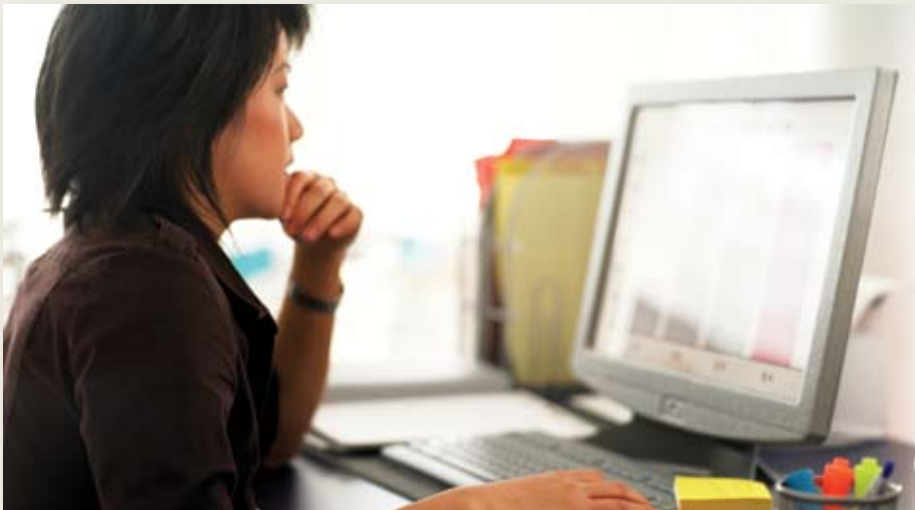


Capital Gains

Agencies in Washington, D.C., improve productivity and efficiency with automated workflow.



The U.S. capital is home to more than 500,000 residents. However, more than a million people are in Washington, D.C., on a typical workday when visitors and commuters from the suburbs arrive.

The District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) has a mission to protect the health, safety and economic interests of these people. The department issues licenses and permits; conducts inspections; enforces building, housing and safety codes; regulates land use and development; and provides consumer education and advocacy services.

As it protects the health and welfare of the District of Columbia's residents, businesses and visitors, the DCRA is always working to achieve a higher level of efficiency. That's why it's been adopting new tools to streamline its workflows, simplify IT systems and make information more accessible to the public via the Web.

Until recently, the DCRA used 51 different systems to manage its data. With so many systems, staff relied on numerous interfaces and data repositories to find information.

"There is significant overlap in terms of the data each of DCRA's divisions needs to do

their jobs," said DCRA Director Linda K. Argo. "However, none of our legacy IT systems spoke clearly with each other, and thus most of the interaction was taking place on paper or through e-mails and phone calls."

DCRA staff had to compare and contrast different versions of the same data to arrive at what they needed. "They were maintained on different platforms, different vendors, different everything," said Gus Viteri, CIO of the DCRA. "It was tedious at best and inefficient at worst."

A Web-based solution from Accela is streamlining the department's workflows by setting up a single database and condensing to approximately eight systems, with one of those systems doing most of the work. With fewer systems and one comprehensive database, the infrastructure will be simplified tremendously. Thus, numerous activities within the department are happening more quickly.

The DCRA uses Accela Automation®, a Web-based enterprise solution that enables the department to automate workflow, activity tracking and other daily tasks. The central database allows more efficient data management and easier information sharing across departments. The result is improved

efficiency and productivity. And because it's Web-based, it lowers costs and streamlines application support and maintenance.

The DCRA is finishing up an 18-month implementation this fall. Like most government entities in today's tough economic times, the department is doing more with less. With Accela Automation, the only requirement to access the system is an Internet-ready PC and browser, which reduces costs considerably for the DCRA.

In addition to improving internal systems, Accela Automation also enables permits to be issued more quickly. And it's making it easier for citizens and businesses to get information and services on the Web.

"We are excited about this new system as it allows us to leverage new technology to create a seamless operation and to move many of our processes online," Argo said. "We've improved both the customer experience and created new efficiencies this agency sorely needed."

To the Point

With fewer systems, the agency will be more productive. "We'll have all our information, for all of our areas, in one single system," said Viteri. "Now you don't have to log in to five or six different systems. Everything is in one place. That's going to be the first benefit for us. The second is that the reporting process is going to be a lot easier." With the new system, reporting can be done more quickly than in the past, and Viteri and his staff will have more confidence in the data.

With the streamlined systems in place, the DCRA can serve citizens more speedily. For example, when a building was to be demolished, previously it took nearly two hours to do the permitting and other paperwork. Now it takes less than five minutes.

Before, when seeking some permits, citizens would hire expeditors to stand in line and move paperwork ahead for them. Now

the DCRA lets people get permits quickly and easily themselves. “Now they can do it online, and they don’t need a third party to do it for them,” Viteri said.

Two other district agencies — the Department of Health and the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) — are also using Accela Automation to improve operations and customer service. The ABRA implementation will be part of the DCRA’s, and the two agencies will share resources and information.

Viteri said the ABRA expects the automation to improve its IT infrastructure and the online services it provides to the public. The ABRA issues alcoholic beverage licenses and permits, and conducts inspections and investigations while enforcing regulatory compliance. The ABRA is looking to automation for improving its one-stop service to customers seeking licenses and records access, as well as its own processes for issuing licenses.

The ABRA will use several Accela Automation modules and add-on products, including Licensing & Case Management, Accela GIS™ for visual analysis of the agency’s information, Accela Wireless™ for keeping field agents connected, and Accela Citizen Access™ for better Web services for the public.

Standardization Saves Time

For the DCRA, Accela brings numerous other benefits in addition to the software and expertise. “With the plug-ins and the partners they have, we don’t have to build

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new interfaces every time we need something,” noted Viteri. With less need to build its own components, the DCRA saves a lot of money and it’s now much easier to share information among agencies. “I don’t have to reverse-engineer the application,” said Viteri. “In many cases, the vendor is no longer around or we haven’t had support for a number of years. We have a standard way of interfacing the systems now.”

The standardization works well on many levels for the agency. Having a single system for most of its processes is a major improvement. “That allows me to free up some resources and do away with some residual contracts and support for systems that are no longer state-of-the-art or reliable,” Viteri said.

There’s also a standardized method of entering addresses, which is saving time for staff. The previous systems allowed for variations in how addresses were entered, so different people could input the same address in different ways.

That caused problems later when people needed to retrieve the addresses. And vital

information associated with an address could be spread through several different records. It cost a lot of time for staff to pull it all together. “Now there’s only one way of putting in North Capitol Street, for example,” said Viteri. “It’s regulated by the system. When you go in to get all the permits for North Capitol Street, everything is there. That’s going to help our people.”

The single system also gives the DCRA better ability to track interactions with the public and businesses. “We’re going to have a bar-code system for our client submission, so we can track everything with bar codes and know where things are at any given point in time,” said Viteri.

Viteri wasn’t at the DCRA when Accela was chosen as the solution more than two years ago, but he’s happy to be working with the company. “They are very flexible,” he said. “We had some situations where some of the plans changed. We needed to change the project plan, or there would be other limitations. They were willing to work around our schedule and our priorities as they changed, which was really refreshing.”

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