



New Custom Applications Advance Productivity

TAJF increases system uptime, improves data entry and access, and end-user experience

The Texas Access to Justice Foundation (TAJF) is the definitive provider of grants for legal aid in Texas. The Foundation distributes funds to 40 organizations statewide that provide free civil legal assistance to more than 100,000 low-income Texans each year in civil matters such as protection from domestic violence and assistance with housing issues.

One source of funding for TAJF grants comes from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTAs). As the administrator of these funds TAJF is tasked with tracking data from nearly 550 banks, 23,000 IOLTA accounts and 75,000 active attorneys throughout Texas. TAJF's systems for managing this data included a custom internal MS-DOS application and classic Active Server Pages (ASP) web application. Created in 1989, these applications had finally reached the end of their usability for TAJF. Faced with unsupportable MS-DOS technology and the impending retirement of the programmer who had created and maintained the applications for the last 17 years, TAJF knew it was time for a significant change.

Implementation

After comparing technology and vendors, TAJF engaged Catapult Systems in a two-phase project to design and implement custom applications to replace their existing internal management desktop application and classic ASP website. In the first phase Catapult worked with TAJF to gather business requirements and develop a complete functional specification and technical design, which they delivered along with a statement of work that met TAJF's timeline and budgetary constraints. In the second phase, Catapult focused on upgrading and migrating TAJF's databases, and building the custom applications to replace their MS-DOS and classic ASP web technology.

To support internal management of attorney compliance and law firm/financial institution information, Catapult built an application utilizing Microsoft ASP .NET 3.5 and Windows Presentation Foundation. This application presented some unique challenges with regard to ensuring ease of use and end-user adoption, as users were accustomed to a MS-DOS interface, and relied on hot-keys and 10-key data entry.

To ensure end-user satisfaction Catapult took a three-pronged approach:

1. A proof of concept was done during the design phase to get TAJF used to the Windows user interface and ensure success of the project.
2. During the design of the application ensuring usability for the TAJF staff became a priority goal. It was important that application functionality replicated the old DOS paradigm (e.g. hot keys) to reduce the amount of change for end users. This permitted individuals to choose which way they wanted to navigate through the application—utilizing either a traditional Windows navigation or the DOS method of keyboard and function key entry—accommodating existing users while providing a more typical navigation capability for new users as TAJF continued to grow and expand.
3. Blending aspects of waterfall and agile development methodologies, Catapult employed an iterative approach to the development process which enabled TAJF to test out portions of the application as they became available. This gave TAJF the opportunity to concentrate on small sections of the application and provide input before it was completed, while familiarizing them with new application functionality before it went live. This process dramatically

“The reporting is the biggest positive change for us. What we can get out of the data that’s put in is so much easier and less time consuming.”

Joyce Lindsey | Associate Director, TAJF

increased user satisfaction while lowering anxiety related to change, driving successful end-user adoption.

The second application Catapult designed and implemented provided attorneys and/or law firms with a convenient way to submit their IOLTA compliance information through a web interface. In the past, attorneys submitted their compliance information either through TAJF’s classic ASP web application or by mail. The web application was difficult to use and didn’t provide support for firms to submit compliance information for their attorneys. It also didn’t integrate with TAJF’s internal systems, requiring duplicative and manual entry of information by TAJF staff.

To combat these issues Catapult created a new application utilizing ASP .NET 3.5 and wizard-style approach, making it much more intuitive and user-friendly. The application was also integrated with TAJF’s desktop application so that submitted data could be reviewed and accepted/rejected before importing it into the internal database, preserving data integrity.

Results

One of the most immediate benefits TAJF experienced was the increased uptime of their system. Before their system would lock up and be down for significant amounts of time – sometimes even days. Now they have a reliable structure that is stable and extensible with current technology that can be easily supported.

System scalability has also impacted productivity within the organization. With the old database TAJF’s programmer had to make brand-new tables and duplicates of their look-up data each year. Now with SQL Server all the data resides in tables that no longer need to be replicated, and can be distinguished by the date and time of each record. TAJF reports that data entry has also become much easier due to a reduction of 40 screens to 15, along with a much more intuitive workflow and layout of data.

Likewise, feedback from people utilizing the external eb application has been very positive. In particular it has been noted how user-friendly the application is, saving both time and aggravation. Law firms can now submit IOLTA data for all of their attorneys online, while on the TAJF side it now only requires one person to maintain compliance.

Perhaps though, the largest benefit TAJF has experienced is the level of visibility and accessibility into their data. In the past TAJF would get questions that would take days to obtain an answer to. Now a simple query gives them an immediate report with accurate data, and compatibility with Outlook ensures they can communicate easily with their constituents. This has also impacted TAJF’s ability to project trends – before it was a manual process to pull specific reports and add them up – now they can do this automatically utilizing queries which export directly to Excel, enabling TAJF to manipulate and present the data easily.



How can we help you?

Contact us at 1-800-528-6248 or info@CatapultSystems.com