

SEDGEMOOR DISTRICT COUNCIL CONTROLS INFORMATION WITH COMBINED SOLUTIONS FROM TOWER SOFTWARE AND GOSS



The Quantocks

Accurate and effective record-keeping ought to be seen as good practice in every area of business, but in public service organisations, it is critical. The requirement to create, distribute, electronically-publish, store or retrieve thousands of documents every day inevitably requires specific electronic systems – and Sedgemoor District Council is now reaping the benefits of just such a solution from Enterprise content management company, GOSS, and electronic document and records management specialists, TOWER Software.

Organisation Profile

Sedgemoor District Council looks after the heartland of rural Somerset. With three main towns - Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and world-famous Cheddar – the Council currently provides services to around 45,000 households and a population of approximately 110,000. Covering an area of over 56,000 hectares, via one main administration office and sub-offices. The Council is also one of the largest employers in the district, providing employment for about 630 people.

Business Challenges

Like the majority of local Councils throughout the UK, Sedgemoor's administrative processes had been paper-based and there was an increasing need for documentation to be stored and managed more efficiently. In parallel to that and in accordance with their own corporate priority on efficiency and focus on improving customer service across the Authority, the Council also recognised the need to comply with emerging national guidelines on electronic government and service delivery. The national e-Government and e-service delivery guidelines require that citizens are able to enjoy an equally good customer experience across all channels of contact with their Local Authority.

In recognition of an increasing move towards online council services, Sedgemoor decided to meet the challenges laid out in the 2005 Pendleton Report, which specified 21 critical steps to assist public access to local planning information over the internet. In order for that to happen, the council was in clear need of a system to create and manage electronic documentation, and a means of publishing and maintaining a large proportion of this information on its own public website.

The Solution

In fact, identifying a suitable Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM) solution was not as much of a challenge as you might think. The choice of TOWER Software's EDRM suite, TRIM Context was relatively straightforward, as the package was the only solution available which was capable of meeting Sedgemoor's stringent performance criteria.

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information – notably planning documents – available via our website,” commented Sedgemoor DC’s IS Manager, Craig Wilkins.

Sedgemoor had already been working with enterprise Information Management solutions company GOSS since 2003 and plan to use GOSS’ iCM (intelligent Content Management) software to publish documents stored using TRIM Context, on to the Council website.

“The ability to create and maintain a high quality website in a structured, and controlled manner using a minimum of resources is an essential requirement for us,” continued Wilkins. With approximately 4000 pages to maintain, iCM takes the hard work out of managing a site of this size - enabling the small web team to focus their attentions on other issues.”

To date, Sedgemoor has trained over 80 people to use iCM and despite a wide, varied range of knowledge and experience within the council’s user base, Sedgemoor has found that iCM could be quickly picked up by and adapted for even the most novice of PC users.

As for TRIM Context, around 80 users are now trained and deployed throughout Sedgemoor DC’s various departments and offices in line with the Council’s longer term Transformation programme. As the roll-out continues, the benefits continue to emerge.

The Results

Although Sedgemoor’s EDRM initiative was originally mostly driven by regulatory and compliance issues, it is now also delivering benefits in other areas – including both cost savings and operational efficiencies. To date, according to Wilkins, the wider availability of information in and around the authority has been the most impressive advantage. “The ability to gain access to the right information, by the right people at the right time is having a very positive impact on service delivery to our customers,” he adds.

“We have already migrated a number of paper-based processes,” continued Wilkins. “Our goal is to integrate all Council administrative functions with the EDRM system in order to centralise the storage and management of all documents within the Authority, and thus remove any remaining non-compliant document management systems or functions. Early Sedgemoor initiatives included the scanning of planning documents at source, storing National Land Information Services (NLIS) documents, scanning benefits case archive documents, storing of Council’s Reports, Agenda’s and Minutes and allocating the appropriate Local Government classifications within the EDRM system.

Coupled with its link into GOSS’ iCM Content Management System, citizens and local businesses accessing the Council website will soon be able to download documentation 24 hours a day, while the ability of the Council’s contact centre accessing documentation in TRIM Context directly, has seen a dramatic reduction in calls passed on to back office staff.

Employee feedback has also been highly positive, although many employees were typically hesitant at first - particularly with the

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notion that it was no longer necessary to leave your desk to visit a filing cabinet! Indeed, the Council thought very carefully about the ‘cultural’ changes that a new EDRM system would bring, and made sure that the most critical in-house systems were first on the list of those to be integrated with TRIM Context.

“We felt people would use TRIM if they were confident of finding what they were looking for, so we were highly proactive in putting the ‘most accessed’ information in first,” commented Wilkins. “However, once users started to familiarise themselves with the capabilities of TRIM Context, they happily adopted it without question.”

In Wilkins’ view, the key to a smooth adoption process is information structure within the EDRM system. The data repository groups related documents together, with a structure based heavily on the Local Government Classification Scheme. Coupled with this is the ease with which TRIM will integrate with iCM and the subsequent delivery of a range of online services via the Council’s website.

“iCM has provided us with the ability to devolve responsibility away from the central bottleneck of the IT department down to the specialist areas across the Council,” states Wilkins. “We have been able to develop an information rich site that now has the solid foundations needed to support the transactional services we are hoping to develop over the coming year,” continued Wilkins

With the Council’s service areas each developing their own content, the turnaround time for uploading material has been reduced from the previous one or two days, to an astonishing five minutes! Thanks to TRIM Context and GOSS, the control of the council web site has been given to the employees who actually generate the information, using iCM’s template driven structure to enforce a strict and consistent layout and style.

For the future, Wilkins and his team plan to incorporate Sedgemoor District Council’s intranet into iCM, to enable internal business units to benefit from iCM’s powerful automated site management facilities and ensure that the Council’s internal information infrastructure is as up-to-date as its external system. Further ahead is a plan to encourage local community website development by drawing on iCM’s ‘sub-site’ capabilities to potentially host and deliver community sites developed by residents or local community groups themselves.

Overall, the integration of TRIM Context with iCM will deliver significant benefits to Sedgemoor District Council, and will do much to support the growth of customer access to council information services. This is due in no small measure to TRIM Context and iCM’s ability to dynamically integrate previously paper-based back office information into real-time, customer-facing services. The result is a holistic approach to the creation, storage and presentation of Council information which will support local services for many years to come.

About TOWER Software:

TOWER Software, a leading enterprise content management (ECM) provider, delivers electronic document and records management (EDRM) solutions. TOWER Software's award-winning solutions empower organisations to manage and secure their vital information assets. The TRIM Context® solution is a single, integrated platform that manages business information throughout its complete lifecycle. By relying on its proven domain expertise, strong strategic partnerships, and powerful solutions, TOWER Software enables organisations to improve the accuracy of information on which business decisions are made; maximise efficiency by finding business critical information more quickly and easily; and achieve and maintain standards compliance across industries, resulting in sustained competitive advantage. TOWER Software is a privately held company with operations in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

For more information, email: emea@towersoft.co.uk



TOWER Software Europe Middle East & Africa

**TOWER House
Oaklands Park
Wokingham
Berkshire RG41 2FD**

Telephone: +44 (0) 118 977 1212