Oregon License Directory

licenseinfo.oregon.gov

Oregon Secretary of State

Category: **Digital Government: Government to Business**

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Sponsor

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Executive Summary

The Oregon License Directory (licenseinfo.oregon.gov) was developed in response to House Bill 2643, mandating that all state and local government agencies record licenses impacting small businesses and update those license details annually.

The Oregon License Directory transformed a 12-year-old system into a modern, mobile-first solution that's accessible and usable for all Oregonians on any device. The administrative functionality increases the efficiency of agency staff supporting the system, and improves the accuracy of all the data. The system enables authorized representatives of state and local government entities to log in and directly update their licensing data, after being prompted by automated email notifications.

The Oregon License Directory:

- Simplified online search functionality for public look-up of state and local business licenses, permits, and registrations.

- Reduced time, effort, and cost for Secretary of State support staff.

- Improved accuracy of data.

- Drastically improved security and disaster recovery capabilities.

- Automated reminder notifications to government entities for annual updates.

- Varied administrative access roles, providing Secretary of State staff with oversight, and state and local government agencies with updates to their own license data. If an individual supports several small boards for example, they may be granted permission to update multiple entities' licensing data with one login.

- Improved the running of flexible reports by Secretary of State staff that are used to gauge usage and progress of annual license updates.

- Enhanced efficiency is provided through 250 state and local government entities managing individual unique logins, and directly updating license data annually.

The License Directory was incorporated into the existing Oregon Business Xpress one-stop business portal, increasing the value of the existing portal while tying together resources for productive government and business interactions.

Project Narrative

Concept

Background: The Oregon License Directory is the official State of Oregon online application (app) that provides a single information source for over 1,482 Oregon licenses, certifications, permits, and registrations (referred to as licenses). Information on all known state licenses is available using this app, as well as links to license holder lookups (when available), federal license summary information, and website links.

The License Directory began in 2003 to provide the public with information on rules and regulations for starting a business, and information for specific business types. The application was hosted by the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) in a Cold Fusion database.

In December 2005, cities, counties, and regional jurisdictions began entering license information. Adding these additional licenses took several years. Many jurisdictions did not participate. Given the manual process of information gathering and updating, the information available to the public was often out of date, incorrect, or missing. The original engineers of the system had retired and there was no one on staff with the legacy knowledge needed to upgrade the aging system.

In 2010, the Secretary of State (SoS) took over the system from DCBS and began developing plans to upgrade and modernize the database, while merging functionality with the Secretary's own Business Wizard application.

Security, stability, and disaster recovery were increasingly becoming concerns for the Secretary of State, as the license service was supported in house.

In 2013, House Bill 2643 mandated that all state and local government agencies provide updates annually to licenses impacting small businesses. This mandate required a way to both receive this information and track compliance, neither of which the existing License Directory could provide. This legislative mandate provided the Secretary of State with the opportunity to pursue the modernization of a 12-year-old system.

Selection Process: The Secretary of State elected to utilize the State of Oregon's enterprise E-Government Program to help develop and implement the new system, working closely through a public-private partnership, in which the private partner had successfully delivered a similar solution for another state. The E-Government Program also provides security safeguards in that their entire infrastructure and development processes undergo an annual independent security audit.

Costs: This project included one staff project manager and staff subject matter experts. The system was developed utilizing an innovative annual software subscription fee, which helped protect the State of Oregon from traditional risky time and materials-based approaches. The ongoing annual software subscription fee is currently $57,600.

Project Management and Oversight: The Secretary of State and NIC project managers met weekly and provided weekly project updates to E-Government Program management, and quarterly updates to the Oregon Electronic Portal Advisory Board.

Accessibility: Throughout development, accessibility was considered and ensured by conducting iterative accessibility testing and validation in production. The License Directory supports both keyboard and screen reader usage across all commonly used versions of Web browsers.

Communications: The new system was promoted through email announcements to state and local representatives and through featured content on the Oregon.gov and Business Xpress website portals.

Business Xpress: The License Directory is housed on the Business Xpress portal, the state's one-stop-shop for Oregon businesses. It is the first phase of a two-phase effort to update the Secretary of State Business directory services. The second phase, a modernized "business wizard" app will launch in 2017 and continue to leverage the phase one License Directory data, by offering an interactive tool that describes all the requirements for hundreds of business types.

<u>Significance</u>

The Oregon License Directory drastically improved services provided to 250 state and local government agencies, and an average of 15,000 unique public visitors monthly. The app helps entrepreneurs to cut through red tape by providing an easy-to-use detailed directory of all 1,482 state and local permits, registrations, and licenses.

A business owner or employee doesn't need to know Oregon state agency names or structures to find licensing information, thereby reducing confusion and time spent navigating multiple state and local government websites.

The License Directory provides the most modern, flexible, user-friendly, mobile-first state and local government search in the nation. By focusing on the user experience and testing concepts with Oregonians, the project team was able to deliver a useful and usable solution that renders seamlessly on any device.

The License Directory meets the following 2017 NASCIO priorities:

Security and Risk Management: By building the system through the State of Oregon Chief Information Officer's E-Government Program, this initiative leverages an enterprise service provider through a public-private partnership and statewide resources.

Consolidation/Optimization: This system consolidates and digitizes valuable data that enables the agency to operate more efficiently and makes more accurate data instantly accessible to the public.

Legacy Modernization: Modernizing the outdated legacy system provides business process improvements, by streamlining maintenance and ensuring the longevity of this important service. The system hosting vendor also provides disaster recovery with geographically separate data centers and fail-over capability.

Impact

The differences in agency maintenance and public interaction before and after the License Directory modernization project are substantial.

Public Usability: The License Directory exists to provide a single resource for all permits, registrations, and licenses required by state and local governments in the state of Oregon. The new user interface provides a streamlined, search-centric screen that instills confidence in the end user.

Previously, visitors to the app were overwhelmed by a cluttered interface with lots of information that proved to be too cluttered and confusing for visitors. The new interface provides a familiar look and feel that leverages "fuzzy logic" to help authenticated users find their desired license type, even with misspellings or alternative naming conventions.

By removing the burden from the public to understand government agencies' structures and naming conventions, the new License Directory enables visitors to quickly find licensing information from any state or local government entity in a single place using their own search terms.

Mobile: The License Directory is now a responsive design with a mobile-first approach to content, providing ease of use to the rapidly growing mobile user base. Since the app was launched on July 20, 2015, over 25 percent of License Directory visitors access the site using a mobile or tablet device, an increase of 11 percent as of March 4th, 2016.

Efficiency: With an easy-to-use administrative interface, Secretary of State staff can manage all Oregon State and Local government agency staff accounts, licenses, and notifications. Automated notifications remind agency representatives when annual updates are due, reducing SoS staff oversight.

Reports provide summary information of updates made, allowing SoS staff to target ad hoc communications as needed. State and local government representatives may manage single or multiple agencies and authenticated users. So, as staff turnover occurs, agencies are enabled to keep their records updated independently.

Accuracy: The modernized License Directory provides a mechanism for proactive updating and data maintenance. Previously, updates occurred when someone from the public or an agency noticed that information was out-of-date. The new system provides automated proactive communications for required annual updates. As a result, the License Directory has seen a 34 percent increase in the number of licenses reported by state and local agencies.

The Secretary of State provides the Oregon Employment Department economists licensing data on a regular basis. Therefore, with this system being more up to date, it also offers downstream benefits to economists in their reporting accuracy.

Summary

In Oregon, small business is big business: 98 percent of Oregon businesses employ 100 or fewer employees. The improved License Directory is where Oregon entrepreneurs go to see if there are any state, county, or city licensing requirements for their type of business.

With ease of use being a key feature, the License Directly app is promoted using a Sasquatch theme – *so easy a Sasquatch can do it*.

Find State Licensing Information

Search all Oregon business licenses, permits and registrations - so easy, a Sasquatch can do it.