



PHS achieves 35% gain with IFS AI tools



Using IFS Planning and Scheduling Optimization (PSO), washroom hygiene services provider PHS has increased UK technician productivity by over 35%, helping to offset the rising cost of labor, fuel and consumables. The technology has eliminated the need for next-day manual route-planning for its 700 UK engineers, has enabled the company to seamlessly cater for a variety of different customer needs, and provided customers with on-screen technician tracking and self-service rescheduling tools.

PHS Group are specialists in washroom, healthcare and floorcare hygiene services. PHS completes over 5 million visits a year, thousands of which are by the hygiene division each week.

From manual guesswork to optimized plans

Explains Stephen Male, Head of Logistics (Planning and Scheduling Optimization) at PHS Group, "Before we adopted IFS, we were effectively working in the dark, routing our fleet of over 700 vans using a list of postal districts. We had no way of knowing how many visits a driver should be able to make in a day. But the real push for us to automate scheduling was seeing our drivers spending an hour of their time at home each night, planning their routes for the next day. We'd provide a list of 20 - 25 calls, and they would have to plan the best order themselves."

About PHS

Mobilizing over 700 field technicians across 23 depots, PHS is one of the leading workplace services providers in the UK. The company ranks #1 for washroom facilities, with other services including healthcare, floorcare protection all of which are part of its Hygiene Division.

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Benefits seen with IFS PSO

- Automatic scheduling and routing for 95% of visits
- 40% increase in technician productivity enabling 100,000 visits a week
- Over 100 new hires avoided
- On-the-day service increased by over 40% points
- No evening manual planning required by drivers
- Last customer visit scheduled within 30 minutes travel of each driver's home

Typically realizing a 35% decrease in travel time through scheduling, the IFS scheduling tool entirely automates the planning and dispatch process, requiring manual intervention only to manage exceptions. Explains Male, "Using IFS PSO, we've taken the average jobs per day from 18.5 in 2018 to over 26 in 2024, a 40% productivity increase. Some technicians are averaging over 35 jobs per day. Before we introduced IFS, the maximum number of calls we'd issue was 30 a day. Since IFS, that maximum has risen to over 50, in areas where we have excellent customer density," he says.

AI-driven real-time changes enable instant adaptability

Male is impressed with the AI-driven real-time dynamic flexibility IFS provides his dispatchers. "Inevitably any operation where drivers are on the road is subject to unforeseen disruption. Resources can also become challenging when a schedule is planned for a day and a technician calls in sick," he says. "The beauty about the real-time approach from IFS is that if something doesn't get done on the day, it's immediately flagged and automatically rerouted. Before we had automation, missed calls would simply fall off the queue and have to be picked up manually down the line."

By learning from tens of thousands of visits and using trillions of computations with multiple variables, IFS optimizes plans in a way a human scheduler cannot. "The machine learning capabilities in IFS mean that we can ensure all customer sites receive a good level of visits," says Male.

Benefits and productivity improvements

During COVID, with many customers closed, the company's healthcare business was able to repurpose its washroom drivers to service COVID testing sites, with IFS scheduling an additional 6,000 weekly visits UK-wide. "Without IFS we would never have been able to pivot rapidly like this without automated scheduling," observes Male.

With 95 % of activities automatically scheduled by IFS, Male's team of planners and despatchers are only manually intervening for the remaining 5% of exception scenarios.

From a PHS customer perspective, using IFS has allowed the company to rapidly mobilize new work. "We can share a fully optimized schedule with a new customer on a four-week roll-out that clearly shows the dates and locations we will attend. And we can categorically assure them that the plan is the most efficient solution," says Male. "Reducing mileage has been one of our key goals to limit our impact on the environment."

Continuous Improvement

Over recent years customer expectations in the market have changed, creating a need to focus on service quality and, in particular, service consistency. Explains Male, "There's a growing desire for service to be provided on a fixed day of the week or month. Thanks to some adjustments from IFS, over the last 18 months we've moved away from a model of longer grace days and magnetized our system to on-the-day service. We have increased our on-the-day service delivery by over 40 percentage points, making a significant difference to our customers."

The solution has also benefited quality of life for drivers. "The days of drivers planning their own schedules in the evening are now long gone. We've reduced our average miles between visits from six and a half to about four and a half. In addition, we're endeavoring to plan a technician's last job each day to be within thirty minutes' drive of their home," says Male.

Lessons in change management

In terms of adopting IFS some 11 years ago, Male accepts his company has learned some lessons. "I think careful change management is needed to ensure staff feel empowered to trust and adopt enabling, but very different, automated scheduling," he says. One of the things Male is clear about is the need to enroll employees in understanding the benefits of technology and change. "The workforce has to be involved in the transition," he says. "Now, for example, we have a drivers' debrief every day where we take feedback. We also show them, using visualization modeling within IFS, the negative implications of manually changing a route where, without constraints, the solution provides an optimal circular sequence."

Recognizing the Value of Outcome-based Service

Increasingly, Male believes customers are now focusing on the overall output and value of the service provided, rather than fixating on time-specific performance and KPIs. This servitized business model confers tangible value and benefits for both customer and supplier. "In the real world, flexing a day or two in a monthly rota has no negative impact on the customer's experience, and allows us to minimize emissions, costs and travel times," observes Male.

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**Stephen Male, Head of Logistics,
PHS Group**

Find out more

For more information, contact
your local IFS office or visit
ifs.com

