

BI Software Fights Crime, Saves Little Old Ladies

The province of Alberta is using WebFOCUS to give its call center workers more information on seniors who ask them for help.

Business intelligence isn't just for crunching numbers for big scary corporations: it's being used by public servants to keep communities safe and happy.

Project manager Peter Dartnell ventured down to Nashville for the Information Builders Summit from Alberta to share how the provincial ministry of seniors and community supports has used Information Builders' WebFOCUS product to streamline its call center and frontline worker operations, and will help people research care facilities in the future.

The 2004 election saw the ministry's staff increase from 200 to over 2,000 after the portfolio reassignment, Dartnell said, "We had rapid growth in a little while, with different architectures and technologies under one roof. But with the human services, we can't have any impact on our operations."

"Business intelligence used to be in the province of the Fortune 500 companies, but over time, more companies are entering the market, and the last few years have seen a rather large influx of small to medium-sized businesses looking at it in a serious way. Large healthcare

facilities have started, but it has filtered down to the federal and state and local levels," said Wayne Eckerson, director of research and services with the Data Warehousing Institute.

Putting together a business intelligence strategy was a challenge, as much of the data was sectioned off and the public nature of the operation meant that it was difficult to do a long-term plan.

Working with the Edmonton-based OA Solutions, Dartnell wanted to push out business intelligence to the front-line staff. They went with a WebFOCUS program for the call center staff that gave them a more holistic view of the seniors' and community members' information in one place and in real time.

They also put together an XML-based Yahoo maps feature that helps front-line workers track location-based issues. The workers can also use roles-based portals to contain their internal and operational issues, business intelligence, and content management all in one active desktop. The public can benefit from these portals as well.

Long-term care facility inspectors can input their results into their portals, which will eventually feed into a public engine that will allow people to research facilities, which will become more important as more private facilities pop up for the ever-aging population. "It's not



about busting them, but about pushing them toward compliance,” said Dartnell.

Cops are getting on board with business intelligence, too. Present at Information Builders Summit 2008 were two police departments that have used WebFOCUS to more effectively fight crime.

Captain Mark Eisenman of the Houston Police Department heads up the crime analysis unit. Calls that come into Houston’s Emergency Center are routed by iWay software to the crime analysts, who scrub the data and then send it out to the police officers’ mobile units in their police cars.

The ease of use had to be there for the officers. Said Eisenman: “These people aren’t very computer-literate: the people on *CSI* are, but we’re not!” Centralized, real-time comments help officers keep on top of crimes and criminals, while a simple search interface allows them to find what they need.

This replaces tried-and-true queries that the cops had set up in their archaic 1997 computers that were often wrong, and their crime-mapping system consisted of a map on the wall with pins in it. Now, search terms as varied as “boats” and “pawn tickets” can be looked up and cross-referenced, and Eisenman said that the learning curve was “zero” for his officers. “We had to make it cop-proof,” said Eisenman. “They can’t hurt this, which is good, as they had messed up Excel spreadsheets before and gotten in trouble.”

The system has only been running for a few months, but there have already been results. Someone reported a partial plate for a road rager who was running people off the road. By running it on their mobile unit, they were able to get his address and see his prior road incidents, and meet him at the perp’s house, where the man said, astonished, “How in the world did you find that out?” Another partial plate yielded a burglar with 250 burglaries under his belt, while the analysts were able to send over a package of information about the gangmembers involved, with everything from their tax records to other 911 calls about them, which led the police to valuable witnesses that they might never have contacted.

They are perhaps interested in going into predictive analytics as well, which would allow them to track longer-term factors, like the weather and the moon, even. Another future project includes taking some of the data public that would allow people to search for crimes in their neighborhood.

A similar project is underway in Kentucky through the Erlanger Police Department and surrounding areas. They also are using WebFOCUS to effect better crime-fighting, according to police chief Marc Fields.

The system includes Information Builders’ new Magnify feature that updates itself every 15 minutes and features a very simple Google-style search that’s easy on even the least tech-savvy officer, said detective Steve Castor, who is the communication center manager. They can then delve into the search results to find out more about the dates or locations of the crime, among many other categories.

Like in Texas, the officers’ mobile units then become even more useful tools that can communicate real-time crime information to cops on the go. For instance, a traffic stop entered in the system could yield other arrests or auto accidents on their record.

Crime portals can also offer a wealth of information in one place, such as mapped locations and crime stats. “This gives the chiefs the ability to generate reports themselves,” said Castor. And, as use of the system goes long-term, they can gather more and more statistics and see what level of labor is needed. “That way,” said Fields, “We can control our efforts instead of just throwing stuff at it.”

Reprinted courtesy of ITworldcanada.com.