

On shoestring, creative IT grows revenue, improves functions

Despite a locked up budget, mrc helps the Village of Lombard integrate two disparate processes to both improve functionality, and create a brand new revenue stream.

Basics

One of the biggest complaints you'll ever hear about government, from the very large to the very local, is the non-commonsensual bureaucracy of procedures. What should be a simple in and out trip to get a permit, or a license, can take hours, and always seems to involve a litany of forms that each bear a striking resemblance to the one before.

Wouldn't it be nice if instead of making multiple trips, with multiple due dates, you could take care of all your resident duties at one time? That's coming closer to reality if you live in the Village of Lombard.

Once a year, the villagers of Lombard, IL, a Western suburb of Chicago, are required to purchase city stickers for their automobiles, and dog licenses for their dogs. One might

initially think it incongruous to loop these two processes together, however, there was one fact that could not be ignored. The rate of residents

registering their autos each year was very high, but the rate of residents registering their dogs was very low. The village's IT manager, Larry McGhinnis saw an opportunity to improve the village's system, and began to look into how to do it... despite a locked up budget.

McGhinnis, was able to think outside the box, and integrate two disparate processes via the Web to create both improved functionality, and a brand new revenue stream. A one-time application build now pays dividends.

Challenge

The first part of McGhinnis' challenge was that the Village of Lombard (running on an IBM iSeries) uses a packaged software product for the

majority of data entry and retrieval. With all packaged

software, it's impossible to make all the people happy all of the time...so the general approach for these packages is to design them for the least common denominator and customize individual needs from there. As is often the case, the majority of the software package worked just fine, but Lombard's processes of city sticker renewal and dog licenses were not working with the rest of the system. McGhinnis wanted to modernize them, and integrate them. The second issue at hand was that data-entry for these processes was not a full-time job, or done by one person, and the text-based traditional green screen interface that was being

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**Basics**

Despite a budget with no breathing room, IT Manager, Larry McGhinnis at the Village of Lombard was able to think outside the box, and use the Web to integrate two disparate governmental processes, improve functionality, and create a brand new revenue stream.

Challenge

- Neither process was integrated with the software package Lombard runs.
- The Web applications needed to be easy to use, and graphical.
- The Budget was severely limited

Solution

mrc created an a la carte Java servlet application: Web-based, graphical, fully functional, flexible, and portable to any platform he chose.

Value

By streamlining the bureaucratic processes, and finding a creative solution, Lombard's IT Manager, Larry McGhinnis, not only made two city processes better, but turned a revenue trickle into a revenue stream.

used was just not intuitive to those without training.

Retrieving data was even more challenging, as police officers

who would most often access the information could not be expected to be fully trained on the green screen...so considerable time was being spent retrieving data as well. McGhinnis' goal was an easy-to-use Web-based graphical solution that anyone could comfortably pick up and use to both enter and retrieve necessary information.

The third, and biggest, challenge was that the Village budget was limited. Both the cost of training in a Web language like Java (in order to build the application himself) and the cost of hiring a consultant to customize the two applications far exceeded the monies he could allot to the project.



He didn't have to go far to find what he needed. The right solution was just down the street from him...mrc.

Solution

After researching the various solutions available to create Web-based applications, mrc made him an offer that no one else could match. They offered to create an a la carte Java servlet application that would

be Web-based, graphical, fully functional, flexible, and more importantly, portable to any platform he chose. Suddenly, problem solved.

He just needed a design. The first step was changing the Village of Lombard's city sticker form to add a question about pet ownership. In order to complete the new form, a village resident would be asked whether or not they had a dog, and if they did, the necessary dog license information would follow.

Additionally, there were issues with functionality as well that McGhinnis felt could be improved upon. McGhinnis created a graphical interface to allow users to easily add the license data. More importantly, he built an even easier way for Lombard police to quickly get it out.

Here's a copy of the application, with sample data:

Before, in the case of a stray dog, there had been no way to access much of the necessary information in the database. For example, there was absolutely no way to cross-reference by breed or by color, or by sex, even though that information was attached to the license.

Value

Improved capabilities

What appears to be just a simple data lookup has exponentially improved the chances of a stray pet finding its way back to its owner with very little information to go on. For example, if a Pomeranian wanders down Main St. and is

picked up, a police officer can look the dog up by license number, which they could also do in the original process. However, with this new Web application, if a dog doesn't have a license, the search doesn't end there. He or she can also search by breed, to find out how many Pomeranians are licensed in Lombard, IL, and where they live. Or, they can look up a dog by color and sex, if they aren't sure the breed, and narrow down the search. Or if the Pomeranian's dog tag only reads "Josie", a user can now look up how many 'Josie's are in the village, and narrow it down that way. These are all capabilities that were just not there before.

Restored Data Integrity

Also, in the past when dog license information was entered, data integrity was a common problem. Breeds would be entered manually, so human error meant options wouldn't all match. Or, color would be described in different ways, black/brown, brown/black could describe the same dog; the data entry was subjective. Additionally, addresses of owners could be incorrect as there was just no way to know if the address entered was a valid one.

In the new Web application there are validation checks that not only ensure that the information that is entered is standardized, but also that the information is accurate. And with the pop-ups and drop-down features, validation is created, and the process for

VILLAGE OF LOMBARD
1869

VILLAGE OF LOMBARD
DOG LICENSES

Village of Lombard 255 E. Wilson Ave. Lombard, IL 60148 (630) 620-5700

Search

Tag #	Breed	Color	Gender	Street #	Street name	Dog Name	Owner Last
12	MIXED	BLACK BROWN & WHITE	F	1045	MAIN	FRED	MCGHINNIS
15	BASSET HOUND	LIVER & WHITE	F	910	CHERRY	PORK	KLINE
19	BEAGLE MIX	BLK/WHITE/GRAY	F	25	WEST	TOBY	RUPP
20	SHIH TZU	GREY/WHITE	F			SASSY	MOORE
25	SCHNOODLE	SABLE/WHI	M	1041	MAIN	ANGEL	SMITH
30	SILKY TERRIER	YELLOW	M	15	HARDING	WAG	SMITH
50	BEAGLE/SHELT	BLACK BROWN & WHITE	M				DICUS
72	LABRADOR	BLACK	F	526	STEWART	NO NAME	MYERS
325	COCK A POO	WHITE	F	1016	HIGHRIDGE	CASIO	RAKEBRAND
329	DOBERMAN	BLACK & TAN	F	1035	GRACE	ROBYN	THOMAS

Next

entering the information is streamlined. If the drop down menu only has a choice of black/brown, all of the dogs that are brown/black or black/brown are in one category. And, when a user enters the information for an address, they can link up to a state-land file that supplies every valid address in the village of Lombard. When a user enters an address, he or she will know immediately whether the address is an actual address, and then with the click of a button, the address will be entered automatically into the form, so work does not have to be duplicated.

Perceived Value meets Restored Revenue

The process of combining the two processes is also win-win for both parties involved. Lombard saved money along the way by printing one form instead of two, improving

capabilities, and creating an efficient internal process. The dog-owners of Lombard receive the perceived value of combining what might have been two inconvenient steps of separate license applications and separate payments, into just one step...shortening the red tape considerably.

By combining these two processes, McGhinnis and the Village of Lombard have more than tripled the number of licensed dogs this year due to this integration. That revenue that would otherwise be lost adds up and goes straight to the bottom line. The old way also meant more dogs in shelters, more dogs put down, more employee time spent researching, and more government money spent on all of the above.

Conclusion

The extended capabilities of this data retrieval application are to some extent,

immeasurable. Being able to hop onto the Internet and quickly filter through a massive list of data to narrow down a search, even based on the most basic features such as color and sex, create a capability that wasn't there before...the ability to find the pet's owners quickly and easily. Anyone who has ever lost a pet would agree that that's welcome progress. But, that functionality is not singular to one small dog license application. It can be translated to hundreds of applications, not only in local governments where there are many needs for address lookups, permit retrievals, and the like. But, it can be translated to all sorts of businesses including law firms, police departments, hospitals, pharmacies, as well as larger industries such as manufacturing, distributors, and retail stores.

With budgets still slow to recover, though clearly on the mend, many IT managers continue to search for ways to improve their business' efficiencies through technology, despite their budget constraints. mrc continues to work with businesses across the board to create a la carte applications as they search to create new efficiencies, and new revenue streams in overlooked processes.

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