Port Stephens Council streamlines its operations by connecting, sharing and using data efficiently with Authority

Port Stephens Council enhanced its use of Civica's Authority to **connect data across the business and improve operations**, reducing the time taken to finish simple administrative tasks and offering an **improved experience to their rate payers**.

The Challenge: The Council's heavily segregated systems resulted in administrative delays and lack of collaboration between employees. An audit of the internal systems revealed 300 data sources used across the organisation, with a majority of data being maintained in isolation. The council also had to protect the data that they had, comply with legislation and aggregate these localized data sources to obtain an enterprise view of performance.

Systems were not a problem, it was their lack of integration

The Port Stephens local government area lies in the Hunter region of New South Wales, Australia. The area covers approximately 858.5 km^2 and is famed for its rural beauty and beaches, making it a popular location for older generations and getaway for city dwellers. With over 72,000 residents, the Council employs more than 500 employees across all portfolios of management. The Council is responsible for managing and responding to requests across a range of issues including street permits and property planning. Receiving requests, issuing work orders and providing feedback to citizens were among a variety of challenging processes as the Council was using data collated by multiple different sources with internal businesses siloed and functioning in isolation.

Juan Hernandez, former Corporate Systems and Business Improvement Coordinator at Port Stephens Council, explained that a lot of good data was slipping through the cracks, and a lot administrative duplication was occurring due to lack of integration. "What we realised at that particular juncture is that it wasn't so much that our corporate systems weren't performing to the standards they needed to perform but that data was in a very isolated form," he said. As a result, following an internal audit, Port Stephens Council decided to connect all of their systems to improve online services and to deliver efficiencies. The Council then focused on making it easier for their employees to do their job by enabling greater connection between the four systems they used—Authority, GIS (Geographic Information System), EDRMS (Electronic document and records management system) and SharePoint systems to provide multiple access points to the same shared and relevant data.

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Authority as the connector of all data

Port Stephens Council enhanced its use of Civica's Authority modules to enable them to connect, share and use its data in single transactions. This included seamless management of requests, integration with its GIS system, automatic generation of work orders including notifications for citizens, and more detailed reporting. "Authority has a really powerful role to play in being the connector of all data. It doesn't necessarily have to be the central point of truth, but plays the role of a glue," he explained. Amongst other things, the Council optimised their e-services tools, which included online CRM, online certificates, and the online payment gateway which turned out to be the biggest winner, saving time and energy for rate payers and the employees. It also included their Community Portal and the Data Warehouse & Business Intelligence tools, which have resulted in sgnificant time savings in generating corporate monthly reports.

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Data accessibility resulting in increased efficiency

The optimisation of Authority modules, including online CRM and payment gateway, has resulted in a reduction in data sources from **300 to 190** and a substantial decrease in duplication for Council businesses participating in the initial improvement.

Benefits and outcomes

▶ **Port Stephens Council has greater visibility of customer request resulting in better customer experience to citizens.**

▶ **Sizeable time savings through reduction in data entry and duplication allowing council employees to focus on more strategic and community initiatives.**

▶ **Reduced time taken to issue planning certificates to conveyancers from five days to less than one streamlining the process for citizens.**

▶ **Data Warehouse & Business Intelligence tools built and in use saving relevant staff time required to generate Corporate Monthly Reports allowing the Council to make faster and assured decisions.**

Individual staff members are now enabled to own and drive tasks to completion themselves, instead of having to pass them among several teams within the Council to progress each step. For instance, it now takes less than half a day to produce planning certificates for conveyancers, instead of the five working days taken previously. Staff have the ability to access data directly and gain visibility of the status of requests so they can provide accurate responses to citizen queries immediately.

For instance, field staff can now use the data generated from business registers through the Actus app for accessing Authority data in the field. They can complete assessment and tasks and feed their updates via Actus, which updates the registers, following which they can approve or disapprove a permit. Authority optimisation has also helped their citizens as they can now self-serve via end-to-end online services with status notifications letting them know that their requests are being heard.