



**Mississippi Department of
Information Technology Services**



Mississippi State Board of Architecture Online Licensing Suite

**Category:
Digital Government: Government to Citizen**

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Nomination Submitted by:

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Executive Summary

In 2015 the Mississippi State Board of Architecture (MSBOA) sought a way to improve their outdated online application process and increase the level of involvement in which they engage citizens. Partnering with Mississippi's eGovernment provider, Mississippi Interactive (MSI), MSBOA launched a full suite of 11 mobile responsive online applications (https://www.ms.gov/msboa/application_suite/Applications/Index) aimed at placing a wealth of information and services right at user's fingertips. The suite launch made MSBOA one of the only Mississippi government entities where all business can be conducted electronically.

To streamline efficiency, the application suite categorizes online services across the three professions managed by MSBOA: Architects, Landscape Architects and Interior Designers. Constituents interested in pursuing careers in the offered fields can expedite the application process by accessing experience and degree requirements with just one click, allowing them to quickly identify accredited programs and link directly to MSBOA resources. Through the reorganization and consolidation of content, users can immediately complete renewals, reinstatements, applications and purchase rosters. The improved user interface features an intuitive navigation pane providing users quick access to a multitude of MSBOA features including electronic personal information updates, certificates of standing requests, and registration verifications. The launch of the application suite replaced outdated cumbersome processes with time-saving online solutions, resulting in 100% online adoption from day one for all disciplines.

The self-funded suite of applications was developed, is hosted and maintained by Mississippi Interactive (MSI) at no cost to MSBOA. The self-funded development has saved MSBOA over \$65,000 in development, technical, project management, and marketing resources.

Concept

Prior to the redesign of the application suite, The Mississippi State Board of Architecture (MSBOA) utilized an online application for license renewals that was close to fifteen years old. With an office staff of two employees, the management of both paper and online processes for licensees and applicants along with general inquiries from students and consumers had become cumbersome and a user-friendly system, for both licensees and MSBOA employees, was essential. After evaluating their existing services, MSBOA recognized the need for a current, citizen-focused approach to educate present and future users in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Interior Design while also making electronic interactions with the Board quick and efficient. The legacy system, supported under a traditional time and materials funding model, became costly for MSBOA to maintain given the age of the system and updates required.

MSBOA began discussions and requirements gathering with Mississippi Interactive (MSI), the State of Mississippi's eGovernment partner, in June 2014 with a goal of having their entire online portfolio live by October 2015. MSI designated resources including .net developers, creative designers, quality assurance and marketing to execute the project rewrite, while an assigned project manager lead the project's design, development, implementation and launch, along with simultaneously overseeing coordination between the Board of Architecture, MSI and the Board's licensing back-end vendor.

The culmination of these discussions resulted in an application suite that provides a high level of comprehensive, easily navigated functionality that guides users to information quickly and easily and allows MSBOA to serve their clients more efficiently through new features such as:

- License Eligibility Wizard: By entering license number, last name and date of birth, the online system communicates with MSBOA's third party licensing system to display only the online services available to the user at that time, eliminating the guess work out of whether to renew or reinstate a license.
- Pre-populated Data Fields: Personal Information is pre-populated, but editable, for existing licensees.
- Mobile Optimization: To seamlessly integrate the web-based application with the mobile user population, the online application suite was responsively designed to fit any mobile or tablet device.

Additionally, MSBOA processes received enhanced automation through online submission and audit selection for Continuing Education reporting in conjunction with a shortened purchase process including wizard guidance and pre-populated fields. The implementation of response design significantly increases usability by increasing the platforms and times when users can access profile information and purchase licenses and also follows all the accessibility standards set by Section 508 and W3C Level One guidelines.

Furthermore, the application suite utilizes a secure web service between the database vendor and MSI to transfer personal licensee information between MSBOA's back end system and the online applications. For secure transfer of sensitive payment information, an https connection is used to transfer all payment data to the State of Mississippi's official payment engine (TPE), a fully-hosted, web-based, enterprise-class payment processor specifically designed for use by state government. TPE is a Statement on Auditing Standards (SAS) 70 Type II-certified solution that is fully compliant with federal, state, local and industry standards—including Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) and Payment Application Data Security Standard (PA-DSS).

By utilizing the State eGovernment program and MSI's self-funded model for the rewrite of the system, the MSBOA realized an initial cost avoidance of over \$65,000 and also was able to utilize the state's award-winning ms.gov portal and social media outreach to create awareness for the new licensing suite, and to increase adoption after the services were launched for citizen use. Additionally, a press release was issued to highlight the online licensing services offered by the Board of Architecture.

Significance

The MSBOA Application Suite replaced an existing online renewal system launched in 2001. The updated Application Suite brought 11 services online into one central location while providing a modern and mobile-optimized user interface with a refreshed look where licensees and applicants can now conduct transactions with MSBOA online and on-the-go. The suite of services and subsequent business process enhancements included:

- Mobile optimization of the online application to seamlessly integrate license sales with the mobile applications and be accessible from any mobile device
- Addition of intuitive requests for information based on user's responses
- Reconfiguration of the real-time web service connection with MSBOA's back end license vendor
- Rebranding of the online user interface to seamlessly match MSBOA's recent website redesign
- Development at no cost to MSBOA
- Integration of Licensee and Certificate holder profile updating functionality
- Implementation of Application regeneration for ease of reporting tasks of MSBOA's staff
- Improvement to Continuing Education course calculations for late renewal license purchases and license reinstatement applicants

With over 2,000 licensees, the fluidity of the mobile-optimized site and application suite allows users to effortlessly access information and securely complete online transactions from any platform including tablets and mobile phones delivering the ease of use to all MSBOA constituents.

There are currently 2,015 licensees and/or certificate holders who are required to maintain active licensure or certification through bi-annual renewals, with an additional 100+ new applicants applying for licensure annually. With the launch of the application suite, MSBOA realized 100% electronic adoption from day one for all disciplines under the Board's jurisdiction.

Impact

Since its launch in August 2015, the revamped system has created significant operational efficiencies for MSBOA staff through the removal of manual methods, has a 100% online licensee adoption, and has already processed nearly \$700,000 in online transactions in eight months. In October 2015 alone, the refreshed application suite saw close to 17,000 page views, an almost 300% increase from the previous month. Additionally, among the cumulative 46,000 page views, the application suite maintains an almost even balance of new users at 48.6% versus returning users at 51.4%.

After the launch of the application suite, MSBOA observed a significant decrease in customer calls, due in part to the streamlined service. Additionally, through the use of a self-funded pricing model, the Board benefits due to significant decreases in ongoing maintenance costs.

The MSI team dedicated design resources for Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), development team members built the application, and the Project Manager worked daily with MSBOA to facilitate testing and updates to the suite of applications prior to launch. MSI provided marketing through the ms.gov social media channels, and promoted the service online on the award-winning ms.gov portal. The project in total resulted in 500+ resource hours saved by the Board. Since the launch of the services MSBOA has realized a total cost avoidance of over \$65,000.

The overall benefit of this project is leveraging the use of technology to impact citizens by offering an online solution that places government at the fingertips of its users, while at the same time providing a robust solution to MSBOA that didn't require the use of state appropriated funds. This eGovernment strategy, supported by Mississippi's eGovernment program, promotes the efficient delivery of state government and helps to drive cost savings for MSBOA. By utilizing the public-private partnership between the State of Mississippi and Mississippi Interactive (MSI), the Mississippi State Board of Architecture (MSBOA) was developed, tested, launched, hosted, and is maintained at no cost to MSBOA.