

Moving Mountains: Macedon Ranges Shire Council



Infra provides a low bandwidth request management solution for the Macedon Ranges Shire Council



Macedon Ranges Shire Council

The Macedon Ranges Shire Council, located in the state of Victoria, Australia, services a semi-rural population of 35,000, dispersed over an area of some 1800 square kilometres.

When it came to finding a request management system that could reliably run to its widespread groups and offices, the Council faced a special challenge.

The dispersed nature of the Shire, made a client-server based system a costly and high maintenance alternative. Similarly, with bandwidth in the semi-rural region running as low as 19K at some points, a web-based solution initially appeared impractical.

David Brown, IT Manager with the Council says the demographics of the Shire meant it was not feasible to purchase larger bandwidth. "We have mountains in the middle which make it almost impossible to get better performance in any case, and any improvements we could have made were cost-prohibitive."

When the Council put out an expression of interest to find a suitable vendor, they had, says David "a lot of people telling us that we weren't going to get a system that would meet our technical requirements. So we were very pleased when we found Infra."

Macedon Ranges Shire Council processes around 150 requests from the public every day, ranging from rates enquiries through to property valuations, roads, garbage collection, tourist and recreational facilities. These come in as phone calls, emails or via the Council web site, to any group or department.

The Council's existing customer request logging system had trouble handling multiple connections. According to Annette Paul, Governance Officer, "We had a lot of difficulties because we are a decentralized Shire, with four separate offices. In addition, we have a lot of remote locations and an increasing number of people wanting off-site access."

Because of the difficulty of access, says Annette, a number of units within the Council were not using the system, but were managing their own work requests using online spreadsheets or paper-based systems.

"This meant that the Council did not have a reliable single register of customer requests, which made it difficult to anticipate future resourcing needs and, in particular, to prioritize work across the Shire."

In order to maintain the efficiency of services and avoid duplication between departments, the Council wanted to broaden the base across which it was collecting calls and requests, and standardize its operations by bringing all these groups onto a single system. To manage this, the Council chose the Infra 100% Web Service Management application.

Accessibility across the network

Infra runs across the Internet from a single server in the Councils' central administration office, providing both office and off-site access via a Web browser.

The majority of Council staff access Infra via simple dial-up modems connected to their PCs. The larger Woodend office runs Infra across a 128K ISDN link that also supports the local government and finance package, property package and email.

Outside offices too, Infra provides an effective solution. Says David Brown, "From my own home, which is on a rural property a long way from a phone exchange, the best speed I can get is 19K and I am still able to use Infra effectively."

Ensuring customer requests go to the right people, first time

The Council has entered over 200 predefined problem types into Infra, each linked to a particular group.

"The customer service officers handling the initial enquiries don't need to have an in-depth knowledge of the council departments," says David Brown. "They select the problem type, click the button, and the work request is sent to the relevant officer or department. Infra does the thinking about where it needs to go."

Service levels and escalation notifications built into the system ensure that requests are actioned, and customers notified within an agreed period of time. Absent staff can also be tagged in the system, automatically re-routing any work sent to them.

Screens customized for problem types

The ability to customize Infra's html screens to fit individual demands and requirements was important in ensuring the new system received a positive reception from the various Council groups, says David Brown.

"By creating different screens to match request types, we have ensured that the information needed to resolve the request is captured at the time of talking to the customer."

Visibility of requests across the Council

All Council ratepayer and property records have been loaded into Infra, allowing rapid identification of who is calling and where the problem is. This assists in providing comprehensive reporting as well as trend analysis, enabling planning of resources in advance.

In the longer term, Infra will be extended to the Council's public web site, via a customer feedback and request logging page. Customers will enter their request online and select a predefined problem type, which will send the request details directly to the appropriate Council group.

According to Annette Paul, "Infra has been excellent in providing a solution that all officers can access no matter where they are, with the added advantage of client access if need be."

Ease of implementation and upgrades

The most time-consuming part of the implementation, says David Brown, was in compiling the list of problem types and escalation levels; the actual technical implementation of Infra took only one day. "It was very painless, very quick."

Since the initial implementation, Macedon Ranges Shire Council has managed its own upgrade process, which, because it affects only a single server, was performed without interruption to users of the system.

This ease of managing the Infra system is critical to David Brown who prefers to take "a very hands on approach. We do as much as possible ourselves so that we have total control and ownership of the system."

"The cost, response times over limited bandwidth, and the fact that no configuration was required on individual PCs, were the main reasons we chose Infra."

Annette Paul, Governance Officer

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