

Online Professional License Renewal Suite

Maine Department of Professional and Financial Regulation

Digital Government: Government to Business Category
State of Maine

Executive Summary

Maine has a highly successful and comprehensive online professional licensing suite, allowing online license renewal for 57 licensing boards and over 150 license types, ranging from physicians to cosmetologists to electricians and elevator operators. Maine Department of Professional and Financial Regulation (PFR) oversees 53 licensing boards through the Office of Licensing and Regulation, as well as the semi-autonomous boards of nursing, medicine, and engineers. Through a partnership with InforME, the state of Maine's eGovernment portal, a suite of online services has been developed that provides convenience to users and significant time and cost savings to the agencies. These services allow users to review and update certain license information for renewal as well as to pay required fees using a credit or debit card.

The suite consists of four online professional license renewal services:

- the Office of Licensing and Registration (OLR) service which includes 53 licensing boards and over 150 license types – www.maine.gov/online/pfrrenewal/
- the Board of Nursing service for registered nurses – www.maine.gov/bon/
- the Board of Medicine service for physicians – www.maine.gov/online/doclicensing/
- the Board of Engineers service for engineers – www.maine.gov/professionalengineers/renewal/

The online services allow an individual licensee to log in with identifying information such as license number, name, and PIN, and then view their license information on file. Certain information may be updated online, such as address, phone, and email, and for some license types, additional information is collected such as continuing education credits. After updating their license record, the licensee simply confirms the information and makes a credit card payment to complete the renewal. A confirmation/receipt page is provided to provide immediate confirmation of the successful transaction.

The agencies involved have committed to the online services by changing their business practices, and this commitment has led to remarkable adoption and cost savings for the agencies. Not only have they adjusted their processes to include online renewals, but they have stopped mailing pre-printed paper renewal applications, which have been replaced with reminder letters or postcards encouraging the use of their online services. This shift in business practices has resulted in online service adoption ranging from 55% up to 91% across the services, which has significantly reduced manual processing hours. In addition to the time savings in processing renewals, the agencies are receiving more accurate data and have saved money related to the lowered costs involved in printing and mailing reminders instead of applications.

Description

Prior to July of 2000, all 53 licensing boards under the Office of Licensing and Registration in Maine Department of Professional and Financial Regulation (PFR) were manually processing paper license renewal applications. Paper renewal forms were preprinted with the licensee's information and mailed to the licensed individual prior to their license expiration date. The licensee would then review and make any necessary changes to their application and mail it back to the agency with a check to cover their annual renewal fee. The paper applications were received by the agency, processed, data entered into a database, and then new license certificates were issued and mailed. This process was very lengthy and inefficient. PFR decided it was time to provide an electronic option for their license renewals. The agency worked with the state's eGovernment portal, InforME, to create a web-based renewal service that could interface with their existing database system.

This first application in the Suite was built using Perl scripts that make calls to the PFR database to determine whether the licensee log-in information provided is accurate and eligible for renewal. Eligible licensees are then provided with the data that the agency has on file and have the option of updating certain information through the application interface. Lastly, the user is given a total fee for their renewal and the ability to make a payment using a valid credit/debit card. Payments are handled by the InforME payment engine, which processes credit card charges in real-time. The user received immediate confirmation of a successful transaction.

The second service in the suite, the Maine Board of Engineers online license renewal service, was developed in partnership with InforME and made available in 2003. In 2004, Maine State Board of Nursing partnered with InforME to create an online renewal service for nurses. In 2007, the Board of Medicine partnered with InforME to create the online renewal service for physicians. Because these boards each had their own back-end database systems and different licensing requirements, they were developed as separate online services from the Office of Licensing and Registration service. However, the essential steps for the licensee to complete a transaction are similar and in all cases the web application interacts with an agency database to query, pass, and store transaction data, and processes secure credit card payments for renewal fees.

The Boards of Nursing and Medicine made immediate changes to their business process to drive usage of the online renewal services. They discontinued their practice of mailing paper renewal forms to each licensee, and instead mailed a reminder with the online service URL. Paper forms are provided only upon request by a licensee. This commitment paid off quickly. The nursing license renewal service achieved over 70% adoption in the first few months, and now has 91% adoption. The physician license renewal achieved 87% adoption within its first year of operation.

Development and maintenance of the four online services was provided without the use of appropriated funds, under InforME's "self-funded" model. To recoup the costs involved with developing, hosting and maintaining the services, InforME receives a nominal per-transaction fee for each renewal that is processed through these online applications. These transaction fees are absorbed by the State agencies and not passed on to the user. This funding model allows the agencies to realize immediate cost savings from the online services, as there were no upfront

costs to recover. InforME is managed by Maine Information Network, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of NIC. InforME was created by Maine state legislation to be the Internet gateway to government services and information under a self-funded, no appropriations model.

Significance

The Office of Licensing and Registration (OLR) professional license renewal service was the first to launch, in 2000, followed by a major upgrade in 2005. During the first three years (2000-2003), the agency was not reaping the benefits that an online service should provide. In an effort to increase the adoption for the service, InforME worked with the agency to develop ways to encourage licensees to renew online. By adding the service web address to their website, phone messages and mailers, the agency was able to triple adoption of the online service from 2003-2006. However, this still only brought the average adoption for the 151 license types that were eligible for online renewal up to 9.8%, which equated to approximately 3,820 online renewals annually. In 2007, InforME developed a marketing plan with the agency, and it was determined at that time that the low adoption rates were mostly related to the fact that users were still receiving the pre-printed paper applications being mailed out by the agency. The agency committed to change business practices to increase online renewals. In May 2007 all 53 OLR boards started sending renewal reminders in place of the preprint forms, with paper renewal forms available only by special request, and within two months the average adoption had risen from 9.8% to 68.5%. Online renewals continued to increase throughout the subsequent year, with many licensing boards now achieving 75-90% adoption. The agency is now realizing significant efficiencies from the online license renewal service, with fewer staff hours required to manually input data and process payment information.

In 2003, the Maine Board of Licensure for Engineers launched online license renewal. In its first year, the service adoption was 25%, but by the third renewal cycle (renewals are every two years), adoption reached 50%. This agency has only one full time staff member, so the time savings due to online renewals are a life saver.

In 2005, the Maine State Board of Nursing hit the ground running with an adoption of over 70% in the first few months that their service was live. This service currently has an adoption rate of 91%. Again, this agency has only a few staff members, so the time savings from online renewals has been essential to the agency's ability to operate effectively.

Similarly, the Maine Board of Medicine online physician license renewal service, launched in 2007, achieved an adoption rate of 87% in its first year.

Agency commitment has been vital in creating the efficiencies provided by the professional licensing services. All four agencies are fully committed to the online renewal services and continue to find ways to increase online renewals and to offer more license types through these services. The Board of Medicine is currently working with InforME to add physician assistant renewals online, and the Office of Licensing and Registration is planning to add the dental board as well as insurance license types and others within the next year. With the continued budget

and staffing cuts that the State of Maine is experiencing, these online services will become even more important to the ability of these agencies to serve their constituents.

Benefits

Maine's online license renewal services are extremely successful, due to the agencies' commitment and the ease of use of the services. In 2007: 22,631 renewals were completed online through the Office of Licensing and Registration, along with 9,180 online renewals through the Board of Nursing, 2,187 online renewals through the Board of Engineers, and 406 through the Board of Medicine, for a total of 34,404 online professional license renewals in the Suite. At 5 minutes of manual processing time per license, that translates into almost 2,867 staff hours saved. This significant reduction in staff hours required for the manual processing has allowed all four agencies to devote more time to customer service and other agency tasks, which is critical in the current budget climate and understaffed agencies.

For the licensees, the Professional Licensing Suite has made renewing licenses a simple and convenient process that users rave about. Nearly round the clock availability allows users to renew in the comfort of their home or office at a time that is convenient for them, and those who procrastinate can still get their renewals completed on time at the last minute. Online renewal offers payment by credit card, which most licensees prefer over paper check. Having online renewal also reduces the number of late renewals and lapsed licenses, which ultimately benefits both the licensees and the state of Maine. Citizen-centric design and architecture were carefully implemented throughout development for each service, and changes have been made over time based on user feedback. The services were developed in compliance with state of Maine Web Standards and use a standard Maine.gov online services design, which is based on user interface best practices.

In addition, the professional license renewal suite assists licensees with disabilities. The online services offers the ability for individuals to complete their renewal online at a time that is convenient for them, without travel to a government office or dealing with a paper form that may require assistance. The online services are fully compliant with the State of Maine Web Accessibility Policy and federal standards for accessibility, allowing disabled individuals to renew their licenses online independently. The services are compatible with screen-reader technologies and other assistive devices for the visual and motor impaired.