



Dawson County Expands Services, Cuts Costs with Hosted Records Management Solution

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: State and local government

Customer Profile

Dawson County is nestled in the foothills of the North Georgia mountains. Dawson County is home to the start of the Appalachian Trail, Amicalola Falls, and many other exciting destinations.

Business Situation

The county maintains paper records using labor-intensive business processes that are difficult to access and that leave critical official documents vulnerable to catastrophic losses.

Solution

Microsoft and members of the Microsoft® Records Management Preferred Partner Program deployed a solution built on Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 and hosted by IMC that reduces operational costs and safeguards critical data.

Benefits

- Facilitates access to records
- Provides better service to citizens
- Enhances collaboration
- Improves business continuity
- Optimizes use of IT resources



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“Imagine what we could do for local government here in Georgia once we have a statewide records management system.”

Kevin Tanner, County Manager, Dawson County

Situated in the North Georgia mountains some 40 miles north of Atlanta, Georgia, Dawson County has grown significantly, but sustainably, over the past decade. However, as the economic downturn reaches nearly every community, the county anticipates a decline in local tax revenues that will affect local resources. Records management lies at the core of how Dawson County serves many of its key business and citizen constituents. To that end, the county is automating and digitizing its records to accelerate the delivery of services, improve accuracy, and better protect key information assets. Leaders of Dawson County are tapping Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007 technology and Microsoft Certified Partners to help make this happen.



Situation

Kevin Tanner, County Manager for Dawson County, has the challenging, though increasingly common, task of improving the efficiency of county government operations while holding the line on expenditures. Tanner is always searching for ways to harness information technology to reduce labor costs for the county and to improve citizen services.

“Our county needs to develop a business model—a technology road map—for putting the most cost-effective technology in place,” says Tanner. “We’ve started up a county IT department, and we’re even growing some of our own in-house talent. Now we need to move forward.”

The county is off to a good start using technology to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of county services and governance. A variety of departments are employing IT-based systems to support county operations. But what is needed, says Tanner, is a coordinated approach. “Our Sheriff uses Computer-Aided Dispatch, or CAD, for dispatch; our fire services have a fire management system; the assessor’s office has a system, planning and zoning has their own, and so does the business licensing office,” says Tanner. “But none of these systems work together. We don’t have a way to blend these processes and all this information into one.”

Tanner notes that this absence of harmony among county computer systems can have the effect of slowing the execution of routine county business.

Additional pressure for making IT systems more interoperable is coming from outside. A Georgia-wide move to develop a regional approach to issues such as development and environmental quality is increasing pressure on Dawson County to seamlessly share data

with other government offices in neighboring counties as well as with Georgia state and federal government entities.

Tanner also notes that citizen access to county government information has been spotty. With the growth of Internet use, citizens have come to expect easy online access to all kinds of information, even about their local government.

A case in point is the records management operation of the Dawson County commissioner’s office.

Dawson County still relies on largely manual processes for managing official records of vital citizen statistics, such as birth and death certificates and marriage licenses. Unfortunately, inefficiencies are built in to these paper-based processes. Retrieving and re-filing physical records takes time and skill. And records that county officials are using for their work are inaccessible to other county workers and citizens.

Another key challenge posed by Dawson County’s traditional approach to records management is the burden it is placing on physical storage resources. The county is simply running out of the office floor space required to maintain tens of thousands of records. Dawson County is currently storing records that are over 100 years old, and the county is quickly running out of space for filing cabinets.

According to the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), Dawson County’s struggles with records management are a growing trend among Georgia county governments. ACCG has studied the practice of public records management across Georgia. In a 2007 survey of all 159 Georgia counties, ACCG determined that Georgia counties needed to improve records management training, achieve more effective

distribution of best practices for local government public records management, and implement more effective disaster management plans.

Solution

Under the leadership of the Dawson County Board of Commissioners led by Chairman Mike Berg, Dawson County is undertaking a pilot effort to prove the concept that a small-to-medium sized Georgia county can automate its records management processes at a reasonable cost, and maybe even lay the foundation for a completely interoperable family of county processes and information resources.

Dawson County has teamed with the Microsoft Public Sector group and members of the Microsoft Records Management Preferred Partner Program, including Abel Solutions, Fujitsu, Information Manufacturing, LLC (IMC), and KnowledgeLake.

With Abel Solutions acting as the systems integrator, records from the county commissioner's office are being scanned, captured, and stored in Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, which is supported and fed by a KnowledgeLake user interface and Fujitsu high-performance scanners. For the purposes of the pilot program, and to determine the business value and return on investment measurements associated with hosting applications offsite, Dawson County's records management system is being hosted at IMC's secure hosting facility

Benefits

Tanner reports that the hosted solution built on Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, which is being initially accessed by the Planning and Zoning Division of the Dawson County Commissioner's Office, has been a big hit with office employees. The solution employs a Web-based interface developed by Abel Solutions that is familiar to anyone who

uses e-mail or a home computer. Fujitsu scanning technology, coupled with KnowledgeLake software, takes the guesswork out of capturing existing paper records. Implementation was quick and easy because the Fujitsu scanner integrates seamlessly with the KnowledgeLake software and Office SharePoint Server 2007. And because the Abel Solutions configuration of the hosted solution is built on proven and familiar building blocks of Microsoft technologies, such as the Windows® operating system, Office SharePoint Server and Internet Explorer® applications, the ramp-up time for county employees has been minimized.

The Dawson County hosted records management project also promises to deliver excellent return on investment. Because of savings gained by using inexpensive Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 software in an IMC hosting facility, Dawson County will be able to focus its scarce resources on the integration needed for an end-to-end record management solution. "Hosted solutions are often attractive and cost-effective options for local governments because counties do not have to make big up-front investments in additional hardware to build out the solution," says, Robert Dash, Chief Technology Officer for IMC.

With the integrated and hosted Office SharePoint Server-based records management solution, Dawson County can do more of its traditional functions with fewer resources and personnel. County leaders already recognize that their county offices will be able to do things they've never been able to do before, such as sharing data internally among various Dawson County departments, across county and municipal lines, and ultimately to constituents via the internet.

Dawson County officials can also rest assured that vital records are backed up

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For more information about this Dawson County records management project, contact Kevin Tanner at (706) 344-3501, ext. 247.

offsite—even outside of the county—offering an unprecedented level of security and a solid foundation for ensuring business continuity in the wake of natural or other disasters.

As Georgia counties start to consolidate resources and functions on a regional basis, county seats will be able to better communicate and collaborate across jurisdictional county and municipal lines.

Dawson County is not alone in assessing the impact that records management automation can have on government operations. Ross King, Deputy Director of Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), recognizes that digital records management technology promises to address many of the problems in the existing business processes of county commissioners. “As technology evolves, the opportunity to effectively and efficiently manage current and historical records in a digital format is available and strongly recommended,” says King.

Tanner concurs. “Imagine what we could do for local government here in Georgia,” he muses, “once we have a statewide records management system.”

Above all, Tanner envisions delivering better citizen services, with all appropriate county information available to any county resident with an Internet connection. Fully aware that many Dawson County residents are not online, he would like to extend access to county information to as many residents as possible via a proposed 311 call center. “I want all county information to be in a countywide electronic knowledge base for our 311 operators,” explains Tanner. “I’d like all of this to lead to a one-stop shop for Dawson County citizen services.”

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Software and Services

- Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007