

Online Passport Renewal Service (ORS)

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Organisation: New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs (DIA)

Country: New Zealand

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time: 2 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

New Zealand's Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) has transformed its Passports business by implementing a smarter IT system (KIWI) that uses our existing customer biometrics and data more effectively, enabling us to better focus staff resources. As a cornerstone of our business transformation, DIA delivered the world's first entirely online adult passport renewal service (ORS). There is no offline component to this service, and no physical documentation is required to accompany the application – all details are validated against existing DIA passport and life event data.

The service enables customers to lodge their application at their convenience, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This is of particular value to those New Zealanders who renew their passport from overseas.

The online system is easy to use, saves the customer time by simplifying the process, and removes the need to send physical application forms. We also implemented an online photo checking tool to help customers and photographers know if their photo is acceptable prior to applying.

Previously, staff spent most of their time entering and manually validating data. The shift to online applications, along with 128 automated checks performed by the 'smart' system, means staff can now focus on making decisions and assisting customers.

In a significant paradigm shift, we are using our investment in biometric facial recognition technology not just to enhance security, but also to increase productivity by matching applicants to their previous passport image. As a result of automated checking of biometrics and data, many renewal applications require minimal human intervention before a passport is ready to be issued.

These innovations have delivered a cheaper and easier service for the customer. We have also significantly improved the efficiency of the passport process, which has enabled us to cope with nearly double the application volume.

Why the innovation was developed

- Approximately 70% of the New Zealand population holds a passport, with around 2.9 million valid passports in circulation. Of the 600,000 - 660,000 new passports issued in 2014, 65% were renewals. New Zealand has a highly dispersed population with an estimated 1 million citizens living overseas.
 - These factors, combined with the change from 10 year to 5 year passports, meant that DIA faced rising numbers of applications - with an increasing percentage from overseas. DIA was determined to meet this challenge, and innovate to provide a more efficient service for its customers without increasing the number of processing staff.
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Objectives

Enhance public trust, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction

- DIA was facing increasing passport demand as well as the need to replace its aging IT system. The objectives of the project were to:
 - Improve the application experience of the Department's customers and staff.
 - Meet the progressive increase in passport application volumes (an 80% increase from 2005 to 2016) with little to no increase in staff.
 - Improve the security of the New Zealand passport and the integrity of the issuance processes.
 - Develop an innovative IT system that would meet present needs and be flexible enough to adapt to meet future needs.
 - Fully utilise our investment in biometrics by using facial recognition to improve productivity as well as security.
 - Take full advantage of one of our most valuable DIA assets by using automated checks against our identity data to streamline processes.
 - Create a paperless office and increase flexibility by shifting the work to the most appropriate resource (i.e. a global work pool across multiple offices).
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Main beneficiaries

General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- All eligible adult passport holders including an estimated 1 million New Zealanders living overseas can renew online
 - The smart system means DIA has more consistent application of identity checks and operational policy.
 - Customers have saved over \$30,000,000 due to reduced application fees.
 - 56% of online applications have been approved automatically with minimal human intervention allowing staff to focus their attention elsewhere
 - New Zealanders have a high integrity document and system, and passport fraud is extremely low.
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Existing similar practices

Partial online processes

In other countries' public administrations
Other passport issuing authorities

We are aware that some countries have an online component as part of their service – for example, submitting the application form online with the need to confirm their identity at a face-to-face appointment (i.e. not a fully online service).

Results

Efficiency

- This innovation has delivered a cheaper and easier service for the customer, and significantly improved the efficiency of the passport process.
 - The changes have also enabled DIA to cope with a steady increase in passport volumes – a result of the legislative change to 5-year validity in 2005. We are now producing nearly double the volume of passports, and we did so without increasing staff numbers.
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Effectiveness

- The Department investigated new ways to deliver its services and use biometric facial recognition technology to improve productivity as well as integrity.
 - We now use a smart and innovative computer system to make decisions based on simple data matching. This means that our Passport Officers are using their skills to make decisions about more complex matters. This approach, which targets more effective use of our human resource, ultimately provides better service and demonstrates another significant and creative shift in thinking.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- Customers can use this service at their convenience from home, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Responsiveness:

- On average, 45% of eligible applicants are now applying online, and we are generally issuing a passport within three working days

Reliability:

- Automated and consistent checking and biometric photo matching have improved the integrity of the issuance process and help prevent fraud.
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User satisfaction

- In our recent customer experience survey, respondents indicated 96% satisfaction with the online service channel.
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Other improvements

Development

Design

The concept grew from a management decision to research the value of facial recognition in 2000. Following initial testing on our image set, the management team made a decision in 2005 to use facial recognition as the cornerstone for an automated approach to passport application processing.

The online passport renewal service and new KIWI passport system were developed by the Service and System Transformation Group in conjunction with the Service Delivery and Operations Group in DIA. The programme consulted widely with users, other business groups, external agencies and the public.

Design time: 1 year(s) 2 month(s)

Testing

- Significant user testing and then piloted (this included the involvement of 176 staff and other government department staff) to ensure that the system was as easy as possible to use.

Testing time: 4 month(s)

Implementation

Tools used:

- Programme Management MethodologySolution Delivery Life Cycle (SDLC).

Resources used:

- 8 full time DIA staff plus vendor resources were used on the project. Subject matter experts from within the business also contributed significantly.
- Online and automation were part of a much larger programme of system development, and therefore the exact fiscal breakdown of these components is not available.

Implementation time: 3 month(s)

Diffusion

- DIA was able to offer this service because of a significant change in thinking and by adopting new technology and then using that technology in an innovative way.
- The ORS has given us a platform from which to extend the service to incorporate more customers. We can now approach the challenges of different application types, with success and experience 'under our belt.'
- We are actively planning to broaden the online service to incorporate wider customer groups (e.g. child renewals, adult first time applicants), using what we have learnt from our experiences with online adult renewals.

Diffusion time: 2.5 month(s)

Challenges and solutions

- Photographers being able to provide an electronic photo – we worked closely alongside the major photography guilds and photo taker groups providing ongoing communication and new requirements ensuring they were ready for implementation. This included face-to-face meetings and presentations.
- Uploading the photo – getting the correct balance of parameters to meet ICAO standards and balancing this with what was achievable by the photo takers as this was uncharted territory. The solution was to simulate in-house a large sample of photos to find an acceptable balance so that there would not be a high rejection rate. This was further assisted by the introduction of online photo checking software.

Lessons Learned

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- We learned that uploading the photo towards the end of the online application process did not fully cater for the needs of customers.
 - We needed to have a service that checked photos online before the applicant began the process, so that they could feel completely confident prior to starting the application.
 - We listened to customers, and implemented an online photo checker. This service also helped photo-takers to improve image quality. The online photo checker has already delivered a 15% improvement on 'right first-time' image uploads.
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Conditions for success

- DIA changed its business model, adopted new technology and then used that technology in an innovative way. It reflected what our customers wanted – ORS removed some of the pain points identified by our customers and allowed them to apply when they want, where they want.
 - The programme was well resourced - critical to the success was the embedding of Departmental staff in the project who are fully involved in the day to day process of issuing passports.
 - DIA has quality information at its disposal, and can perform efficient and effective validation against source records (including death matches).
 - DIA has a person-centric database which links all the names available to an identity back to a single point.
 - Quality photographic images going back to 1992 were available, and DIA has cleansed its image database through a comprehensive many to many matching program, removing duplicate records and multiple/fraudulent identities. This means online renewals can use a 1:1 facial recognition match. New Zealand Passports experiences extremely low levels of fraud.
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Other information

DIA's use of facial recognition as a tool to improve productivity is an example of an innovative approach to the use of technology. Other countries use facial recognition software solely as a forensic tool to prevent fraud by matching all applicants' photos against all photos in their database. DIA saw the potential to use biometric matching to facilitate applications, by identifying that the applicant is indeed the person we already know from our existing data. This paradigm shift offers a far better return on investment, by utilising technologies in multiple areas, for multiple purposes.