

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Omaha Realizes Cost Savings, Enhances Transparency and Citizen Engagement

Known as the “Gateway to the West,” Omaha is the largest city in the state of Nebraska. Home to the headquarters of several Fortune 500 companies and the largest railroad operator, Union Pacific Corporation, Omaha boasts a budding economy and a thriving city center. City officials in collaboration with the development community have revitalized the downtown area with loft apartments, shopping districts and a sports complex to attract and retain a younger workforce.

WHY OMAHA OVERHAULED ITS AGENCY WITH ACCELA

To meet builders’ needs, the City Planning Department’s Building and Development Division looked at ways to leverage technology as a means to greater efficiency, improved data sharing and streamlined access to building and planning resources.

“Before, we were using a mainframe system,” shares Stu Craven, Senior Applications Analyst. “Everything was kept on green screens, it was hard to retrieve data and that data was all code-driven, meaning it required employees to have special training to find and retrieve information. All inspections and the processing of paperwork were done by paper. The data wasn’t that great, and we were finding a lot of errors. It was an inefficient, troublesome way to do business. Most importantly, there was no public interface with our citizens or building community so it was tough to share the data we had. It made doing our job difficult.”

The City was also looking for a solution to reduce staffing challenges generated by seasonality, weather events or large projects. Historically, the agency would hire temporary employees to handle increased demand and City officials were required to provide time-intensive training and pay substantial amounts of overtime. By automating key functions, the department would maintain staffing numbers while meeting customer service demands.

The Building and Development Division developed a technology roadmap and looked at

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Population
427,000

Challenge
Deliver City services to residents and contractors with greater speed, efficiency and transparency and enhance back-office functions

Solutions
Accela Land Management, Accela GIS, Accela Inspector, Accela Mobile Office, Citizen Access, Electronic Document Review

Results
50% of all permits handled online

83% of electrical permits handled online

Significant cost savings due to decreased overtime, lower overhead and increased efficiency



Improving speed, efficiency and transparency

a number of different software vendors. The overall business goal was to deliver City services to residents and contractors with greater speed, efficiency and transparency and enhance back-office functions, too. They learned that Accela would provide the capabilities necessary for short-term success, including permitting, inspections, citizen engagement and mobile functionality, plus a robust platform to enable expansion going forward.

HOW ACCELA EMPOWERS OMAHA

Omaha has deployed Accela Land Management, Citizen Access, Accela Mobile Office, Electronic Document Review and Accela GIS. The complete solution includes permitting and inspection solutions, allowing the City to streamline operations and procedures for construction-related activities. Because the system is web-based, various departments can connect to the system without the need to purchase additional systems.

The launch of online permitting in 2011 has streamlined key civic processes for greater efficiency and transparency. Today, citizens and businesses use the portal to apply and pay for permits, schedule inspections, check the status or print an approved permit. By allowing constituents to complete the application process online, the City saves taxpayer dollars by reducing costs and maximizing staff resources to focus on more complex applications.

The business benefit was realized in April 2013 when a massive hailstorm caused damage to thousands of roofs in the area. In May, the City handled approximately 6,000 permits online, over 3,000 of which were directly related to the storm. Today, the agency handles approximately 50 percent of all permits and 83 percent of electrical permits online.

Other solutions are also gaining traction within Omaha's Building and Development Division. Electronic Document Review is enabling contractors to upload their plans, share data, track reviews and provide electronic documentation across department teams, helping to boost compliance with local regulations and codes. And by utilizing a full suite of mobile applications, Omaha's inspectors are more productive, efficient and transparent.

"All of our inspectors currently use Accela Mobile Office and we have now started using Accela Inspector on smartphones," says Craven. "The great thing with the new smartphone apps is it provides a much more flexible interface. It is hard to take a computer inside a jobsite and it's hard to do an inspection when you are lugging a computer. Our inspectors are able to do a comprehensive inspection, capture pictures and send automatic notifications to the contractors, all in real time."

THE BOTTOM LINE

Omaha has realized significant cost savings due to decreased overtime, lower overhead and increased efficiency. At the city level, officials prioritize customer service for businesses and citizens while offering transparent views to key civic processes.

About Accela

Accela provides cloud-based productivity and civic engagement solutions to more than 2,200 government agencies worldwide. The Accela Civic Platform includes solutions for asset management, citizen relationship management, environmental health, finance and administration, land management, legislative management, licensing and case management, recreation and resource management, right of way management, and utility billing. More than fifty percent of America's largest cities use the Accela Civic Platform. The Company is headquartered in San Ramon, California, with offices in San Francisco, New York, Boston, Portland, Melbourne and Dubai.

Learn more

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