



City Embraces Information Management Solution To Improve Operational Efficiencies

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Government

Customer Profile

The City of Camden, New Jersey (population 79,000) has an illustrious history dating back to 1626. Recently, however, the state needed to step in to help turn around the ailing city.

Business Situation

The City of Camden reached out to Microsoft and Infusion Development to serve as strategic partners in its efforts to help turn around and streamline city operations.

Solution

The Camden Success Project, consisting of the Contact Camden and the Major's Digital Dashboard systems, was implemented to ensure resident service requests and city operations are managed efficiently.

Benefits

- Promotes transparent government
- Faster access to data for decisions
- Trackable key performance indicators
- Improved citizen satisfaction levels
- Enables proactive government
- Improved accountability

“We can track problems with our constituency, offer better services, and deliver cost savings. Everybody seems happy about the services, and that gives us accountability. That’s what every city needs.”

Gwendolyn Faison, Mayor of the City of Camden, New Jersey

The City of Camden, New Jersey has an illustrious history dating back to 1626 but had fallen on hard times in recent years to the point that the State of New Jersey stepped in to help the ailing municipality. In compliance with a legislated 24-month turnaround plan, the City of Camden was directed to upgrade its information technology environment. City officials worked with Microsoft and Infusion Development as strategic partners and created the concept for the Camden Success Project. Its two major components, the Contact Camden and the Major's Digital Dashboard systems, help insure quality service for residents, as well as accountability and enhanced collaboration across City departments. Tracking key performance indicators by department has enabled City officials to make more informed management decisions and to encourage proactive rather than reactive efforts on behalf of Camden residents.

Microsoft technology allows the greatest flexibility to react to requirements in our city. We've been very satisfied with the performance, manageability, scalability, and security of our solution.

Archie Williams
Manager, Division of Information Technology
City of Camden

Situation

The history of the City of Camden, New Jersey, dates back to 1626 and the early settlement days in the original 13 colonies that would become the United States. Incorporated in 1828, Camden counts renowned poet and essayist Walt Whitman among its citizenry and industry leading companies in its business community. Camden has been the home for the RCA Victor factory where both the first phonograph player and first color television was manufactured. In World War I and more prominently during World War II the shipyard based in Camden was the largest and most productive in building aircraft carriers, battleships and other vessels vital to the war effort.

In more recent times however, Camden experienced stagnation in several areas to the point that the State of New Jersey stepped in under the Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Recovery Act and initiated a 24-month turnaround plan to assist the ailing city of about 79,000 people.

On the economic front, locally supervised efforts helped realize new school building and modernization projects, various housing and construction developments, as well as revitalization of the Camden waterfront area so that it now offers several popular recreation and tourist attractions.

On the government front, the City of Camden reached out to Microsoft to help streamline operations and improve efficiency. In the past, the process for fulfilling a service request was often disorganized, and duplicate efforts from City departments sometimes resulted. While service requests and complaints from citizens were noted on paper, this paper trail process presented problems for determining project status, especially if multiple requests were received on the same project. Since basic information was not easily accessible, data was not always shared between most City departments. It was not uncommon for five or

six different city departments to receive work orders for the same project if different residents reported the problem. Because extra time and effort was often dedicated to following up, researching call information and playing telephone tag with residents, the efforts of City personnel were largely reactive rather than proactive. Poor communication between City departments and the resulting delays led many Camden citizens to perceive that the City was unresponsive to their needs.

Additionally, the legacy, disparate network infrastructure that the City of Camden utilized for government reporting obligations, addressing tax and financial requirements, monitoring local land use projects, and coordinating emergency response efforts relied on both off-the-shelf applications that were no longer supported in some cases and applications developed in-house that required upgrading to meet future needs.

In establishing criteria for upgrading its information technology, the City of Camden determined it needed a solution that would help met its prime objective of being more responsive and accountable to resident needs, while also offering scalability to meet future needs, providing greater security, and insuring lower operating costs.

Solution

With the ultimate goal of improving the lives of its residents, Camden city officials focused first on putting the right tools in place to become more responsive and accountable to its citizens.

"Since I've been mayor, the mission of the city of Camden is delivering services to the resident. With a city where resources are limited, we have to be very careful that we use our resources to the best advantage," said Gwendolyn Faison, Mayor of the City of Camden.

I just push a couple of buttons. The information we need is right there! Then we go to work and instead of weeks, a problem can get solved within minutes or a day. It's like a new day in this city.

Judge Theodore Z. Davis
Chief Operating Officer
City of Camden

Camden city officials identified the need for an information management solution that would provide key performance indicators (KPIs) for each City department as well as efficiently track service requests received by its residents.

With Microsoft and Infusion Development, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner that specializes in working with local and state governments, the City of Camden implemented its Camden Success Project that consists of two major components: Contact Camden and the Mayor's Digital Dashboard.

Contact Camden is a complete call and task management application that facilitates the entry and tracking of calls related to services, complaints and requests for information. When a resident calls to initiate a service request, the person that answers the phone enters the person's name, address and phone number as well as assigns what is known as a service ticket number that is then evaluated and referred to the appropriate City department to complete. If a follow-up call is received, either this service ticket number or the resident's name and contact information insures the call is routed directly to the appropriate City departments. Updates related to the project can be entered into the system by any City employee and instantly available to all who have access to the network. This real-time information helps insure that service request planning is proactive and efficient, and is an example of a KPI that is fed into the Mayor's Digital Dashboard.

The Mayor's Digital Dashboard, accessible to the mayor and chief operating officer, offers a consolidated, graphical view as well as specifics about each identified KPI towards the goal of making better and more informed decisions that impact the City of Camden. This management tool shows what

department directors and city employees are doing and if tasks are completed within or past the established timeframes. During the planning phases of the project, benchmarks for core KPIs were established to help track improvements in the City's operational performance.

"We can get rid of all these piles of paper, and in my case as the mayor, I can look at the Mayor's Digital Dashboard and I can see the input, I can see the benchmarks, I can see the progress of employees. It's all there for you. I can just pull up a department and see who's working and who's not working, see who's producing and who's not producing, see who's helping to save money, who's losing money," Faison explained.

The technology that supports the Camden Success Project is Microsoft Office SharePoint Server that provides the portal capability, and Microsoft ASP .NET and Microsoft Visual Studio 2005 that are used to develop the custom aspects of the Contact Camden and the Mayor's Digital Dashboard components. Providing support on the backend are Microsoft SQL Server 2005 and its business intelligence capability, along with Microsoft BizTalk Server that provides business activity monitoring.

Being more responsive, accountable and efficient in meeting residents' needs has enabled the City of Camden to connect the gap between government and its residents. Camden residents have noticed.

"I like the ability to jump on a problem and solve it right away, and what fascinates me about this system is that I just push a couple of buttons. The information we need is right there! Then we can go to work just like that, and instead of weeks going by before a problem of the resident is resolved, it can get solved within minutes or a day. I've even had the experience when people start sending in

We're looking forward to where the Camden Success Project can take us in the future, because it's doing great things today.

Reverend Tony C. Evans, Sr.
Director, Department of Health and Human Services
City of Camden

thank-you letters. It's like a new day in this city. It's really working," explained Judge Theodore Z. Davis, Chief Operating Officer of the City of Camden.

"We're getting to the point where government is now realizing that customer service has to be number one. This tool is allowing us to get to that end," noted Reverend Tony C. Evans, Sr., the Director of Department of Health and Human Services for the City of Camden.

The new efficiencies have empowered City employees at all levels to work more proactively to address the service request needs of Camden residents.

"The system enables the employees to have a greater sense of control of the situation, because the information that they have is really right at their fingertips," explained Tasha McCoy, Administrative Analyst in the Office of the Mayor of the City of Camden.

"We found that the Microsoft technology allowed us the greatest flexibility to be able to react to various requirements throughout the city. We've been very satisfied with the performance, manageability, scalability, and security of our solution," added Archie Williams, Manager of the Division of Information Technology for the City of Camden.

Benefits

By implementing the Contact Camden and the Mayor's Digital Dashboard systems, the City of Camden has improved the service it provides to its residents, and enhanced communication and collaboration across City departments to insure greater operational efficiencies. Additionally, City officials are now empowered to make better and more informed management decisions by leveraging rich business intelligence obtained from all of the City departments through an

integrated and easy-to-use dashboard. The upgraded systems play a crucial role in enabling the City to accurately measure and report on its progress toward satisfying the mandates outlined in the MRERA legislation.

Accountability & Improved Service Work Hand-in-Hand

A benefit of the city's Camden Success Project that focuses on streamlining operations and improving efficiencies, is the results from the emphasis placed on accountability. The Contact Camden component involves not only recording a Camden resident's service request or complaint, but also insures it is referred to the appropriate department, that follow-up is initiated when applicable, and that progress is tracked against an established service timeframe. The status of all projects is monitored through the Mayor's Digital Dashboard. These efforts help insure that the City of Camden remains focused on being responsive to its residents' needs.

"With our new technology, once an employee inputs a complaint or service request, we can see when it began, can check the progress, and can see when it was finished. We're now looking at a matter of days, where it used to take days and days, and even weeks. This is the way to go for accountability, it can't be beat. It's the best way to get the job done, and save money for the taxpayers," Mayor Faison added.

"City employees now are a lot more confident in themselves and their performances, and the residents feel more secure and comfortable with the City, because when they call for answers to questions, we have the answers right there for them, on hand," McCoy added.

Enhanced Communication & Collaboration Insure Citizen Needs Are Met Efficiently

Camden City employees are now empowered to work more proactively and cooperatively. Previously, one City department didn't necessarily know which projects another was working on. In some cases it was the same one and a duplication of both time and effort resulted. The system now allows all City departments to be aware of and easily communicate with each other toward resolving a resident's service request or moving forward on an important local project.

"The efficiency of City operations is much better now because of the accountability and I think City employees appreciate this too because it elevates their performance. If you elevate this performance, it benefits the citizens, and then it benefits the city as a whole. It's a big circle of influence that it has a positive impact," Judge Davis added.

Technology Leads the Way to Meeting Current & Future Goals

The City of Camden, like many municipal governments, is constrained in terms of financial resources and must insure it is making the best use of taxpayer funds. During the process of upgrading its systems from a patchwork of in-house developed applications that were not expected to meet future needs, as well as some unsupported off-the-shelf applications, the City worked with Infusion Development and Microsoft to best leverage its available resources.

Much of the computer program code that helped the City of Camden address its goals of responsive and accountable government was available, in large part, through Microsoft's Solution Sharing Network Program.

"The code base for the solution is freely available to any municipality who wants to use it, as part of Microsoft's Solution Sharing Network Program. It becomes an exercise of integrating it into each unique environment within that municipality to enable them to take advantage of all of its capabilities, and all of the benefits," explained Kevin Lasitz, Vice President, Sales and Business Development at Infusion Development, adding: "The products involved in the solution are standard, off-the-shelf Microsoft technologies that we wanted to integrate and be able to really customize to actually meet the needs of the City of Camden in a very cost-effective way."

For the challenge of integrating the data, the City of Camden was able to leverage another solution from Microsoft and Infusion Development.

"One of the things that we decided was important about Microsoft products are that, by design, they are fully integrated, right out of the box. So we didn't have to go out and contract someone to build in that interoperability. The Microsoft products have allowed us to be able to bring in all these disparate legacy applications, and integrate them seamlessly into our overall Microsoft platform," explained Williams.

The custom aspects of the project that insure the City of Camden system addresses the unique needs of its community were also developed in a streamlined manner due to Microsoft's approach to inoperability.

"The advantage we have is that we work with a Microsoft technology stack, so we don't have to invent a lot. We find ourselves understanding the process, creating a little bit of glue, but putting together the right aspects of the Microsoft technology stack to suit the problem. This gives us the speed of execution in solving a big problem much,

For More Information

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For more information about Infusion Development products and services, call Kevin Lasitz, Vice President Sales and Business Development (917) 648-2345 or visit the Web site at: www.infusion.com

For more information about City of Camden, New Jersey products and services, call (856) 757-7200 or visit the Web site at: www.ci.camden.nj.us

much quicker than any other method," noted Gregory Brill, CEO of Infusion Development.

Benefits were realized in other areas as well.

"Our developers tell us that the development cycle is greatly shortened. There's increased data integration between SQL Server 2005, as well as Visual Studio 2005, which allows for an ease of development on the developers' part," explained Williams, adding: "It's very important for us to be able to respond in a most efficient way, to reduce the burden on our taxpayers. We found that the Microsoft products allowed us to be able to bring products to market in a quick and efficient way. And the beauty of this is that we're able to implement this entire solution on one server."

The future looks bright for the Camden Success Project as those involved in program acknowledge.

"Microsoft and Infusion Development have worked to prove to us that it can be done in any city, and it can make a difference. That's what every city needs," Mayor Faison observed, adding: "With this system, we can track problems with our constituency, offer better services, and deliver cost savings. Everybody seems happy about the services, and that gives us accountability. That's what every city needs. I'm just so proud that we now, finally, have a system that can do these wonderful things so that everybody can benefit."

"We're looking forward to where it can take us to in the future, because it's doing great things today," Reverend Evans said.

Software and Services

■ Products

- Microsoft Office 2003 Professional
- Microsoft Visual Studio .NET 2003
- Microsoft BizTalk Server 2002
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2003
- Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003
- Microsoft SQL Server 2005
- Windows XP Professional

■ Technologies

- Microsoft .NET Foundation Services
- Microsoft SharePoint Team Services
- Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Notification Services
- Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services