

Overcoming the challenges of recession to deliver new public services

Wexford County Council

The Challenge

- Improve efficiency in the use of GIS
- Deliver new public services

The Benefits

- The time required to manage and update spatial data is substantially reduced
- A single GIS platform supports all users – internally and externally – and all applications from the desktop to the web and smartphones
- GIS professionals have the time and technology to develop new public services



The Customer

County Wexford is located in South East Ireland, an area characterised by mountains, valleys and beaches. The county council serves a population of over 145,000 people in rural communities and towns including Wexford, Enniscorthy, Gorey and New Ross.

The Challenge

The suddenness and depth of Ireland's recession has created immeasurable challenges for local authorities. Right across the country, councils have to balance the need to operate more efficiently with the desire to deliver better services to improve citizens' lives. Wexford County Council hoped to achieve both these goals by revamping its use of geographic information system (GIS) technology.

The council already made extensive use of GIS to support the work of many different departments, but its existing technology required a great deal of time-consuming management and maintenance. This was partly because its spatial data was dispersed across different GIS systems and databases. When updates were made to one dataset, employees had to replicate the changes to other databases, a needlessly complex process that absorbed valuable time.

Furthermore, the council's intranet-based GIS for staff had a completely different look and feel from its public-facing map viewer, which led to unnecessary extra administration, as well as confusion among staff about how to access information. The GIS team (comprised of Catherine Kavanagh, IT Project Leader and Frank Burke, GIS Officer) was working at maximum capacity, just dealing with day-to-day data and system management, hence change was required.

The Solution

After an extensive evaluation process, Wexford County Council selected Esri's ArcGIS Platform and worked with consultants from Esri Ireland to design and implement a new GIS infrastructure, together with a single spatial database. "It was a totally new approach to GIS, compared to what we had previously done," explains Frank Burke GIS Officer at Wexford County Council. "Esri Ireland provided excellent support to allow us test the software before purchasing."

With Esri Ireland's help, the council built a single, all-encompassing GIS system to meet the needs of all members of staff, across all departments, partners and the general public. A sophisticated security mechanism controls access to this web- and intranet-based system, so that seven different categories of users can view appropriate layers of data, depending on their authorisations and needs.

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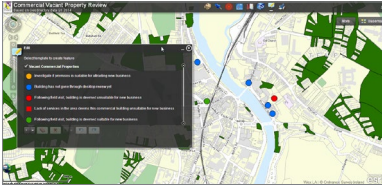
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“ArcGIS allows us to do more with GIS.”

Frank Burke, GIS manager, Wexford County Council



ArcGIS map identifying vacant commercial properties

Council employees with the correct permissions can edit their own data from within their browser, and updates are immediately visible to all staff, on the intranet GIS viewer. It was this capability that really stood out for Burke during the selection process. “For some of the other products we were considering, you almost had to be a mini developer to edit data,” he recalls. “We were impressed by how intuitive and user friendly ArcGIS is.”

The council is now using ArcGIS to roll out a wide range of new internal and public-facing apps for its intranet, web site and smart phones. Burke explains: “We can deploy a web map or web app very quickly using the data that we already have in our central database. If that database gets changed, all our web maps and apps are instantly updated too. That’s a big plus.”

Benefits

The council’s new consolidated GIS strategy has led to a host of efficiency improvements. Data is kept more up-to-date and distributed more quickly to everyone who uses it. The GIS team no longer has to replicate data between databases and maintain different systems. What is more, the council can stream third party resources, such as National Parks and Wildlife data, directly into its GIS viewer using web services, saving it hours of data preparation.

By enabling the GIS team to work more efficiently, ArcGIS has paved the way for it to deliver new value-adding services for the public. Burke says: “ArcGIS allows us to do more with GIS. We are doing so much more with our time.”

One of the council’s new GIS services allows the general public to access planning information from smartphones and use GPS to find planning applications near their location. Another GIS app for smartphones helps council employees find the locations of new-builds more easily, enabling them to provide more efficient customer service when installing commercial watermeters.

Currently, the council are progressing development of a new GIS application that will help it to identify vacant commercial buildings, analyse existing utilities and services in these areas and identify the most promising premises to promote. It is hoped that this GIS will play a key role in helping the council to attract new business into the county, creating jobs and improving opportunities for local people.

A further GIS solution in development is an accessibility smartphone app that will enable people with disabilities to quickly check the location of the nearest car parks with accessible toilets for example. With all these GIS applications, and others like them, Wexford County Council is therefore overcoming the challenges of recession and delivering valuable new public services.

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