By getting results out of the tester and up to the cloud, the chances of losing data are minimized. Testers don't need to be recalled from the field. Results can be automatically consolidated into the correct job.

LinkWare™ Live adds a cloud capability to the industry's leading reporting solution and testers. Versiv™ testers can be connected to the internet through a wired Ethernet or Wi-Fi connection. In instances where no Ethernet or Wi-Fi network connection is available, the Versiv unit can connect wirelessly to a smart phone configured as a personal hotspot to send results to the LinkWare Live service.
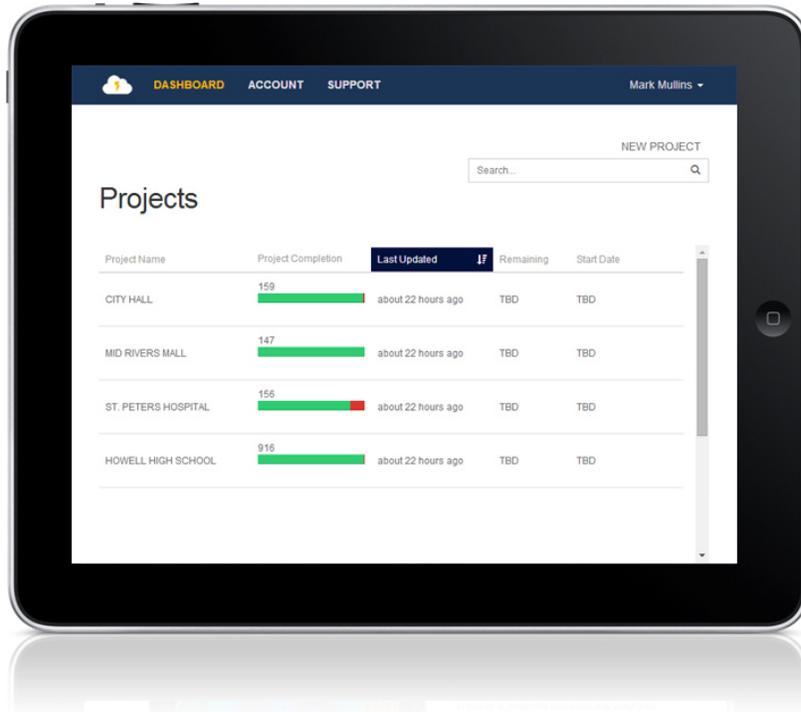
LinkWare Live is a cloud-based service that manages copper and fiber testing results on a project by project basis.

Once connected to the network, results can be uploaded with just a few keystrokes. Tests in Versiv are tied to projects, so, once they get to the cloud service, it adds them to the appropriate project automatically. Since the process is so quick, it can be done many times a day, so that the impact of a card failure or stolen tester is minimized.
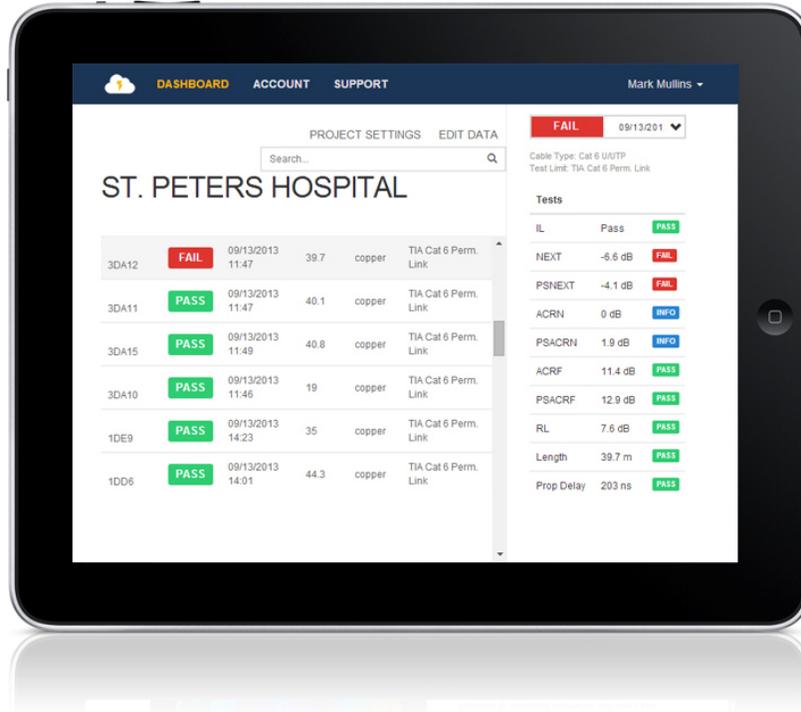

LinkWare Live provides detailed view of projects and results.

When the time comes to generate the report, the contractor simply downloads the results from LinkWare Live into the PC running LinkWare. From there, the status of the project can be checked, and missing or improper results immediately identified. A full report can be generated with a few keystrokes.

Since LinkWare Live understands the projects set up within the Versiv tester, it can keep track of the status of projects. And since it's cloud-based, this information can be accessed from anywhere by tablet or smartphone. This gives the project manager or consultant a near-real-time view into the status of the project and the ability to drill down into individual test results to ensure they are done properly.
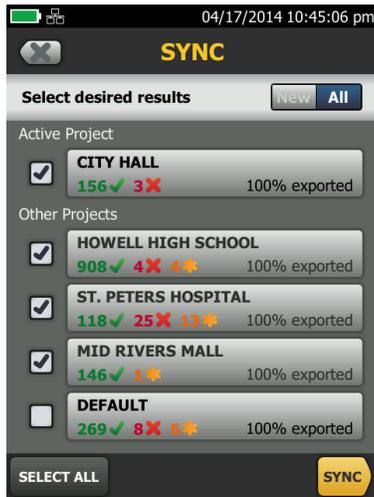
Versiv manages results and uploads them to LinkWare Live on a project basis.
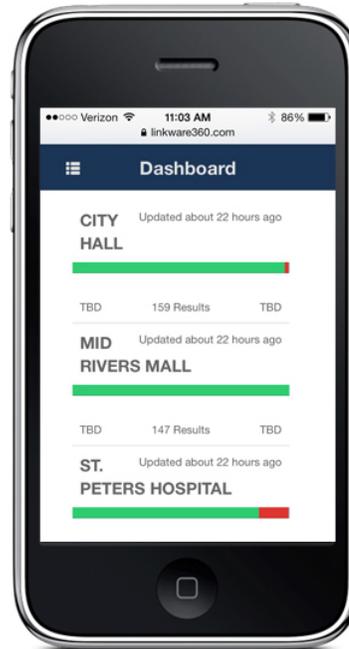
Using a smartphone, project managers can use LinkWare Live to track the status of projects wherever they are.

Conclusion

Managing results through a cloud based service offers significant advantages:

- Increased productivity by no longer needing to recall testers from the field just to download test results
- Reduced time by automatically consolidating all results into the correct job
- Less rework by reducing the likelihood of losing test results when testers or memory cards are lost, stolen or erased
- Instant access to results for faster troubleshooting
- Real time visibility into project status from any location

Using a cloud based service is a sensible approach that can prevent problems and save time. You save your work on your PC every few minutes, so why would you save your cable test results only once a day?