

HOW OHIO EPA REINVENTED PERMITTING AND COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE

Every business, whether it's a manufacturer, body shop, restaurant or a dry cleaner, must comply with environmental regulations. Failure to follow these rules can put the public at risk. But a citizen who opens a nail salon, for example, may not know how to store and dispose of chemicals or which permits are needed. In most cases, that person will call the state environmental protection agency (EPA) or visit the agency website to find the information.

In the past, information on Ohio EPA's website was difficult to find. This resulted in multiple phone calls, which irritated business owners and overwhelmed Ohio EPA employees. Ohio businesspeople often had to call as many as five program offices to find out which regulations and permits applied to their businesses. But in many cases, Ohio EPA employees could not easily give businesses the information they needed. The complexity of the regulations and the number of groups involved frustrated everyone involved, and the consequences could be severe. Misunderstandings could result in a business taking the wrong action, which could harm citizens and damage the environment.

CREATING A WIZARD

Years earlier, Ohio EPA developed a custom permit wizard to help business owners locate the information they needed. But the wizard was outdated, lacked functionality and Ohio EPA no

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Rick Magni, Chief Information Officer, Ohio EPA

longer had staff that could support it. Agency leaders needed a new way to enable self-service to reduce costs and staff workload. They also needed to improve the consistency of their information.

In late 2015, Ohio EPA released a request for a new compliance and permit wizard that could increase self-service and connect field resources with back-office systems to improve operational efficiency. TruePenny People, a company that specializes in Oracle Policy Automation technology, responded to the request.

“Ohio EPA leaders had some big ideas about what they wanted to accomplish,” says Raj Dubey, president of TruePenny People. “They didn't just want to update their existing wizard, they wanted something that would be very customized toward each person's experience and each business' situation, but that could also answer routine citizen questions.”

Ohio EPA was an early adopter of Oracle Service Cloud and decided to build a new environmental permit, license and registration information one-stop wizard based on Oracle Service Cloud's Oracle Policy Automation.

“Rather than replace a custom product with a custom product, we would use Oracle Policy Automation and Oracle Service Cloud to provide Ohio EPA a solution that would allow them to consolidate and better leverage their existing knowledge base,” says Shane Caldwell, Oracle Policy Automation specialist at TruePenny People. “That would also take some of the pressure off their staff and allow them to focus on more strategic activities.”

THE OHIO EPA JOURNEY

Ohio EPA had an ambitious six-month timeline. This was a challenge given that complex regulatory requirements had to be built into the tool. That meant involving the right subject matter experts (SMEs) and conducting rigorous testing to ensure the correct information would be provided to users.

“One of the biggest challenges was finding the right people to work with,” says Rick Magni, chief information officer for Ohio EPA. “We are fairly siloed, so just finding the right people was a challenge. We have a lot of experts, but they aren’t all experts in the same thing.”

Once the correct SMEs were identified, TruePenny’s Oracle Policy Automation specialists worked one-on-one with them to develop a series of questions, known as an “interview,” that could be integrated into the agency’s existing website. The team effort continued through the refining and testing phases of the project, allowing agency SMEs to increase their Oracle Policy Automation skill sets.

Working together, Ohio EPA and TruePenny People launched the new compliance and permit wizard within the agency’s six-month window.

A NEW EXPERIENCE FOR OHIO BUSINESSES

Ohio EPA’s new online permitting and compliance wizard reduces agency silos and makes life easier for entrepreneurs in the state. Using the wizard, Ohio business owners can easily determine which permits, registrations, licenses or notifications are required by federal or state EPA regulations. The wizard directs users through a series of questions and uses embedded logic to determine if a permit is required. The dynamic nature of the software determines which questions are applicable based on the previous answers provided, so a hairdresser is not asked questions that apply to a plywood manufacturer, for example.

At the end of the interview process, the user can download a “roadmap” that includes recommendations and information regarding requirements, local contact information and steps to take to begin the permitting process. It also suggests a series of steps businesses can take to comply with environmental regulations.

“There are educational mechanisms within the wizard to confirm people understand what they are using,” says Magni. “For example, one question is ‘Do you use hazardous waste?’ If they reply no, the next question might ask whether they use certain chemicals. On that list could be something like methyl ethyl ketone, which is indeed a



hazardous chemical. In that way we — and they — find out they are indeed using hazardous waste. It adds another layer of security and compliance and reduces our liability.”

To help improve the citizen experience, most references to EPA regulations and jargon have been omitted from the wizard wherever possible. And the system is available 24/7, so Ohio EPA offices don’t need to be open for citizens to access information.

Since its implementation, Ohio EPA’s new permitting and compliance wizard has improved consistency in customer-facing guidance, reduced time and effort for Ohio businesses, and increased Ohio EPA’s staff work capacity.

“If we can get people information directly, it makes the process more efficient and provides a better experience for businesses in the state,” says Magni.

Magni says the wizard will help Ohio EPA increase compliance, reduce liability and improve public safety. The wizard is also serving as a model for future Oracle Policy Automation application development at Ohio EPA. Some applications currently in development include better systems to notify Ohio EPA of a water line break and route that information to the right person day or night, a grants management application, and an application to help Ohio EPA employees monitor fish populations in local rivers — a primary indicator of water quality.

“We have a slew of use cases we’re looking at,” says Magni. “Leveraging Oracle Policy Automation has a lot of potential benefits for many types of state agencies, and the return on investment is there.”

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