Welland group

Company: Software AGCustomer: Welland GroupSubmitted by: MCC

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The mission:

The Welland Partnership needed to create a community portal to provide its

five councils' services and information to 350, 000 local residents, spread

across four counties.

The solution:

The Welland Partnership was impressed by Software AG's understanding of

the business problem, its innovative XML based solution, proven delivery

track record and ability to meet the strict budget of the Pathfinder project.

They chose Software AG's XML based integration technology to deliver

information from back office systems to the community based market town

portals, developed by Rutland On Line Limited. The Software AG solution also

includes the delivery of a multi channel contact management system into

each of the five councils, which is a key component of Software AG's

Integrated Electronic Service Delivery framework.

The result:

- Real-time information and services available on-line. For example, the
  Pathfinder project initially focused on the public requirements of the
  planning department, whereby planning applications, representations
  and payments can now be submitted electronically via the portal.
  Planning submissions can also be viewed on-line.
- An XML based infrastructure links the community portal to the back
  office systems of each of the five councils.

- Software AG's Integrated Electronic Service Delivery (IESD) framework has been implemented within each of the 5 councils to support multi—channel service delivery and provide an improved customer service.

The IESD framework includes Customer Relationship Management functionality (CRM) which will provide the foundation for wider e-Government initiatives, such as the implementation of Contact and Call Centres.

- The data is stored in XML format, so it can be quickly and easily manipulated to provide different front-end interfaces for business and private users, as well as to share information with different partners.

The customer:

" In a large geographical area with a small population, the main industries are those of tourism and agriculture. Many people who live in the area do not work or shop here, which decreases the income of the local region. By achieving the e-Government targets for Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) with the help of Software AG, the Welland Partnership will be able to address this key concern and improve the take-up of local markets.

To fulfil this aim, we need to successfully publish our services and data on a community portal." Keith Aubrey, Assistant Chief Executive, Melton Borough Council.

Bridging Communities On-line

By the end of 2005, the Government aims to have transformed public services to focus on the citizen. Although it is unclear as to exactly how citizens will want to receive these services, it is fairly certain that ESD will

play a vital role in the success of this plan. The Welland Partnership is one group of local authorities that has chosen to meet this challenge head-on.

By pooling its resources to achieve its common objectives, this group of local councils has placed itself in the driving seat of XML-based portal integration projects by enlisting the help of Software AG and the supplier of the portal application Rutland On Line Limited .

The challenges of development

The Welland Partnership comprises East Northamptonshire Council, Harborough District Council, Melton Borough Council, Rutland County Council and South Kesteven District Council. The population of this rural sub-region of the East Midlands is approximately 350, 000 people spread across four counties. The smallest of these councils is Rutland, who launched the first Internet portal for the area as part of its Rutland On Line project in 1996. The site was subsequently recognised as the Local Government Area Website of the Year 2000.

Following Rutland's success, other common needs and issues of the area were addressed, leading to the formation of the Welland Partnership in 1998.

Addressing the needs of the community

In September 2001, the Government made public its willingness to support and fund a series of 25 Pathfinder projects. In order to enhance the information available to the public, stay on course for the 2005 ESD requirements and pull the sites together to create a community portal, the Welland Partnership applied for a Pathfinder allocation. Once the funding had been agreed, the project went to tender in July 2001. The requirement was

to provide an integration infrastructure linking the community portal application, developed by Rutland On Line, with the back office systems used by each of the five councils. Software AG's proven delivery record, reference sites and excellent customer feedback were important factors for the group's consideration.

Software AG responded accurately to the requirements of the brief, giving a strong presentation and a solution that was within the budget constraints of the Pathfinder project, that also offered the added value of CRM and workflow as part of the IESD framework. Software AG's Tamino XML Server provides the Welland portal with the platform for integrated ESD. Designed specifically to store structured information in native XML format, Tamino has a big advantage over relational database management systems, as no extra data conversion layer is required resulting in faster response times. By using Software AG's IESD solution, the Welland Partnership will provide its constituents with easy, 24×7 access to information and services from public, private, voluntary and community sectors across the 11 market towns in the Welland area. Furthermore, this community portal lays the foundation for the wider e-Government strategy of each of the Welland partners.

Taking an integrated approach

The Welland Partnership differs from others as the councils involved come from four different counties – Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland.

The partnership itself has evolved from initial discussions between chief executives. A subsequent meeting found that their authorities shared a

commonality of purpose, style and above all, challenges. The creation of the Welland portal will make council services available to the public via the Internet. For example, the pilot implementation for this Pathfinder project is that of Harborough District Council. Between September 2001 and March 2002, the Welland Partnership worked with Software AG to implement the service delivery capability of the website, with the initial focus of the Pathfinder project being on the public requirements of the planning department.

Keith Aubrey comments, " The Harborough portal allows access to information including planning applications, their effects on given localities, details of how the public can oppose them and will ultimately provide the decisions of the applications themselves. With this data accessible on-line, it will greatly reduce the impact the public has on department staff. In time, everyday questions will not require a visit to the council offices, but a quick Internet connection or phone call to get an accurate and up-to-date answer." The contact management solution, which is based on Software AG's Tamino XML Server, stores all customer interactions and holds all service related information. This allows the Welland Partnership to keep its service related information up-to-date in real-time.

Not only will this service be accessible to the public via the Internet, but it will also become the point of reference for the council workers who are facing the public on a daily basis. For example the Welland Partners are looking to use Software AG's IESD framework to support the introduction of a virtual Call Centre. Each local authority in the Welland region has a number of telephone agents who receive customer calls. If one council reaches

capacity, the telephone system will be able to re-route the call to another council within the Partnership. By allowing the councils to have access to the same information, a high percentage of calls could be answered in a faster time, with equal efficiency and accuracy, with total transparency to the caller. Keith Aubrey adds, " Getting the information on-line has also made the group look at how its own systems differ between councils.

We are now starting to integrate a group approach to the processes and internal systems involved in planning. As part of the end result, it will be important for the look and feel of the portal to provide similar data for each locality. In terms of supporting this data from a council perspective, it will only be made easier if we're all working along the same lines."

Treading the path to the future

The content of the finished Welland portal will be key to its success. The basis for its development has to date been the Rutland On Line site.

Here, the public can access information through a map of the Rutland area, through which they drill down to their specific town or village. The Welland portal will need to have information that will benefit residents, local businesses and tourists across a number of geographical areas. As such, it needs to be straightforward in its design and layout. The aim is to have the Welland portal set as the homepage for private residents and businesses of the area, and to be the first port of call for most of their queries and eventually transactions. " With Software AG's help, we aim to provide a comprehensive set of on-line transactions for both business and private users.

These could include, for example, council tax payments, street lighting contracts and waste exchange programmes," adds Keith Aubrey. " There are approximately 450 services that councils provide and, ideally, we would make them all accessible through our community portal." There are huge commercial opportunities if the Welland portal is set as the homepage of choice across the area. The Welland Partnership could look at including advertisements that are specific to local areas and could have different adverts for business and private users. Software AG's XML based integration technology and the IESD framework makes these viable possibilities for the future, as Keith Aubrey concludes, " We want the Welland portal to become a valuable asset to provide income generation both for the Local Government and local industry. It is entirely possible that in a few years' time, all local authorities could be required to provide input for one central national portal that offers different layers of information at regional, sub-regional, town and village levels.

With Software AG's help, we will be able to integrate all our local knowledge and make it easily accessible to the public, something that we could not hope to have achieved alone."