

“A ProcessFlows solution helps us with the e-Government Agenda as we can demonstrate compliance.” Plymouth City Council

The Customer:

Plymouth is the biggest city on the south coast and the 14th largest city in the UK. The area is rich in maritime history and has a strong naval presence based at Devonport Royal Dockyard. Plymouth City Council is managed by 57 elected council members who are responsible for budget and policy decisions and delivering high quality services to a population of 256,000 residents.

The Council aims to continuously improve the quality of the services it provides for the community. To achieve ongoing development, the council has developed a strong planning, performance and financial management framework and continually monitors these achievements against corporate objectives.

The Challenge:

In 1997, Plymouth City Council realised they had a business problem - main-frame data (in COLD format) could not be stored for any longer than 120 days. The data had to be archived to microfiche and CD three times a year, so no legacy data was searchable electronically or ‘live’. Manual retrieval was the only way of locating documents. This takes a long time and there was the added inconvenience of mis-filing and documents being stored at the other end of the building etc.

Retrieving information this way caused a particular problem when the annual cheque reconciliation report had to be done. Cross referencing all cheques written in the financial year against invoices was taking too long - four employees took over a month to complete the task, equating to 80+ working days.

OpenText Alchemy has successfully been delivering Document Management Solutions to the Council for over 10 years.

The cheque summary report was printed out as a Greenbar report. Greenbar paper has alternating green and white bars to assist those reading the report to follow the data across a wide sheet of paper, but tens of thousands of cheques had to be manually verified this way against the cheque summary report. Manual cross checking was no longer a viable process. The volume of paper print-outs formed a pile as high as a desk.

Moving COLD data away from the mainframe to make it live and accessible would solve the problem. Preparation time of reports would be



dramatically reduced and assigning large areas for the storage of Microfiche and CDs could be halted.

The Solution:

Plymouth City Council visited the ProcessFlows stand at a trade show. Their business problems were discussed and sample data was left with ProcessFlows so a bespoke demonstration of capabilities could be worked on and presented to the Council the following day.

ProcessFlows supplied Plymouth City Council with Alchemy Administrator Client and Alchemy Datagrabber Input Module. Datagrabber extracts the COLD data from the mainframe and parses the ASCII text and EDB-DIC files into the Alchemy repository on the fly. Information is reproduced electronically page by page which enables later searches to be as specific as identifying a date or a name on the page.

Doug Harding, Principal Consultant at ProcessFlows said

"I worked on the presentation in my hotel that evening - importing the Council's data file into Alchemy - and presented in Plymouth the day after. Our solution solved their initial challenge to improve the cheque reconciliation process and revealed even greater business potential - Alchemy could improve processes throughout the organisation by making all data and documents 'live' from COLD."



How this works: Using the Datagrabber scripting language and any text editor a Definition file is created. This will determine exactly how the Data file will be parsed -where the record begins and ends; what new repository fields to create; what data to extract into the fields; what (if any) files need to be merged with the data records and when to create a new folder. The Alchemy Administrator program then runs the Datagrabber operation to process the information. New records will be added to the repository and updates added as per the indexing methods selected.

To enhance the presentation of data the Alchemy administrator enables the Council to design bitmap overlays for all data. Those preparing the annual cheque reconciliation report can even choose to have a Greenbar viewer option if they want.

Datagrabber extracts the data required and bespoke overlays have been designed so printed documents are recognised as a statement, invoice or bill by recipients.

The Benefits:

The Council's key problem when they approached ProcessFlows was the employee time being wasted gathering legacy data and documents. Alchemy solved this. However, there have been massive unforeseen benefits from having "live" and accessible data.

"Alchemy has proved to be an extremely useful tool in many areas of the business which it was never planned to extend the service into - It is used for everything from P45 data to legacy system archiving."

Damean Miller, Team Leader, Systems Analysis at Plymouth City Council.

Response time to queries has been reduced as staff are instantly able to retrieve documents for reference, improving customer service. Efficiency gains, time savings, paper usage reductions and the reduced need for storage space for CDs are also highlighted by the Council as benefits.

"Mainframe files exceed 2GB every 120 days which is why we had to originally print Greenbar reports - 2GB x 3 times a year x 10 years = 600GB of Data = a whole basement of paper! - Alchemy helps us with the e-Government Agenda as we can demonstrate compliance."

10 + years on the Alchemy project has been almost forgotten as the system works so well and gives no problems. *"It is taken for granted"* said Damean.

"Those that worked on the initial installation of Alchemy have moved on and they left no problems for the IT department to deal with. There was no need for training as Alchemy is idiot proof. The solution works seamlessly in the background and has never let us down."