

Information Builders enables agile information solutions with business intelligence (BI) and integration technologies. WebFOCUS – the most widely utilized business intelligence platform – connects to any enterprise system or application and enables simple and intuitive interaction with information.

The City of Cincinnati

Snapshot

Organization

The City of Cincinnati

The Challenge

Create a self-service reporting system to empower nearly 1,000 users in the Finance department, Waterworks department, Sewage District, and other agencies to create, share, and distribute information.

The Strategy

Enable ad hoc and standardized reporting options from the city's intranet; devise a simple way to export certified financial data to Excel; create a parameterized reporting environment for non-technical users; and automate the selection and distribution of information by e-mail.

The Results

Accountants can instantly create and distribute reports via e-mail. The city can automatically distribute thousands of pages to the correct departments via automated scheduling, bursting, and information delivery techniques.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS and Professional Services.

City of Cincinnati Builds Pervasive Reporting Network With WebFOCUS

Web-Based Reporting, Distribution, and Workflow Environment Transforms Government Activities

City governments across the country face a mounting set of challenges, from creating stable business climates to delivering quality services to citizens. In the face of chronic revenue shortfalls, many of these municipalities depend on information technology to stretch limited resources in creative ways. But knowing which technologies to use – and learning how to use them effectively – can be an immense undertaking.

When the City of Cincinnati needed to modernize its information-delivery capabilities and construct a pervasive reporting architecture, city officials turned to a technology company they could trust to ease the transition – a decision that ultimately resulted in one cohesive business intelligence platform that covers all city departments. This new system empowers a variety of users to access the data they need, results in better decisions regarding city finances, yields a high level of service, and increases efficiency citywide.

“We wanted to work with a company we knew and trusted. There have been a lot of changes among BI vendors in recent years, and we valued Information Builders’ independence and leadership as a best-of-breed vendor.”

“When we were ready to jump into Web-based reporting with WebFOCUS, we asked Information Builders to help us get started,” explains David Criddle, information technology assistant manager for the City of Cincinnati. “We wanted to work with a company we knew and trusted. There have been a lot of changes among BI vendors in recent years, and we valued Information Builders’ independence and leadership as a best-of-breed vendor.”

Criddle works in the Cincinnati Information Technology department called the Regional Computer Center, which is responsible for supporting the city’s financial and human resource systems, managing Internet and intranet deployments, and maintaining information security and roles for the city’s local and wide area networks. He oversees the Cincinnati Agency Reporting System, which is based on the CGI Advantage ERP platform.

Transforming Reporting for the Community

Today, the city depends on WebFOCUS to manage information for several divisions of the Finance department, including Treasury, Payroll, Budget, and Retirement. Other agencies, such as the Waterworks department, Sewer District, Police, Building Inspections, Highway Maintenance, Parking, Engineering, and the City Council, have also made a wholesale switch to WebFOCUS. “Our departments are distributed throughout the city, so having Web-based reporting and distribution capabilities is a big advantage for us,” says Criddle. “WebFOCUS has streamlined the reporting process tremendously.”

A handful of developers provide an infrastructure for the electronic delivery of information to about 1,000 active WebFOCUS users throughout the city. These users can access 18 categories of reports directly from the city’s intranet without a lengthy log-in process or any special software. Example reports include statements of balance, classified expense reports, net revenue detail reports, capital project summaries, staffing analyses, budget reports, and many others.

“Our typical users are accountants and auditors, along with City Council members researching city spending,” says Criddle. “They don’t require any training because WebFOCUS is so intuitive.” City employees use the software to research important topics like city spending and funding allocation. “WebFOCUS helps us to be more efficient and, ultimately, provide better services to our citizens,” adds Criddle.

Authorized users bring up a reporting Web site on the city’s intranet to view available reports, which are grouped by type, month, and year. Most reports are published in HTML or PDF format. Others are built to a particular department’s specifications and can be output to Microsoft Excel, if desired.

Since many of these reports are parameterized, users can filter, sort, and qualify information without assistance from the IT staff. For example, they can select data from the general ledger by vendor, department, dollar amount, or product code, viewing transactions as far back as 1990. “We created a simple Excel download facility that makes it easy to create ad hoc reports without any programming knowledge,” says Criddle. “Users can select fields such as vendors, expenses, encumbrances, and time period and access the pertinent information from the general ledger.”

“WebFOCUS helps us to be more efficient and, ultimately, provide better services to our citizens.”

Criddle describes the WebFOCUS Excel download utility as “a simple interface with highly sophisticated selection capabilities.” He believes it is one of the capabilities that makes the city’s finance operation so efficient. Two developers have been trained in WebFOCUS to provide guidance to the city. They work with auditors to create reliable, certified reports that serve the needs of a wide variety of users.

“Letting people click a few parameters to get the information they need is really powerful,” Criddle states. “WebFOCUS pretty much runs itself. We don’t do a lot of maintenance, and we do quite a lot of work with a small staff. Two systems analysts and two programmers support more than 1,000 users in the city government.”

Tallying the Savings

WebFOCUS has improved information access, distribution, and analysis for the entire city. Data mining used to involve manually reviewing thousands of hard copy records. Now accountants, auditors, managers, and other key personnel can find, qualify, and publish information when they need it via simple browser screens on the city’s intranet.

Previously, the city had many power users who were responsible for the cumbersome task of creating reports for the entire city government. Now, WebFOCUS has eliminated the need for this group, and WebFOCUS has more than doubled the number of people who can create their own reports.

“Almost anyone can come in and start creating reports instantly. WebFOCUS has saved us time and money, and that will ultimately manifest itself in improved service to the citizens of Cincinnati. That is always our primary objective,” says Criddle.

Automatically Distributing Information

In addition to reporting, WebFOCUS has helped the city automate several key workflow processes. For example, to ensure the accountability of government officials, the city requires a signed copy of all approved invoices before payments can be processed. In the past, this necessitated printing copies of the required forms, mailing them to the necessary parties for signatures, and then waiting for the signed copies to be mailed back to the city offices. Now, using WebFOCUS ReportCaster, the city has automated this workflow with electronic forms that go out via e-mail each morning, simplifying the process and ensuring that payments are cleared quickly.

This city has also used ReportCaster to dramatically reduce manual, hard copy reports. Formerly city workers had to spend an entire day printing and physically distributing 10,000 to 15,000 pages of financial reports each month, consuming many worker hours and lots of paper. Now ReportCaster automatically formats, bursts, and distributes this information by e-mail each morning, saving both time and resources. “It used to take an entire day each month to sort out paper reports into sections for each department,” says Criddle. “Now WebFOCUS ReportCaster distributes the information automatically, which aids in our ongoing efforts to mold Cincinnati into one of the nation’s leading green cities.”

ReportCaster schedules jobs, transfers data, and sends custom reports to both users and information systems. The technology is valuable for transferring data to the Waterworks Department’s

Find Out More

To find out how our solutions can help your company succeed, talk to an Information Builders representative today. Contact your local Information Builders office, visit us at **informationbuilders.com**, or in the U.S. and Canada, call **(800) 969-4636**.

work order system as well as for transferring financial data to the check system before each check run. "We have used other reporting tools but it has always been hard to get the right information to users, in the right format," admits Criddle. "With WebFOCUS this process is very streamlined."

Reflecting on a Successful Deployment

Criddle says the decision to adopt WebFOCUS marks a crucial turning point that has positively influenced the city in many ways. He and his team found the learning curve for WebFOCUS to be relatively straightforward, and the new capabilities have been well worth the effort. "We didn't have much trouble matching the look and functionality of our old reports, and we have gained a great deal of additional functionality along the way," says Criddle.

Information Builders Professional Services installed WebFOCUS on an IBM mainframe platform. The city has since moved the software to Microsoft Windows. General Ledger data is stored in an Oracle database on an IBM UNIX platform. WebFOCUS operates seamlessly with all of these environments, attesting to the flexibility of this universal reporting technology.

"We have had incredible help from Information Builders' personnel at headquarters as well as from the local Information Builders staff," concludes Criddle. "They went above and beyond what we expected. Information Builders has always been very flexible and gone the extra mile to help us get the job done."