Paper Weight

Adobe® helps the Illinois Department of Human Services unload a heavy burden.

In modern American government, agency administrators manage a growing number of challenges. Diminishing budgets and increasing service demands present a particularly difficult hurdle to clear.

In response, jurisdictions have consolidated agencies and resources to lower costs and improve overall service delivery. For example, Illinois combined all or part of six agencies to form the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) in the late 1990s. The 14,500-employee agency has offices in nearly every county in the state and manages everything from food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), to vocational rehabilitation and mental health services.

Like many states, Illinois faces severe budget limitations. Consolidation efforts like DHS are paying off, but these initiatives also create challenges that must be addressed. In the case of Illinois, combining multiple agencies into one "super-agency" means that DHS handles a lot of paperwork. In fact, it quickly became apparent that the volume of paper forms and documents threatened to overwhelm the new agency. The solution was intelligent document technology from Adobe.

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John Rigg, forms manager, Illinois Department of Human Services

Forming Solutions

The DHS mission is to help Illinois citizens become self-sufficient. But when it came to managing more than 6,000 hard-copy forms used to deliver services, the agency found itself struggling. As DHS Forms Manager John Rigg explained, his staff battled valiantly against the daily onslaught of paperwork.

"We did the best we could," said Rigg. "I had some very experienced and dedicated staff. We seemed to keep on top of things, but it was obvious that the old paper forms scenario just wasn't

going to cut it for an agency this size. It became very clear very quickly that logistically even supplying offices with forms — the cost involved in production of forms, keeping that many forms updated — was just an incredible task."

Human services agencies are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to managing their paperwork. Many of the benefit programs operated by states are federally mandated. These programs are subject to the wish and whim of the federal government, and the programs' regulations are ever-changing.

Even the slightest change demands an updated form, which must be duplicated millions of times and shipped to every DHS office. Changes also render the old forms useless, wasting thousands of existing paper copies. In addition, there's a chance citizens could use outdated forms to apply for food stamps or TANF benefits, which may delay their services.

Rigg knew it was time for a change in Illinois and upon taking his position as forms manager, he actively began seeking solutions to the DHS paper problems.

"After doing a lot of research, it was obvious we needed a reasonably priced, quickly implemented solution, and Adobe seemed to offer that solution for us," Rigg recalled. "It was something we could get up and running in a very short amount of time, something that was effective and met our needs to get the documents out there and in a format that was easily recognizable and easily usable by everybody."

Putting the "E" in Human Services

In 2000, Rigg and his staff laid the foundation for an e-forms strategy through which they could build a more effective, more efficient human services agency. At first, the goal was simple: to see if e-forms work as well as paper.

"I started looking at the options we had right after DHS was formed," said Rigg. "About five years ago we implemented an e-forms project and started putting static PDFs on our intranet."

The project started with internal operations forms. Administrative forms, leave requests, personnel evaluations and other similar documents constituted the initial test group. The test group grew quickly, so Rigg realized he was onto something. The project evolved from static PDFs into an interactive online forms initiative.

"Over time the forms evolved into fillable PDFs, and now they're all enabled using Adobe LiveCycle™ Reader Extension server software," said Rigg. In September 2005, DHS will unveil the first 300 interactive online forms for the public. "Those PDFs are fillable, enabled and totally functional documents as far as being able to fill them out online and save them."

Many of the internal forms used by DHS now can be submitted online, a feature the department plans to soon roll out to the public.

Delivering Interactive Government

Citizens today expect government services to operate 24 hours a day, every day. Meeting these expectations requires innovative solutions that empower government to deliver vital services whenever and wherever they're needed while protecting the privacy and security of information entrusted to them.

The Adobe® Intelligent Document Platform, which is composed of Adobe LiveCycle™ server and Adobe Acrobat® desktop software products, enables effective, interactive service delivery — across agencies and across town. As a result, government agencies operate more efficiently and better serve constituents.

Adobe makes it easy for agencies to design intelligent, interactive electronic documents and forms, and more securely automate the processes that rely on them. Additional capabilities such as embedded 2-D bar codes and digital signatures help agencies meet privacy and security requirements while reducing errors and eliminating paper-bound processes. And with real-time data checking, offline form completion and certified document options, Adobe helps agencies deliver online interactions that are more trusted and convenient for constituents, service providers and other agencies.

Operating on multiple, often disparate, back-end systems, agencies can rely on the Adobe Intelligent Document Platform to work across systems and agencies with speed and safety. Eliminating the rekeying of data, implementing the ability to share data securely and quickly, and bridging stovepipes, makes government more effective and responsive despite older infrastructure and modest budgets.

The Adobe approach allows agencies to create intelligent interaction between people and government, enabling them to take a standards-based approach that spans back-end systems and helps them build new processes that meet constituent expectations.

The task of offering interactive government services anytime and anywhere can be imposing. The Adobe Intelligent Document Platform helps agencies overcome this challenge with flexibility, speed and improved security — bridging the digital and paper worlds to create government services that truly deliver.

The benefits of Adobe's intelligent document approach are wide-ranging. Internally, the chaos of tens of millions of paper forms is being transformed into an efficient, highly manageable system of electronic documents. Illinois also used Adobe technology to eliminate duplication within the forms themselves.

"It's allowed a lot of additional time to really analyze the forms and see which forms we are able to combine, which just physically takes the number of forms down," said Rigg. "[We are] finding there is duplication in processes that can be handled by the same electronic form."

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DHS now uses far fewer forms. In fact, the number of DHS forms dropped from more than 6,000 to about 2,000 — nearly half of which are available electronically.

The Adobe solution is extremely cost-effective for the agency. Since implementation, the DHS cut its annual forms printing budget by nearly 70 percent. Rigg said the agency now creates 10 million to 15 million fewer paper copies annually.

"I don't think there is a more cost-effective solution out there," Rigg said.

The electronic document strategy produces savings for almost every DHS business function. One of the most critical benefits, especially for those on the receiving end of DHS services, is time-savings. Adobe helps DHS respond much more quickly to changing federal mandates.

"An electronic form change is immediate, so you have the time factor there," Rigg said. "Once the form is approved, the electronic format is immediately available to staff. We don't have preprinted stock sitting in a warehouse, waiting to be shipped out and never going to be used now because it's been changed."

Service Delivery

In the end, Illinois citizens benefit the most from these changes. Taxpayers appreciate the increase in government efficiency. And convenient electronic forms mean DHS clients will no longer need to travel to a government office or take time off work to complete some paperwork.

Citizens will be able to complete DHS electronic forms online, then print them out and submit them. That process will become even easier, as DHS hopes to roll out submittable online forms in the next year. This will allow DHS clients to complete the forms online then send the forms electronically to the agency.

"Our whole goal as an agency is to get people as self-sufficient as possible," said Rigg. "DHS Secretary Carol Adams' motto is 'online not inline.' What can we do to make life easier for people? If we're here as a social service agency, what services can we provide to make that easier?"

As Rigg and DHS have found, the Adobe Intelligent Document Platform is a good answer to that question.