



Medway Council

Local government authority speeds forms processing and brings key services online using Adobe® Intelligent Document Platform

MEDWAY COUNCIL

- Local government authority providing services to more than 250,000 people in the Medway region
- Size: 9,000 employees
- Headquarters: Rocheter, Kent, United Kingdom
www.medway.gov.uk

INDUSTRY

Local Government

SOLUTION

Online Forms Processing

PRODUCTS USED

- Adobe Form Designer
- Adobe Form Server
- Adobe Web Output Pak
- Adobe Workflow Designer
- Adobe Workflow Server

Organisation Profile

Medway Council is a unitary authority providing local government services for a quarter of a million people in Medway. Medway is recognised by the United Kingdom government as part of the developing Thames Gateway region, which will play an increasing role on the European and global stage. The council supports a wide range of services, including economic development, education, social care, roads, housing, planning, customer complaints, and refuse collection. To better respond to residents' needs and ensure compliance with the U.K. Online initiative, Medway Council adopted the Adobe Intelligent Document Platform to provide the public with convenient, reliable access to government materials that can be reviewed, completed online or offline, and submitted electronically.

Challenges Faced

- Comply with U.K. Online initiative by 2005 deadline
- Ensure citizens adopt the e-government services
- Improve customer service
- Simplify form completion and processing

Medway Council has to comply with the national government initiative, U.K. Online, which calls for making all services available to the public electronically by 2005. This challenge was particularly tough for the council because many of its users would be using public access terminals, meaning security issues also needed to be taken into account.

Medway Council needed not only to meet the deadline for e-government services, it also had to ensure the public's use of the services—otherwise the exercise would have no value. This meant that the council had to closely examine which forms and processes would benefit users most from a new way of working.

In the past, the perception among people was that councils were not being as responsive as possible to their needs. This perception stemmed largely from difficulties in tracking complaints and requests, so customers never felt fully confident that actions were being taken.

As with many government organisations, almost every process is driven by the completion of forms. Originally, this was almost entirely paper-based, which was both bureaucratic and time-intensive. Some of the forms, such as the one used by the adoption and fostering division, necessarily ran to over 15 pages in length, serving as a barrier for users. One of the best ways to ensure citizens use the service was to focus on making these forms more manageable as an incentive to drive users online to complete them.

“Every time Medway Council is contacted by a member of the public, a form is filled out, either by themselves or by us. The more we can automate this process, the more efficiently we can function,” says Richard Lynn, IT project manager, Medway Council.

“User-friendliness has proved to be the key to ensuring the public use the services, and this was something we could not have achieved without the technology from Adobe.”

Richard Lynn,
IT project manager,
Medway Council

RESULTS

- Enhanced customer services
- Reduced time needed to complete and process forms
- Lowered council administrative costs with automated processes
- Improved tracking of residents' requests

Success Strategy

Medway Council selected Adobe Systems to help it address these challenges. Its approach was to tackle the project one form at a time, beginning with one of the simplest—the customer complaint form. Despite not supporting the conversion to an online form with advertising to drive usage, within the first three months the council had received more than 250 forms and was receiving 11 forms per day from the public.

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Having completed the first stage, the next step was to make the most of the capabilities offered by the technology. One of the first forms to be moved online was the adoption and fostering application form. The new form featured built-in intelligence that shortens the overall form length according to the candidate's answers, making the application form quicker and simpler to complete.

Users can now join a library, apply for council tax discounts, report racist or homophobic abuse, register for waste collection, order a memorial, become a sports coach, apply to be a foster parent, or report potholes, vandalism, illegal dumping, graffiti, broken street lights, and road defects—online. Medway Council identified these services for migration early on in the project because they were expected to be highly sought after and contribute strongly to the overall success of the initiative.

Customers will also be able to track the progress of any requests or complaints submitted to the council via the council's Web site, allowing users to know that responsive actions are being taken. In the future, Medway Council is looking to incorporate digital signatures, which will enable the remaining 10% of its forms to be moved online.

Results

The Web-based forms processes deliver benefits to both the public and Medway Council, which is well on its way to complying with the 2005 deadline for the U.K. Online initiative. The public has faster and easier access to materials for requesting government services. At the same time, the streamlined, digital processes make it easier for Medway Council to track requests and follow up with individuals as needed.

For the council, the automated system is on track to achieve a considerable return on investment, due to savings in administrative costs and the cost associated with the copying and delivery of paper. The Web-based processes provide the added benefit of helping to ensure that constituents access only current versions of forms, minimizing the need to ask citizens to resubmit materials and giving council staff the information needed to efficiently process requests.

The flexibility of the system has been excellent, allowing the council to add services to meet changing citizen demands. “With Adobe, we are continually impressed. There aren't many limitations to the capabilities of the Adobe Intelligent Document Platform,” concluded Lynn.

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