

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Implements Powerful Communication Channel

Rhondda Cynon Taf County
Borough Council
Wales, UK
www.rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk

Industry:

Public Sector

Oracle Products & Services:

Oracle Universal Content
Management

Key Benefits:

- Improved Web site and high ranking
- Achieved 23% increase in traffic between September 2005 and September 2006
- Received positive comments from people in the community about service and access
- Enabled departments to easily update the site with relevant content while capturing full audit trails of the authorization process

“Without Oracle’s repository or template architecture, we were faced with a huge manual task of updating every page. We believe that we have cut six months off the delivery timeframe because of our content management system. As such, we are in a better position to serve our citizens.” – Leigh Gripton, Director of Customer Care and ICT, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council has a commitment to its citizens to provide the highest level of service and information through its Web site. Working to meet United Kingdom (UK) government directives and requirements, Rhondda Cynon Taf reviewed its existing Web site and decided to completely overhaul its design, navigation, branding, and accessibility.

Rhondda Cynon Taf was an existing Oracle customer and believed the company provided the best content management system to support its new Web site. Building the new site around Oracle Universal Content Management (previously called Stellent Universal Content Management) enabled the council to complete the project and go live about six months faster than it would have if it had used other manual processes. The Web site is now ranked by independent analysts as one of the best public sector sites in the UK.

Revamping the Web Site to Improve Service

Public sector organizations are under constant scrutiny and demands from government to improve the service levels they deliver to citizens. Information has been one of the biggest drivers, whether it comes in the form of the Freedom of Information Act or another type of legislation. To ensure that councils provide relevant and easy access to information, UK governments have placed an increased focus on e-Government—driving citizens to and providing services via council Web sites. Rhondda Cynon Taf is no exception, but its Web site is exceptional.

Rhondda Cynon Taf decided that the project required a complete overhaul. Indeed, “if you are going to do it, do it properly,” was a

mantra that the team felt applied very well to this important IT project. As such, the team approached other local councils in the UK to examine how their sites were built, designed, and structured so that when it began its own implementation, it could ensure that its Web site was easy to use and navigate for citizens. In addition, the council was eager to adhere to the Local Government Navigation List (LGNL), an important framework to follow so that citizens that access one council Web site would have the same navigation experience at another site.

As it examined the structure and design of the site itself, Rhondda Cynon Taf decided to review its brand identity to give it a crisper, more modern look. This new brand identity was another key component of the refreshed Web site.

Improving Access for All Citizens

One key element of the Web site that Rhondda Cynon Taf was keen to develop and ensure was of the highest possible standard was Web accessibility. Improving access to the site for partially sighted citizens was a key requirement of the e-Government agenda and the Council put a big emphasis on ensuring its new design met the needs of these citizens.

There are approximately two million people in the UK with sight problems and with the Government eager to use council Web sites as a primary information source for many citizens, Web accessibility has become a key initiative for many public sector and commercial organizations. Indeed, the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act demands public sector and commercial organizations improve the accessibility of Web sites.

Rhondda Cynon Taf began the process of improving its Web accessibility while re-launching its Web site earlier in 2006. To help it meet the demands of Web accessibility standards, Rhondda Cynon Taf researched the W3C and Royal Institute of the Blind (RNIB) guidelines to guarantee that it adhered to all code templates. For example, Rhondda Cynon Taf has alternative text for all images and diagrams, and different font sizes. All of these additional capabilities are required for Web accessibility compliance.

Within three months of launching the new site, it moved from 90th (out of 462 UK councils) to 7th in a monthly accessibility survey of local government Web sites conducted by Sitemorse. The council made these improvements by paying close attention to the

guidelines on how to create an accessible Web site and by conducting thorough testing of the site in the rebuilding process.

Receiving Positive Feedback from Citizens and Staff

Rhondda Cynon Taf has dramatically improved its Web site, and its high ranking by Sitemorse endorses the strategy, planning, and technology used in rebuilding the site. Moreover, citizens have backed it as well, both in terms of numbers but also in feedback. Rhondda Cynon Taf's Web site achieved a 23% increase in traffic between September 2005 and September 2006, and the council has seen a rise in the number of positive comments from people in the community about the service and access. One citizen, who is partially sighted and was invited to provide feedback during the planning process, is very pleased with the new site and its Web accessibility capabilities.

The revamped site also enables content managers within departments to make updates as required. Using Oracle's templates and approval workflow capabilities, employees can upload new content per the current design style and through the workflow authorized by a director. This model gives departments like marketing or customer services opportunities to easily update the site with relevant content while capturing full audit trails of the authorization process.

"Our new Web site is such a powerful communication channel for the council and the fact that we have increased traffic and positive feedback from the local community justifies the time and energy spent on the overhaul," said Leigh Gripton, director of customer care and ICT for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. "We can now provide up-to-date information in a consistent and clear manner for all citizens. Without Oracle Universal Content Management as the backbone of our Web site, we would not have been able to deliver such a robust service to the people of Rhondda Cynon Taf."

Why Oracle?

Prior to implementing the new system, Rhondda Cynon Taf had an existing Web site that was managed by an Oracle enterprise content management system. However, UK government mandates required the council to update and improve the Web site in order to improve the access and ease of use for its citizens. The council handled the project in-house because its team had the necessary expertise and knowledge of the Oracle product line.

Gripton said, “We recognized the need to update our site concurrently with the government’s wishes for better public Web sites. We had surveyed citizens and learned a great deal from their feedback regarding the Web site’s look and feel, as well as its navigation and accessibility for all citizens, including the partially blind.”

“We wanted to ensure that our Web site was citizen-centric. We wanted to make it clean and easy to look at, while ensuring that our brand was clear and that the content was consistent. It was also vital that we could update the site quickly and easily. All these factors were key reasons why we continued to work with Oracle, as it provided all of this and more,” Gripton continued.

Implementation Process

Over the years, Rhondda Cynon Taf’s Web team had created a large Web site with more than 4,000 Web pages. To update all the pages with new branding, text, and accessibility capabilities would have been a lengthy, manual process unless the team had a central repository that stored, managed, and controlled the content. Leveraging Oracle’s repository and 12 templates that were designed in-house, the Web team was able to re-architect the Web site automatically based on standardized and agreed-upon templates.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council is the second largest council in Wales with a population of 231,946, serving an area in South Wales Valleys covering 42,000 hectares.