

London Borough of Ealing Advances E-Government Initiatives



Consisting of 300,000 residents, the London Borough of Ealing is an outer borough of London. The borough is governed by a local council and mayor, and is represented by a Member of Parliament.



Challenge

When it comes to adopting new technologies, government tends to lag behind the private sector, perpetuating time-consuming processes and bureaucratic red tape. Taking aim at bureaucratic inefficiencies, the British Parliament wanted to speed up and simplify reporting and decision-making processes. The government enacted legislation that redistributes budgetary controls to local levels, and set mandates requiring that all local governments in the United Kingdom e-enable their operations.

These government mandates sent the London Borough of Ealing (LBE) shopping for a Web-to-host connectivity solution that would give local department heads real time, 24x7 access to their budgets, grants and other financial information. Ealing is an outer borough of London that is home to more than 300,000 people. The borough is governed by a local council and mayor, and is represented by a Member of Parliament. These officials oversee the Housing Department, the Client Executive Office, Central Education and Corporate Resources.

Under the borough's centralized system, reams of paperwork had to be processed to authorize the release of information to local departments. Often, a month passed before information finally reached the person making the request.

The new government mandates gave the LBE an opportunity to overcome their inherent technology barriers presented by disparate mainframe, iSeries and PC systems plus extensive paper-based processing. By unlocking information from these sources, the LBE could provide local department heads with real-time access to financial information via a Web browser.

The borough's Corporate Resources Division needed a solution that could integrate seamlessly with existing applications. Users needed an intuitive GUI that would provide Internet access to information. Conducting a thorough search, the division looked for a vendor that could meet its requirements and deliver a cost-effective Web-to-host solution. The LBE team evaluated each vendor based on how well it met organizational and cost-effectiveness requirements as part of the pilot scheme, which involved transforming a purchase order screen into a more user-friendly GUI format.

Solution

Only LegaSuite GUI®, a component of Seagull Software's LegaSuite® solution, could enable LBE to run a GUI thin client on the host application without the need for a front-end server and drastic software enhancements. Another major factor in the LBE's selection of LegaSuite GUI was that the solution would not require any changes to the host application.

"Seagull Software's speed of development, ease of use and short training periods were all crucial factors in the decision-making process," Smyth said. "The beauty of the whole installation process was its non-invasive nature, so it didn't affect the underlying host application."

— Andrew Smyth
Senior Financial Systems
Accountant
London Borough of Ealing



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“Seagull Software’s LegaSuite GUI offering was by far the most cost-effective and efficient solution for our requirements,” said Andrew Smyth, senior financial systems accountant at the LBE’s Corporate Resources Division. “It offered our users the functionality and Web access we sought.”

LegaSuite GUI is a robust development and deployment environment that transforms iSeries applications into sleek, new Web- and Windows-enabled applications, providing users with a streamlined, easy-to-use application that enhances their productivity and effectiveness. For IT departments, LegaSuite GUI provides a fast, easy and non-invasive way to deploy business processes to the Web—without altering the host application. More importantly, LegaSuite GUI provides organizations as a whole with enhanced applications that are as scalable and reliable as the original application.

“Seagull Software’s speed of development, ease of use and short training periods were all crucial factors in the decision-making process,” Smyth said. “The beauty of the whole installation process was its non-invasive nature, so it didn’t affect the underlying host application.” Under the supervision of Seagull Software consultants, the LBE’s IT Application Support Team implemented a Java client version of the original applications within the main council departments, resulting in browser access to these existing business processes. “The development process was extremely quick. The only problems we had to overcome were the internal arguments of what color the GUI screen would be and what the fonts and buttons were going to look like,” Smyth said.

LegaSuite GUI was rolled out to 100 staff throughout the LBE. Outlying sites access the application from a Web browser over the Internet, while in-house employees use the corporate intranet to access the system. The new GUI client was so easy to use and understand that department users needed only brief tutorials to be able to effectively use the system before it went live.

Results

In the past, users navigated up to 11 green screens just to pay an invoice. LegaSuite GUI has now reduced the invoice-payment process to a single Web page. Users can also access salary, wage, purchase order, payment and accounts payable information from one screen. Even though all character-based green screens still operate in the background, users do not see them. Users view the results of their enquiries in a GUI format, as well as in an Excel spreadsheet or in other presentation formats such as PowerPoint and Adobe Acrobat. From this data, users can extract files that can be used for further analysis and reporting to committee, cabinet and high-level council members.



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"We not only provided local authorities and council members with remote access, but we also supplied the functionality they needed in an open systems environment, without sacrificing the security of our host system," Smyth said. "The system is user-friendly, and it's quick and easy to master, thereby significantly increasing productivity." The system is currently serving LBE's accounts and financial services divisions (ledger update, goods and purchase orders), but the plan is to install LegaSuite GUI in the borough's schools and education departments as well.

Since implementing the LegaSuite GUI application, LBE has realized a substantial return on investment. "At the outset, our goal was to improve the accuracy of financial information and save time in rekeying data," Smyth said. "We also wanted people at a local level to take control of their own financial budgets and cut down on inbound inquiries. We have already extended the longevity of our back-office applications, and reaped considerable savings by eliminating the need to purchase a new corporate information system."

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