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 Industry: State and Local Government
 Country: USA



Marin County

Marin County upgrades tax system while reducing the costs of the mainframe

Challenge

Marin County's property tax system was expensive to maintain and could not be integrated with more modern technologies. Updating and modernizing this critical application without losing valuable existing business logic was a strategic imperative.

Solution

- > Micro Focus Net Express® with .NET
- > Micro Focus Server for .NET™

Marin County

Marin County in California is home to more than 250,000 residents in the San Francisco Bay Area. The County provides a wide range of services for its residents including public parks, libraries, community centers and a broad range of departments supporting all other County programs and services.

An aging mainframe containing valuable application assets

The lifeblood of any US County is the accurate and timely receipt of property tax levies. Marin County is no exception. It collects real estate taxes of over \$700 million to help fund county and state budgets. Until recently, Marin County relied on a 20 year old mainframe to operate its property tax management system. Built using a highly structured design methodology and an evolved COBOL coding discipline, it was no longer efficient for the purpose. With newer, more cost-effective technologies now available, the County saw an opportunity to improve the overall system and address some of the challenges they faced: Laborious processes that required mainframe downtime to run custom reports; an inability to add new reports and functionality quickly or efficiently and the cost of a staff member dedicated to a single application and unable to offer support to customers or other functions which would add value to the County.

Other challenges included the inability of the property tax system to integrate with systems from other agencies within the County, including public safety, zoning, planning, permits and library as well as with its SAP-based enterprise resource planning software. In addition, valuable staff members trained on the mainframe environment were nearing retirement, and it was difficult to find recruits with similar skills.

Highlights

- > 91% reduced mainframe operating and personnel costs
- > 50% reduced batch processing time
- > Risk mitigation through the re-use of proven COBOL business application assets
- > Ability to integrate modernized application with newer technologies
- > Streamlined development process
- > No retraining of users

"Our decision to migrate a critical property tax system, with its proven COBOL business assets, to the lower-cost .NET Platform allows us to provide even greater levels of service without the risks and costs associated with 'rip-and-replace' strategies. Moving off the mainframe platform, modernizing our application and reducing costs by 91 percent ensures that Marin County is maintaining the highest level of stewardship of taxpayer resources."

David Hill CIO,
Marin County, California

Modernizing a complex system with little risk

With the lease on its mainframe environment coming up for costly renewal, the County realized that changes were needed to provide more complex and modern services at lower costs. Rewriting the code from scratch was determined as not cost-effective as the County was already satisfied with the operational value of the current system. Instead, working with Microsoft, modernization experts Tiburon Technologies and Micro Focus, the County decided to migrate its existing COBOL code to the Microsoft .NET Framework running on Windows Server 2003. They also changed their third-party database to Microsoft SQL Server 2005. To implement this cost-saving project, the development of the migrated code was carried out using Micro Focus Net Express with .NET, a COBOL development environment for Windows.

“Our business logic is encapsulated in COBOL and we needed to protect this asset as best we could,” said David Hill, CIO of Marin County. “We evaluated how we could leverage the IT assets already in place and modernize a very complex system with little risk.”

Moving the mainframe code to the Micro Focus COBOL environment took less than one year with Tiburon providing automated tools for converting the existing application, including user screens. This process of migrating and validating the database included the conversion of hundreds of tables with millions of rows of data.

Increased productivity, accuracy and efficiency for much lower cost

Marin County has met its objectives of removing the property tax system from the older mainframe environment onto the more extensible .NET Framework. Implementing Micro Focus Net Express allows the County to take full advantage of Web services, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a host of other modern services that were not previously available. The modernized system can be integrated with other systems throughout the County as well as at State and Federal level. Accuracy and efficiency has been enhanced by allowing all agencies to work from a common database environment.

In replacing the mainframe with two commodity dual-processor, dual-core computers, the County has reduced its hardware, software and maintenance costs by 91 percent. Mainframe support employees have been redeployed to boost customer service and business application development. The processing of transactions has also been reduced by half, from four hours to two.

Finally, because the migration included the existing UI screens without change, there was no need to retrain users on the new system. This combination of reusing valuable assets, while modernizing on the latest technology along with dramatic cost reductions ensures that the County can best serve the taxpayers in a timely and efficient manner.

“Moving and modernizing our existing code from the mainframe to Micro Focus COBOL under .NET fit our long term strategy. The project was completed quickly and at low cost and resulted in a long term solution we will be using for years to come.”

David Hill CIO,
Marin County, California

Meeting the demands of the future

With the new property tax system in place, the true advantages of COBOL on the .NET Framework can be seen with the ability to respond to changing business needs faster and more reliably. The flexibility of the new system to work in a world of Web services opens a host of possibilities to ensure that Marin County provides taxpayers with a long term solution that meets the demands of tomorrow.

About Micro Focus

Micro Focus, a member of the FTSE 250, provides innovative software that allows companies to dramatically improve the business value of their enterprise applications. Micro Focus Enterprise Application Modernization, Testing and Management software enables customers’ business applications to respond rapidly to market changes and embrace modern architectures with reduced cost and risk.

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