

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency transforms governance with the 2007 Office

Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Government

Customer Profile

Headquartered in Moncton, NB, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) mandate is to help increase employment opportunities and earned income for Atlantic Canadians.

Business Situation

Faced with a new government accountability mandate, ACOA sought ways to streamline its internal workflow processes and have tighter integration with its productivity tools.

Solution

With the help of NexInnovations and Infotech Canada Inc., ACOA developed a centralized portal based on SharePoint Server 2007. Staff realized improved compliance, collaboration and application development times.

Benefits

- Simpler business processes
- Improved collaboration
- Enhanced user experience
- Improved governance and compliance
- Enhanced application development

“The new SharePoint Server 2007 and Office 2007 integrate very well and have served to dramatically improve our ability to meet the Government of Canada's new accountability framework.”

Ronald Surette, Director General, Service Transformation and CIO, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)

Based in Moncton, New Brunswick, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) is a federal government organization tasked with assisting the economic development of Atlantic Canada through the development of trade and job opportunities. ACOA has an office in Ottawa, plus seven regional offices and over 40 field offices throughout the four Atlantic provinces. The Agency provides economic development services, including business architecture, networking and international development. In order to improve IT governance and its ability to quickly develop business applications, ACOA enlisted the help of NexInnovations and Infotech to extend the functionality of its current software tools using the 2007 Microsoft® Office system and Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. As a result, ACOA was able to streamline its workflow and reduce the time and cost of developing business applications.

Situation

If an initiative involves promoting economic development within the Atlantic Canada region, chances are the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) had a hand in it. ACOA is the Government of Canada agency tasked with fostering business growth in the Atlantic region.

The Agency is the arm of the federal government mandated to work with Atlantic Canadians—their businesses, their business organizations, their provincial, municipal governments and other federal agencies—that operate in the region.

ACOA accomplishes this by delivering economic development services directly to organizations, helping with business architecture, research, networking and international outreach. These business development tools provide clients with the tools and resources they need to handle all stages of the business lifecycle, from initial planning through to company expansion.

The Agency is based in Moncton, New Brunswick with an office in Ottawa, plus seven regional and over 40 field offices throughout the four Atlantic provinces. ACOA employs nearly 1,000 people stretched across this wide geographic area, and many travel frequently on client visits or other Agency business. As such, improving collaboration between workers and clients became a major priority for ACOA.

The Government of Canada recently introduced a new accountability framework for its government departments and agencies which calls for improved IT governance, compliance and transparency of internal processes. Faced with this new government mandate, ACOA sought ways to streamline its internal workflow processes and tighten integration with its productivity tools. In particular, the Agency was looking for a way to quickly develop a portal architecture that

would enable to place documents and manuals online.

According to Ronald Surette, Director General, Service Transformation and CIO, ACOA, the agency also wanted to extend the functionality of its software development tools to reduce the time and cost needed to develop its business client applications. Such a framework would enable ACOA to quickly assemble composite applications from existing systems.

“The importance of good governance in any organization is no longer up for debate. We also wanted to deliver the highest quality of service to our stakeholders in the most cost-effective way possible,” Surette says. “The goal is to help our staff become as efficient as possible so their focus and our resources can be directed at helping the Atlantic provinces to flourish.”

Solution

ACOA had previously migrated from a mixed Unix/Novell-based architecture to a Microsoft®-based environment, and so it sought to further build upon this foundation. ACOA turned to Microsoft Gold Certified partners NexInnovations Inc. and Infotech Canada Inc. for help.

NexInnovations and Infotech advised that ACOA implement a portal architecture based on the Microsoft 2007 Office system and Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007. The partners built proof of concept demonstrations showing ACOA how the new Office 2007 features would complement its current architecture to meet business requirements.

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of Canada's new accountability framework," Surette says.

"The new 2007 Microsoft Office system provides ACOA with tighter integration and improved ease of use within Office and with other Microsoft business software, such as Microsoft Exchange," says Dave Johnson, Solutions Sales, NexInnovations. "Using Office 2007 also helps us streamline the organization's workflow and manage different types of content."

The Microsoft Office system enhances the Agency's ability to integrate data with familiar Office applications using the new Business Data Catalogue and XML file formats. New dashboard features built into the 2007 release and Windows Office SharePoint Server 2007 provide better performance measurement, reporting and integration across the organization.

By deploying Office SharePoint Server 2007, ACOA has improved its collaboration portal infrastructure and enhanced its foundation for developing web-based applications.

"Utilizing the new features of workflow and enhanced collaboration in Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 will help increase business productivity for ACOA stakeholders," says Victor Bonnah, CEO, Infotech Canada Inc.

The environment also includes the Office InfoPath® 2007 information gathering program, a Windows-based application that allows ACOA to create dynamic electronic forms, which its teams can use to gather, share and reuse information, such as training and procedural manuals, to boost collaboration and decision-making capabilities. New features, including the Business Data catalogue, along with using InfoPath and SharePoint enables ACOA to reorganize and package data in such a way

that managers are better able to monitor their progress, performance and accountability.

Benefits

Office 2007 and SharePoint Server 2007 are helping ACOA to improve its IT governance and content management processes. The new tools have also helped reduce the time ACOA needs to develop applications, allowing the agency to deploy simple solutions that meet its business needs right away.

"One of the nice things that we found is that rather than trying to build integration tools, we simply looked at the new Microsoft applications and saw most of those user requirements were actually built into the new products," says Surette.

Improved collaboration and governance

SharePoint Server 2007 includes enhanced features such as document versioning, content approval and check-outs that help organizations control access to content. For example, the Information Right Management (IRM) feature enables content creators to quickly and easily create encrypted and right-managed documents including Microsoft InfoPath 2007 forms, Microsoft Word 2007 and Microsoft Excel® 2007 spreadsheet software documents. This important feature helps ACOA become compliant with many of the new federal government requirements for IT governance.

"Government requirements call for better management of government records. Our new environment enables ACOA to capture information naturally, as part of its everyday business processes. SharePoint Server 2007 permits us to eliminate shared drives in favour of a centralized architecture — not only does this enable better IT governance by meeting government requirements, it's a smoother and more efficient business process," says Surette.

As a result, collaboration between the IT and business managers has improved.

“SharePoint Server 2007 portal has greatly enhanced staff interaction and collaboration. The project timelines are shared responsibilities, where the versioning now becomes a logical progression as opposed to a contractual kind of agreement. This dramatically improves our workflow and internal processes.”

Improved collaborative environment

With SharePoint Server 2007, ACOA has built a comprehensive portal framework that supports intranet and Internet sites. The new environment provides ACOA with a centralized, online resource where management and procedural manuals can be posted.

“The tighter integration of SharePoint is very important to our staff. What I love about it is the ability now of connecting workers using Word and SharePoint,” says Surette. “For example, we developed a centralized framework for quickly posting policy documents online. This way, our employees will see what seems to be a consistent, coherent manual, when in fact it really is a series of SharePoint modules. It’s an interesting and cost-effective project that SharePoint 2007 now permits us to do,” says Surette.

Enhanced application development

The new SharePoint also enables ACOA to quickly develop applications, such as a new audit management system, for its auditors. This helps improve the agency’s corporate governance.

More application development can be done in-house as part of this dramatic change in structure. “Using SharePoint Server 2007, ACOA doesn’t need as many high-end developers to build applications. We

anticipate saving somewhere in the order of \$400,000 in salaries,” says Surette.

In addition, solutions built on top the new Microsoft-based environment require far less technical proficiency than ACOA’s previous Novell Unix-based environment.

“SharePoint 2007 system requires virtually no technical skills to use and maintain. You don’t need a programmer to run the 2007 version. This means that we can give it to departments that don’t have a stable of developers,” says Surette.

The new Microsoft-based tools have also helped to reduce the cost of deploying applications. “It’s now a quarter of the cost for the agency to build business-ready solutions using InfoPath and SharePoint technologies than it is for us to do it with traditional methodologies,” says Surette. “Not only does SharePoint 2007 reduce the time to develop and deploy our applications, it is intuitive to the way information workers work, allowing ACOA to provide simple solutions that meet simple business needs right away. It’s a dramatically improved workflow process.”

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