



Customer Success Story: City of Norfolk

Overview

Founded in 1682, the City of Norfolk, Virginia is home to nearly a quarter of a million residents and boasts the largest naval base in the world and the second-largest shipping-container terminal on America's east coast.

The City's mission is to provide leadership and direction responsive to the needs and desires of all citizens of Norfolk. They strive to do this in an efficient, equitable, cost effective manner that leverages available resources for the maximum benefit.

Challenge

The City of Norfolk has approximately 5,000 employees and over 3,000 paper forms, ranging from parking permits to pet licenses. Managing these processes manually had become inefficient and unproductive, and employees lacked visibility into critical status information. The City recognized the need to improve its processes to improve efficiency and reduce bureaucracy.

One critical process the City needed to automate was its Permit Request Process – the procedure for requesting residential or commercial construction permits. The City was challenged with maintaining its service levels and keeping up with permit requests, which were at an all time high due to recent City revitalization efforts that were generating new office, retail, entertainment and hotel construction downtown, new residential development along the rivers and bay front, and revitalization projects in many of its neighborhoods.

The office responsible for permit processing only has a staff of six people and had processed 14,000 permits within the last 12 months. In addition, much of the new development was taking place outside of downtown Norfolk, which required applicants to drive downtown – sometimes as far as 20 miles – to physically

Highlights

Government

Processes Enabled:

- Permit Requests
- Citizen Services
- Vendor Applications
- Adds/Moves/Change Requests

Customer Benefits & Results:

- Permit request process went from 19 days to less than 3
- Streamlined procedures help attract developers to the City
- Better responsiveness to constituents
- Improved accuracy by pulling data from disparate databases into central repository

visit multiple departments and hand deliver the application for submission and processing. With multiple departments in six different buildings and many different conditions requiring examination and compliance involved in the process approval, applicants would sometimes have to visit numerous times to track the permit through to completion.

To manage continued growth, the City needs to be able to improve processes, provide a more efficient work environment, and maintain a certain level of control and insight over how the City is running in order to continue providing superior service to its citizens. Maintaining good communication and high citizen service levels are also critical in order for the City of Norfolk to maintain a strong resident population and attract new development to the area – ultimately giving them a competitive advantage against surrounding cities.

Solution

The City turned to Business Process Management (BPM) technology from Metastorm to automate its processes city-wide. Since most City functions are process-driven, the Metastorm software gives the City the tool it needs to automate endless applications – therefore enabling the City to be more efficient and to increase accountability.

Using Metastorm BPM®, the City empowers employees to design new, automated processes to replace existing paper ones, or to create entirely new processes to further streamline operations. The City's IT team supports the employee process

design initiative by integrating Metastorm BPM with the City's internal databases and other legacy systems that validate, maintain and authenticate addresses. Metastorm is also integrated with a Geographic Information System (GIS) to validate building locations and facilities.

By linking people, data and process flows across locations, Metastorm BPM enabled the City's Building Construction Services Division to open its first remote office – allowing it to issue permits outside of its main office in downtown Norfolk for the first time. This was an important step for the City because most new construction is being done 30 minutes outside of the downtown area. Metastorm BPM has been deployed in the new office, and many of the City's permit application processes have been automated. Applicants are no longer required to travel between six facilities to get permits approved. Metastorm BPM allows the permit technician to direct the flow of work, and documents can now be scanned and transferred electronically between departments for processing and appropriate sign-offs.

Once the plan was completed, the City's IT team was able to build and deploy the complete system in three months and additional functionality continues to be developed. All departments now have real-time visibility of each application to simultaneously sign-off on approvals and provide status information to applicants upon request. Metastorm BPM has expedited the permit request process and eliminated enormous amounts of paperwork and data redundancy over the City's previous method. All departments involved can also resolve internal issues without the applicant's involvement since Metastorm BPM has enabled online collaboration among the process participants. The City has also taken ownership of tracking progress for the applicants – a once time consuming effort for the citizen. Tracking is now done electronically in Metastorm BPM, and applicants are contacted upon approval or if further action needs to take place. In the future, the City plans to give citizens web-based access to view status online.

Prior to automation, the permit process was taking an average of 19 days to complete. With Metastorm, the City has reduced processing time down to less than three days. Citizens no longer have to spend six to eight hours per application chasing forms through the approval process, saving 100,000 man-hours on 14,000 applications annually. Moreover, if all parties involved sign-off immediately upon receiving the application, the City expects completion in just minutes. The City also estimates they will process a record 5,000 permits per year in the new office using Metastorm, and since the entire process is now automated, they are able to process this higher volume with only two

employees – down from the original staff of six. This increased productivity and efficiency has allowed the City of Norfolk to reduce costs and re-direct resources to other City initiatives.

In addition to the permits process, the City has deployed Metastorm BPM citywide for many other critical processes including its vendor application process and voice adds/moves/changes request process. The City processes 100 vendor applications per month and was managing the process by faxing forms from office to office. Users can now enter data, and send approvals and feedback electronically. This process used to take between three to four days. With Metastorm BPM, the City has reduced its cycle time to just one hour.


The City's voice adds/moves/changes request process is extremely complex, involving 34 departments, and its old method of processing requests was via phone, inter-office mail, and e-mail. This manual method led to the inability of employees to keep up with the volume of requests and in some cases, only 24 hour notification was given to request an entire phone system move. With the new voice request application in Metastorm BPM, anyone in the city can request phone service and it is now routed dynamically for approval. Departments can control budgets and make decisions in advance such as who is available and what equipment is available to perform the job. What used to take one week to complete and occasionally got "lost in the mail" is now taking one day with Metastorm.

Results

With over 350 current users of Metastorm BPM, the City has realized tremendous benefits including increased efficiency, productivity and collaboration across all business areas. As noted above, the City has drastically decreased its process cycle times by eliminating inefficient manual steps and empowering its employees to monitor each activity at any point in the process.

Using Metastorm, the City has also enhanced communication with its citizens and for the first time, automated communication between City departments. Being able to deliver superior citizen services speaks volumes for the City and gives them the competitive advantage they needed to compete with surrounding areas.

For the City's IT department, Metastorm BPM gives the team the ability to practice collaborative, centralized testing and training in preparation for implementing processes. Metastorm enables remote and spontaneous training and testing of the processes from all over the city involving all of the people who are participants in each process.



The City of Norfolk has endorsed Metastorm BPM as a critical system and plans to extend its use by continually automating core processes. Implementing Metastorm BPM software has given the City the ability to make the right strategic decisions on how to streamline and improve its operations – allowing them to lower costs, create greater efficiency and improve citizen service for long term competitive advantage.

“The City’s IT team has observed that Metastorm BPM is more than just a great process automation tool, it also serves as a collaboration catalyst. Successes like the Permit Request Process bolster confidence that with Metastorm all the hard work flow-charting, documenting, and negotiating will end in change,” stated Hap Cluff, Director of IT, City of Norfolk. “Previously burnout reorganization veterans as well as disparate departments and process owners are now seeking each other out to work together. There is something synergistic in knowing at the start that meaningful change is achievable.”

1-877-321-META (6382)
+44 (0) 208-971-1500
www.metastorm.com

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