

Oxford County

Case Study



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County revamps land information database and applications to meet users' demand for improved accessibility, and keep current with emerging technologies

The Customer:

Located in the heart of Southwestern Ontario, the County of Oxford is home to several thriving communities within its eight-area municipalities. The County of Oxford is a mix of both urban and rural communities. The urban communities of Ingersoll, Tillsonburg and Woodstock offer an abundance of business and residential opportunities. The county's rural communities are rich in natural resources and pastoral charm. Farming is both a way of life and a way to make a living and state-of-the-art farming operations are plentiful in the County of Oxford.

The Challenge:

A key resource for municipal and county staff is the County of Oxford's land information database. The County of Oxford Land Related Information System (LRIS) is a sophisticated geographic information system (GIS) that combines digital maps of the area with related information such as:

- Property ownership and transaction information
- Assessment data
- Demographics
- Property legal description, site address and mailing address information
- Structure location and characteristics, and building permits

Comprising a GIS from a leading vendor and an Oracle® database and application tier, the LRIS is a server-based system available to each of the eight local municipalities, as well as County administrative departments such as Community and Strategic Planning Office, Public Works, Public Health and Emergency Services, and Corporate Services.

The County of Oxford needed to consolidate various generations of the Oracle application software, including the forms and reports, into a common, modern interface.

The County of Oxford turned to Imex Systems to migrate the LRIS over to a Web-based system. The new LRIS system leverages the county's existing investment in hardware, software and human knowledge of Oracle and GIS technologies while improving end-user satisfaction through a Webbased system.

"Imex had the right combination of technical skills and e-government expertise as well as a thorough understanding of what we hoped to achieve," said Parkin. "They were also able to accommodate our need to have the end-user community involved in the project."

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The LRIS is used for a variety of municipal tasks, including:

- Issue and tracking of building permits
- Verification of property ownership configuration and location
- Maintaining inventories of land (vacant commercial/industrial, public-owned land)
- Registration of Nutrient Management Plans
- Processing land development applications, and checking for conformity with the County's Official Plan and the local zoning bylaws
- Creation of mailing lists for public notification related to development applications, public works projects, and health and emergency services activities

However, much of the LRIS was developed in the late 1980s, and though it continued to function, the user interface had become outdated. As well, additional applications that had been developed by the County of Oxford over the years had led to several versions of various forms and reports resulting in system maintenance headaches for IT staff.

The County of Oxford needed to consolidate various generations of the Oracle application software, including the forms and reports, into a common, modern interface. "A majority of users were demanding an improved user interface that also provided new flexibility in output formats, such as PDF," said Margaret Parkin, Manager, Geographic Information Systems, County of Oxford. "As well, some of the smaller municipalities were reluctant to purchase additional terminal emulation software that was necessary to access the server-based LRIS. If the system is available over the Web there will be a broader base of users."

The Solution:

The County of Oxford turned to Imex Systems to migrate the LRIS over to a Web-based system. The new LRIS system leverages the county's existing investment in hardware, software and human knowledge of Oracle and GIS technologies while improving end-user satisfaction through a Web-based system.

With a Web-based system, security was also a key consideration for the County of Oxford. Imex delivered a multi-tier security protocol that ensures appropriate access to information contained in the LRIS.

One of the project's key objectives was to incorporate end-user feedback into the new system's design and implementation. A steering committee of end users provided input on the design of the new LRIS. "Imex had the right combination of technical skills and e-government expertise as well as a thorough understanding of what we hoped to achieve," said Parkin. "They were also able to accommodate our need to have the end-user community involved in the project."

With successful knowledge transfer a significant element of the project, Imex's provision of a transparent, documented set of code will allow County of Oxford to tweak and add to the LRIS in the years to come.

"The ability for staff to be able to modify and add new applications, as necessary, is a must," said Parkin. "Imex will play a key role in transferring system maintenance over to county staff."

The project involved migrating the legacy Oracle Database, Forms and Reports to the latest Oracle web-based platform, comprised of Oracle 9i database and Oracle Application Server 10g, with Graphical User Interface, integrating GIS and re-engineering the applications to add new interface functionality such as calendars.

Imex developed its own tools to automate the migration of forms and reports, which has helped to speed up the migration process, and to standardize the applications without affecting the existing business logic.

"Imex Systems completed the LRIS project right on budget," said Parkin. "As the project advanced, Imex was always in a problem-solving mode. Whenever we came across a technical challenge, Imex wouldn't let anything halt progress on the project."

With the new web-based LRIS, the County of Oxford reduced operating costs by eliminating terminal emulation software. The LRIS can also now be deployed wirelessly whenever the county chooses to do so.