

Wanted: AMR Solutions for Small Systems

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A good portion of my time as Circuit Rider for the New York Rural Water Association is spent looking over, reviewing, and investigating new products as they become available to the water industry. I am deluged with mailings, catalogs, literature, and information in many shapes and forms. I spend quite a bit of time in exhibit halls listening to the sales pitches for this product and that.

Recently the small community where I live, and of which I am intricately involved, went through the process of deciding which type of water meter and reading system we would be utilizing for at least the next ten years. From the outset of this process, I tried to keep an open mind to all the systems available. I began the process, by inviting the four largest meter manufacturers representatives to plug their products to my Village Board. To tell the truth, I was not interested in hearing about radio-read systems. We have about 400 service connections in the village and it does not take our employees very long to read them. It has always been my opinion that systems with less than 1000 service connections could never justify the outright expense of the radio-read AMR systems available to date. What does take some time for us are the re-reads and miss-reads that require a trip back to the residence. After listening to and gathering all the information, we decided on digital heads with three-wire touch pads. We will integrate the new system in over several years and keep the same meter bodies as were previously installed. Here's the catch, the touch pad reader that comes with the system only stores 5 readings, has no wireless or wired way of transferring data to the billing clerks computer. Now if you want to buy a \$10,000.00 handheld, this can be accomplished!

The fault in any meter reading system is operator error. The meter readers eyes are weak spot number 1, the recording of the actual reading in the book is number 2, and the transfer from the book to the billing computer is weak spot number 3. So what do I want? I want an AMR for small systems that utilizes a touch pad gun, stores 1000 readings, and transfers via wireless or cable connection to the billing clerks computer. I want this system to be priced under \$2000.00, because anyone can buy a really good laptop computer with oodles of memory and all the bells and whistles for under \$2000.00!

Does anyone sell this type of reading system? Not that I have seen! It seems that the powers that be decided to

skip right over a system of this simple design and forge right ahead with the high priced radio read AMR. Often, the cost of these systems are piggybacked on large construction projects. What's another \$40,000 or \$50,000 on a million dollar job! The trouble is, our system is in good shape, we do not need a large capitol project right now, and we are not ready to burden the taxpayers with an expensive radio read system that we do not need. I am sure the employee's that are now still using books and outside readers would rather have a job, than some high priced radio read system. What they might like, is a system that will enhance and optimize the meter reading experience for small systems.

Now, in all fairness to the manufacturers, I will say that after some serious investigation I was able to find a system that might be adapted to do the job I want it to do, but the price of the reader alone is equal to the cost of 40 new meters! This is a trade off that we could not afford at the present time. If any of you guys or gals are out there and facing a similar situation, I would like to hear from you. And of course, I would like to hear from those vendors who might have a reasonable answer to my problem. My e-mail address is smorol@nyruralwater.org and you can write to me at:

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