

Alfresco Case Study: Islington Council

Alfresco as a corporate solution

Located adjacent to the City of London's financial district, Islington is the second smallest London borough, at just under six square miles. Yet more than 179,000 people live and work there. The council employs approximately 4,000 staff and has a strong information management function. A key driver for choosing Alfresco was to help the Council respond to the UK's Freedom of Information Act, which requires local authorities to meet information requests from the public within 20 days. The Council had already invested in scanning and case management systems and Alfresco was introduced to complement these processes by managing unstructured data and documents on shared drives, the intranet and other team areas.

Usability and the joy of CIFS

Alfresco was part of a knowledge management strategy that placed an emphasis on usability and understanding the 'document journey'. In short, if the system wasn't going to be part of the way people already worked, it wasn't going to be used. Islington therefore needed something that was easy to adopt, robust and able to scale. Alfresco has the unique ability to present itself as a shared drive (with the Common Interface File Storage or CIFS) without the overhead of desktop client installation. This means that staff can continue to store documents on the system in a way they are accustomed to – they simply have a new network drive, which is a technology they're used to. This also worked remotely (through Citrix) which was another important factor not possible with alternative document management solutions.

“When measuring the candidate products against our requirements, Alfresco out-performed alternative ECM software in the areas of easy folder use, “remote working” via a shared drive, open technology for integration and minimal work-force disruption.”

Jeremy Tuck, CIO, Technology Solutions Group, Islington Council

Uniting knowledge and records management through an intranet

By focusing on usability Alfresco replaced the intranet, but also introduced collaborative team spaces and a robust records library. These three concepts have been tied together in a way that is seamless to the user. It also forces the user to understand that once a document has been collaborated on, it needs to be finalized into the records library and only then can it appear on the intranet. This overhead has improved information management. As a sweetener for users, blog type editing was developed enabling quick WYSIWYG editing. Through integrating with Active Directory, any user can easily edit a page they're entitled to edit at the click of a button. This simple facility has thrilled users and made take up and roll out easy.

Meeting Local Government records management requirements

Alfresco was introduced as part of a drive to establish a corporate Electronic Document Records Management (EDRM) and the initial testing of Alfresco was based on the National Archives requirements for records management systems. At the time, Alfresco already had a module based on the US DOD 5015.2 standard. However, as a UK Local Authority, Islington wanted to implement a system that could deploy a functional taxonomy for future proofing content beyond organizational changes and specifically wanted to implement the



Local Government Classification Scheme (a UK standard that provides retention guidance for local authority records). Islington developed a Records Management configuration layer to meet these specific needs, but has kept this development open enough to cater any functional taxonomy.

“Islington developed the Records Management configuration layer ... to cater for any functional taxonomy.”

This means that any other organization could deploy this configuration layer, even with a completely different records management category list. At the time (2006) the Moreq2 standard did not exist and currently the Council are working with partners to seek testing against this and other new standards as they arise.

Why Alfresco was Chosen

Islington initiated a detailed evaluation of short-listed applications. During the evaluation process, considerable emphasis was placed on usability and minimal disruption to the way in which staff worked. CIFS, explained above, was important. Alfresco was the only product that could provide a virtual shared drive that looks and feels like Microsoft Windows Explorer folders without the need for its own Windows client application.

Open technology was a key area, since it is one field where local authorities are typically charged considerably for proprietary APIs and hidden integration costs. As part of the evaluation process, Islington carried out successful benchmark scalability, resilience/high availability testing and User and Group management via Active Directory with Alfresco. The other obvious factor was cost, initial and ongoing.

“Only with an open source solution was it possible to roll out the system to 4,000 users from day one, develop the necessary specific local authority records management tools and set in motion a model that had a solid, but cost-effective support and maintenance model.”

Speed of Implementation & Roll-Out

The implementation of Alfresco from start to finish took just four months. This incorporates the content migration, establishing the records library, intranet pages, and setting up of initial team spaces for collaboration. This included migrating the intranet and developing ‘blog’ type editing for quick and easy editing of content.

Benefits of using Alfresco

The Islington team identified the following benefits from their implementation of Alfresco:

- Open source enables easy and cost-effective application development to add further functionality to the solution;
- Cost by comparison with proprietary solutions;
- Secure EDRM with full audit trail; and,
- Scaled out to include Intranet content management and support scanning tool.



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