

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.

City of Richardson, Texas

Snapshot

Organization

Located on the outskirts of Dallas in the famed Telecom Corridor, the City of Richardson is a Texas community of approximately 100,000 citizens.

The Challenge

Reconcile several different data sources into one user-friendly portal accessible to more than 500 city employees; create reports for departments as diverse as crime, budgeting, and neighborhood services.

The Strategy

Combine GIS mapping capabilities with WebFOCUS reporting technology to translate vast amounts of information into meaningful reports.

The Results

A more effective and accurate reporting system; enhanced communications with citizens on a variety of issues, from apartment inspections to 911 calls.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS.



Richardson Revitalizes Reporting, Invigorates Community

Texas Community Enhances Citywide Communication With WebFOCUS

The City of Richardson, Texas was a booming place from the 1960s through the 1990s. Located along Texas' Telecom Corridor, the city was a bedroom community for the City of Dallas and also housed local employees from some of the world's fastest growing companies. But with the decline of the telecom industry in 2000, many tech workers moved away and Richardson faced a demographic crisis. City leaders were eager to attract young, upwardly mobile workers back to this community of 100,000 citizens.

So began a wholesale upgrade of many aspects of the city's infrastructure. In the IT arena, the city began systematically updating many of its key information systems. One of the areas most needing attention was business intelligence (BI) and reporting. Most city departments were using out-of-date BI software from Crystal Reports,

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purchased years before. This reporting system had a cumbersome authentication process that made it difficult to access, combine and distribute information, hindering many of the city’s revitalization projects.

Today the City of Richardson is seeing a resurgence in its worker population and also in its reporting system. City administrators use Information Builders WebFOCUS BI platform throughout many departments including accounting, budgeting, building inspection, municipal court, crime, fire, and neighborhood protection. For example, the city uses the BI software to send information about active 911 calls to police and fire chiefs, to synchronize citywide information about calendars and scheduling, and to track and manage vital city resources such as ambulances and fire hydrants.

Mapping Out a Future With WebFOCUS

Like many civic projects, rebuilding the city’s BI infrastructure began with a simple idea. Some city workers saw a WebFOCUS presentation at a water consumption conference and were immediately struck by its flexibility as an information management tool. The water department brought the BI software to the attention of Eric Matthews, deputy CIO for the City of Richardson, whose IT department handles a wide variety of services for the city’s 1,000 employees, while also managing all of the city’s external facing information services.

“The water department was particularly impressed with the mapping and data visualization aspects of WebFOCUS, thanks to its direct integration with the ESRI GIS software,” recalls Matthews. “They wanted to incorporate geographic information into their water resource reports, which we use to track everything from water meters to sewer lines.”

After digging deeper, Matthews learned that WebFOCUS presented an ideal solution to the city’s reporting crisis in other areas as well. It could eliminate the cumbersome authentication process, consolidate a broad range of data, and add the GIS mapping capabilities desired by the water department.

The city purchased WebFOCUS in 2005, installed it on a Microsoft Windows Server 2003 computer, and began creating reports against an IBM DB2 database, an existing GIS system, and a variety of Lotus Notes databases. “WebFOCUS can combine multiple sources of information into a single display,” says Matthews, “which makes it extremely useful for our diverse information management needs.”

Updated Reports for the Community

The first WebFOCUS project involved converting 50 Crystal reports to WebFOCUS – a project that took just eight weeks, following a couple of training classes at the local Information Builders office. The city began reaping the benefits of this conversion right away, then went on to create dozens of other reports. Every department in the city now runs at least one WebFOCUS report, and many departments run several more. In total, more than 500 city workers depend on WebFOCUS to run between 150 and 200 reports.

“We’ve seen hard savings in time and money, but there’s also been invaluable increases in accuracy and communication.”

Some groups, such as Neighborhood Services, have created external reports for the general public. This group is charged with enforcing city codes and enhancing communication with citizens to achieve their common goal of citywide revitalization. WebFOCUS maintains a running history of citations, so citizens can see, for example, what inspectors are doing about an abandoned car parked on a neighbor’s lawn. WebFOCUS offers details about citations issued and all follow-up activities. “Publishing this information reassures citizens not only that we are writing tickets, but following through on neighborhood issues until they are resolved,” says Matthews.

WebFOCUS is also useful to the city’s fire and police departments. For example, in the past each fire station tracked the operational status of its fire hydrants manually. Now, all stations share a digital map linked to a database of information about the status of city hydrants. Some of the city’s fire trucks have onboard computers that can display this information. “The data is refreshed every five minutes so our fire fighters always know where they can get water,” Matthews notes.

The city also created a mobile reporting environment to deliver crime data to police chiefs. For example, using their Blackberrys, officers can obtain information about the criminals being held in the city’s jail. They can drill down to the details of each person’s incarceration, including what crimes they are being held for. Police and fire chiefs can also track active 911 calls from these mobile devices, including the status of involved patrol cars, fire trucks, and ambulances.

WebFOCUS also supplies a great deal of information for managing the performance of city employees. For example, supervisors in the Neighborhood Services group can monitor each inspector’s activities to compare their productivity against worker benchmarks, as well as roll up inspection data by geography and date range. This helps the city enforce consistency in its inspections and make sure certain neighborhoods aren’t getting short shift.

Saving Time, Money, and the City

Thanks in part to current data from WebFOCUS, the City of Richardson has made huge strides towards realizing its goals of modernization and revitalization. During its 2008 “State of the City Report,” the City Council highlighted improvements in neighborhood integrity, code enforcement, infrastructure renewal, retail revitalization, financial planning, zoning ordinances, communication, traffic and transportation, and environmental management. Several large civic development projects are underway, the area’s light rail system has been improved, and many neighborhoods are attracting young families from other areas.

While it’s impossible to attribute these gains to any one activity, Matthews says they all have one thing in common: the need for timely, accurate information.

City workers are better able to support these revitalization efforts by keeping a tight reign on all of the information required to run the city efficiently, and WebFOCUS is at the heart of these efforts. Within some departments, such as budgeting and neighborhood services, reports that took two or three weeks to create can now be generated in two or three minutes. Nightly court dockets that used to be printed and distributed in hard copy form are published online, saving time and

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resources for hundreds of police officers and court employees. And important city resources, such as ambulances, are being used more effectively than ever before, thanks to the city's real-time reporting capabilities.

In the future, Matthews and his team plan to build WebFOCUS dashboards to display key performance indicators to city managers. "We've seen hard savings in time and money, but there's also been invaluable increases in accuracy and communication," he sums up. "WebFOCUS helps us meet our City Council's goal of neighborhood integrity and communication by giving us the tools we need to provide high-quality service to our citizens."