

## New Orleans Leverages Web-based and Mobile Technology to aid in Response and Recovery

Located in southeastern Louisiana along the Mississippi River, the greater metropolitan New Orleans area extends about 360 square miles (200 land, 160 water) through the parishes of Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany. The City is home to more than 485,000 residents, and the metropolitan area is home to just over 1.3 million.

In 2003, acting on a promise made by the Mayor to provide increased citizen access to government services, New Orleans began its search for a replacement to the mainframe system used by the City since 1995. The City was looking for a Web-based solution that would be capable of providing increased access and accountability for the agency and the public.

The City selected Accela Automation®, a Web-based, enterprise application that provides government agencies with a complete solution to automate workflow, forms management, activity tracking, cashiering, and other important daily tasks. Specifically, the agency implemented the system in the Department of Safety and Permits to automate its land and permit management activities. As part of the implementation, the City opted to have the application hosted off-site by Accela at a tier-one data center.

### Customer



New Orleans, LA

### Population

485,000

### Location

The greater New Orleans area is located in southeastern Louisiana along the Mississippi River

### Quote

"Not only are we moving at five times the speed by using these products, we can upload the results daily for immediate totals and reporting."

Mike Centineo  
Director, Department of Safety and Permits

### THE CHALLENGE

In September 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated most of New Orleans and the surrounding Gulf Coast communities. Once survivors were rescued and floodwaters were drained, one of the City's most important tasks involved damage assessment of the City's commercial and residential buildings. Of the City's 180,000 houses, 110,000 were flooded and half of those sat for days or weeks in more than six feet of water. Although inspecting these structures was going to be a daunting task, officials in the Department of Safety and Permits had one important advantage—all of the critical building, permit, and other land information data were intact since the data was stored off-site in the Accela Automation database.

### THE SOLUTION

Working collaboratively with the City, Accela enhanced the application to facilitate recovery activities including information gathering, mobile inspections of damaged buildings, and reporting to the Mayor's office, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The emergency response solution also included 25 Toughbooks, donated by Panasonic, which were loaded with Accela Wireless™, a mobile government software application that extends inspection management capabilities to the field for inspections, code enforcement, work orders, and service requests. To facilitate GIS mapping, Tele Atlas and the City provided the GIS street network and parcel data to be used by the Accela Automation application.

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**Phase I - Assess Damage.** City inspectors were dispatched to the field to perform inspections in New Orleans and the surrounding parishes. Inspection results were recorded on the mobile devices running Accela Wireless and wherever wireless hot spots were available, the data was automatically transmitted to the agency database at Accela in real-time. Otherwise, the data was stored in the Toughbooks and uploaded to the agency database when inspectors returned to the office. The application also allows inspectors to identify properties using several geolocation tools including GPS, and tag buildings red, yellow, or green depending on the extent of the damage.

Automating the damage assessment process expedited the Department's work tremendously. Mike Centineo, Director of the Department of Safety and Permits stated, "Not only are we moving at five times the speed by using these products, we can upload the results daily for immediate totals and reporting. This is tied directly to our property database for future inspections and permitting, and in a GIS database for visual assessment of damage patterns. The benefits of this are obvious."

Once the Department's inspection team was up and running with a mobile solution, they were able to process more than 2,000 inspections per day.

**Phase II - Disseminate Information.** Once all of the data is gathered, the City will need to disseminate this information to the public, FEMA, and other relief agencies. In the case of citizens, they will be able to access and view damage assessment maps of their property via the Web and take immediate steps to either return to their homes or begin the reconstruction process. Making the information available on-line will alleviate the number of calls and inquiries coming into the City. This capability is already developed for the application and is awaiting "go-ahead" from City officials who are managing the recovery process. Damage assessment information is already being distributed to FEMA and other organizations to expedite the procurement of relief funds.

**Phase III - Manage Reconstruction.** In the coming weeks and months, the City will provide on-line access to permit processing to expedite and manage the reconstruction process. Citizens and contractors will be able to apply for emergency building permits directly from the Internet, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

As the City continues its clean up and rebuilding efforts, the Department of Safety and Permits feels confident that it will be able to continue providing efficient and effective services to the citizens of New Orleans.

Continued Centineo, "I can truly say that without the help of Accela and its partners we would be doing these inspections by paper and pencil and then would have the huge task of converting all this data into a database suitable for reporting needs. I cannot imagine how long that would take; this is blessed help in our darkest hour."



### ABOUT ACCELA

Accela is a leading developer of software and Internet applications for state and local government. With Accela, jurisdictions of all sizes will reduce workload, increase efficiency and automate processes while providing citizens and businesses with more convenient access to government services.

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