

Title of Nomination: Registered Principal Search
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NASCIO 2003 Recognition Awards Entry
Discovering Montana's Registered Principal Search
Executive Summary

Description of project

DiscoveringMontana.com in conjunction with the Montana Secretary of State's Office launched the Registered Principal Search (RPS), app.discoveringmontana.com/rps, on October 22, 2002. RPS is one of the first of its kind in the nation and is the first time ever in Montana that businesses and citizens have the ability to cross match individuals' names with business entities.

The Registered Principal Search (RPS) is two services in one.

- The user may research information on any Montana business registered with the Secretary of State's office and may research, by name, any officer, director, or manager to see all affiliations. This unique "cross match" search is a powerful tool for businesses.
- The service also allows the user to produce Certificates of Existence and Certificates of Authorization for a business in real time. Certificates of Fact also can be ordered online at a business's convenience, saving valuable time.

Significance to the improvement of the operation of government

Since launching RPS, the Business Services Division of the Secretary of State's office has seen a significant decrease in phone calls and certificate requests. Over hundreds of users are now searching company officer information online, and 50% of certificate requests are now also handled over the Internet. The Secretary of State's Office has also benefited from a 1/3 reduction in calls per month to the division.

Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state

Before the release of the Registered Principal Search (RPS), the ability to search on an individual name for information was nonexistent. If you were an individual associated with numerous companies, the Montana Secretary of State's Office could not access that information for you without knowing each business entity name and researching each one separately. Businesses needing access to check on director information would have to call or request in writing. This was very time intensive for both businesses and the state.

RPS has changed the way companies do business. In a matter of seconds, businesses have access to public information that was never available to them before. Within minutes, they can download legal certificates that they used to have to wait weeks for. Businesses now have access to their government 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Return on investment

Accesses to the RPS service are being monitored daily. Over 40,00 hits are received a month and continues to increase. For security, RPS users must be registered, and so customers are accounted for monthly. Customer usage on paid services has increased by 187% since the service's inception. Hundreds of users are enjoying the service of RPS.

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1. Description of project, including length of time in operation.

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The Registered Principal Search (RPS) is two services in one.

- The user may research information on any Montana business registered with the Secretary of State's office and may research, by name, any officer, director, or manager to see all affiliations. This unique "cross match" search is a powerful tool for businesses.
- The service also allows the user to produce Certificates of Existence and Certificates of Authorization for a business in real time. Certificates of Fact also can be ordered online at a business's convenience, saving valuable time.

The user is able to enter the system once they become a Registered User of Discovering Montana.

The key challenges in the development of the Registered Principal Search were thinking of ways to expand the search options of the database and fixing bad data. These challenges brought forth many obstacles, yet allowed developers and other staff the chance to brainstorm creative methods of searching and displaying public data.

Files were cleaned up and repaired. Methods were put in place in order for searches to bring back all possible results giving the user the most complete information. New and creative coding was used to expand search capabilities.

By not paying development costs for the service, the Secretary of State's office saved \$101,620. Maintenance and enhancements to the service are also provided with no charge. Small convenience fees are assessed for searches on individual names, printed certificates, and company officer information.

The Registered Principal Search was developed and maintained without the use of tax dollars or a general fund appropriation. This is possible through a public/private alliance between the state of Montana and DiscoveringMontana.com.

Our privacy, security and accessibility policies are clearly published on the website.

RPS runs on the our production web server, with the following specifications:

IBM ASCII Monitor/Console (shared between the 4 AIX boxes)

IBM p640 Web Server (B80)
375MHz POWER3-II
1GB RAM
2 - 18.2GB SCSI drives - mirrored
AIX 4.3.3 Operating System
IBM_HTTP_Server/1.3.12 Apache/1.3.12 (Unix)
Backup performed daily via Harbor

2. Significance to the improvement of the operation of government.

Before RPS was launched, information on the status of Montana businesses and corporations was available only by telephone, or by stopping by the Secretary of State's office in the Capitol city of Helena. Certificates could be ordered by phone, but could take up to ten days to be delivered to the requestor by mail. Users needing a certificate can print one from their desks in approximately two minutes. Both citizens and businesses benefit from the opportunity to access this information after traditional business hours and on weekends.

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3. Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state.

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As Secretary of State Bob Brown travels throughout rural Montana, small-town bankers, lawyers, and business people stop him to congratulate him for implementing the service. In a state where communities are often hundreds of miles apart, the ability to do business via the Internet is invaluable.

Some comments from customers:

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” raved Sol Lovas, a Billings attorney. “As an attorney who does a lot of incorporations, LLCs and partnerships, I will no longer need to tie my personnel and yours up on a long-distance call just to check on the availability of a business name!”

“This site will nearly eliminate the sometimes lengthy process of getting critical business entity information needed to issue workers’ compensation policies for our insurance agency business partners,” said Jim McCormick, market development leader for the Montana State Fund.

4. Return on investment, short-term payback (include summary calculations). Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit.

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