

## Municipal Management Software

***Better Practices. Better Technology. Better Government.***

### **Introduction**

**M**ost municipalities and utility authorities recognize the increasingly important role that their IT infrastructure plays in their ability to deliver services and properly manage their business operations. Some municipalities have been quick to adopt new technology, while others have been slow to embrace any automation tools. Regardless of how far down the technology road a municipality has traveled, they now generally find themselves in one of two situations:

**1. Multi-vendor software environment: separate, disparate software for each department.**

*Advantage: Specific software can be purchased for automating and managing various aspects of the organization based on needs and as budgets allow over time.*

*Disadvantage: Using and maintaining multiple software packages purchased from different vendors that were not designed to work together is inherently inefficient.*

**2. Enterprise software: a single, centralized software solution deployed fully throughout the organization encompassing virtually all aspects of the organization.**

*Advantage: Provides a seamless, shared resource for the entire organization.*

*Disadvantage: Expensive to purchase and maintain.*

Finally, there is another breed of software combining the advantages of both with neither of the disadvantages. Thought leadership from firms, some of whom have considerable experience with the inner workings of municipal operations, has recently combined with advances in computer software, giving birth to a class of software termed Municipal Management Software. This software is powerful, easy to use and modular in design.

Table 1 shows the advantages of Municipal Management Software compared to traditional enterprise software and standalone software packages.

**Table 1 – Municipal Management Software: *The Best of Both Worlds and then some!***



	Traditional Enterprise	Multi-Vendor, Standalone	Municipal Management
Plus	Comprehensive solution for entire organization; highly functional	Relatively inexpensive for a department to purchase its own solution	Comprehensive; highly functional; inexpensive for each department and cost-effective and efficient for the entire organization
Minus	Very Expensive	Limited enterprise functionality; costly, inefficient solution for the organization as a whole	

**The Need**

Municipal Management Software provides a long term platform for growth. Municipalities and authorities can develop a phased approach to implementation based on budget and departmental needs because the systems are highly modular. Over time, the result is a comprehensive, centralized resource for all users.

One of the hidden values of these products is how easy they make it to find what you are looking for. No more trips to the file cabinets. No need to walk down the hall to ask someone. There are search capabilities that allow workers to find the exact information they need quickly and accurately. It is simple to find the status of an item or request for service. Plus there are built in reminders and notifications, eliminating the all too common black holes and stovepipes.

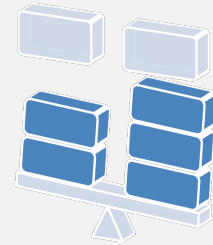
As the diagram below illustrates, local governments and authorities have a third choice when it comes to automating business processes, managing their assets and work flow. Because Municipal Management Software is web-based, authorized users can access the system remotely through a secure interface at any time, 24/7.

## A Closer Look at Municipal Software Types

### Multi-vendor software environment

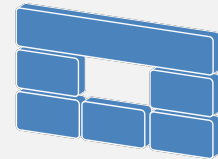
A plethora of individual software products exist for automating the various aspects of a municipality from the key activities involved in Permitting/Inspection, Licenses and Code Enforcement to software for managing fixed assets within storm or sanitary sewer systems to software for providing GIS/mapping. At first blush, purchasing separate standalone and single-tasked software applications for each aspect of a municipal operation seems a prudent approach. After all, it makes sense to get the best software you can find for each department or process, perhaps as budgets allow.

However, this strategy has a most significant drawback. Having disparate software applications implemented across the enterprise that do not communicate with each other is inherently inefficient and hinders productivity. Further, the total cost of purchasing, using and maintaining multiple software solutions from various manufacturers can be quite significant.



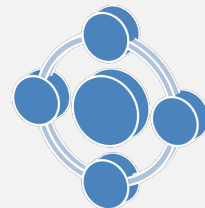
### Traditional enterprise software solution

Previously, the only alternative to the multi-vendor dilemma was to move to an enterprise solution to replace the various individual products. These products offer advantages over purchasing separate software products, but come with a hefty initial price tag and steep annual maintenance fees.



### Municipal Management Software

Enter the new breed of affordable web-based enterprise applications that handle virtually all aspects of a municipal operation. These software solutions provide similar enterprise functionality of legacy software applications for a fraction of the cost of these older, more traditional enterprise products. These new class of solutions have the advantage of offering a single, shared software solution that is available and accessible to all municipal employees throughout the organization, even field personnel. This software is powerful, easy to use and highly modular.



Municipal Management Software is needed now more than ever as local governments and authorities struggle with unprecedented fiscal challenges. Many municipalities have already cut costs and reduced their headcount as much as possible. Technology such as Municipal Management Software is one more step officials and administrators can take to streamline their operations. Efficiency and productivity improvements allow the organization to do more with less. Table 2 shows how Municipal Management Software addresses some of the major issues and challenges facing municipalities today.

**Table 2 – The Value Proposition of Municipal Management Software**

Current Municipal Issues and Challenges	Municipal Management Software Value
Paper-based, file cabinets	Electronic storage of Municipal data and information
No Document Management System	Full Document Management
Inaccurate maps; No digital mapping/GIS System	True GIS on every desktop
Lack of automated, standardized reporting capability	Hundreds of standard reports; ability to create custom reports
No single shared resource	All employees and users have real time access to critical data
Poor visibility into town data and assets	Better perspective on assets and data; relationships maintained

While Municipal Management Software clearly represents the future, not all solutions are created equal. Municipalities and authorities need to evaluate the various software offerings to determine which vendor provides the best overall solution for their organization. Having a set of criteria for comparing Municipal Management Software is the key to success.

## **Criteria for Municipal Management Software**

Developing a set of criteria for evaluating various offerings should include the following major categories:

- Company
- Product
- Costs
- Support and Service

Use the charts that follow as a blueprint to perform your own evaluation!

## Company

(Key company-related questions to ask)

Question	Yes/No	Comments
1. Does the company have in-depth experience working with municipal and/or utility operations? How many years?		
<i>Hint: The more the merrier. This is a major factor to consider.</i>		
2. Did the company design and develop the product itself?		
<i>Hint: It is more desirable to deal directly with the company that designed and developed the product versus a reseller or a firm that acquired the product from another company.</i>		
3. Is the company receptive to working with other companies if integration is required?		
<i>Hint: Look for a firm that has a demonstrated history of working with others.</i>		
4. Does the company have a 100% customer retention rate?		
<i>Hint: There may be a valid reason for losing a customer, but make sure you find out why they lost a customer (or customers)?</i>		
5. Is every installation available to you as a reference?		
<i>Hint: Ask if you can select from a list of customers based on their proximity to you or on their similarity to your operation, etc.</i>		
6. Are sales representatives consultative in their style?		
<i>Hint: Professional salespeople will work side by side with you on an implementation that meets your needs and requirements, rather than just "selling" you a product.</i>		
7. Do you have direct access to senior management?		
<i>Hint: Some level of meaningful contact or dialogue with management from the company demonstrates the importance of having you as a customer.</i>		
8. How receptive is the company to incorporating customer requests for features/changes?		
<i>Hint: Look for a company that earnestly solicits this feedback from its customers.</i>		

No matter how good the product looks, get to know the company as well as possible before you make an investment. You are making a long term commitment; the real question is, are they?

Product		
(Key product-related questions to ask)		
Question	Yes/No	Comments
1. Is it Easy to Use?		
<i>Hint: The software should mirror the way users work and require no technical or computer skills. If the training needed is lengthy that is good indication that the product is not easy to use.</i>		
2. Is the product Modular in design?		
<i>Hint: There should be separate modules for each department and major product functionality.</i>		
3. Are there modules for the critical business process and assets you need to manage?		
<i>Hint: In addition to Property, a foundational module, the following are major areas that should be considered: Request for Service/Complaints, Permitting, Licenses, Code Enforcement, Zoning Appeals, Subdivisions and Fixed Assets (Storm, Sewer, Water and Road Rights-of-Way).</i>		
4. Is there a strategy for integrating the product into your existing environment, including your website?		
<i>Hint: Don't look for a module here or "canned" solution; rather look at their approach and skill set. Do they want to sell you what they have or do they want to really understand what you want and how you want it. Do they have a professional process? What is their willingness and ability to make it all work together?</i>		
5. Is the product Powerful?		
<i>Hint: The product should include comprehensive communication capabilities, true GIS mapping, full document management and extensive reporting as well as detailed administrative controls.</i>		
6. Is the product capable of being fully Customizable?		
<i>Hint: Make sure the product can be easily configurable for your operation in terms of user fields and drop down menus as well as user privileges and other account settings.</i>		
7. Is the product architecture Open?		
<i>Hint: If the implementation is proprietary and closed you may not be able to integrate effectively with other vendor offerings, should this be required.</i>		
8. Does the product maintain Relationships between items and data?		
<i>Hint: You should be able to easily see what permits, complaints, requests, etc. are associated with a specific parcel.</i>		
9. Is the product running in Real-time?		
<i>Hint: To ensure accuracy, timely information it is important that the product not require synchronization.</i>		

Product design and architecture is critical to the user experience. The ideal product is modular, powerful, and easy to use.

## Cost

(Key cost-related questions to ask)

Question	Yes/No	Comments
1. Is the product a good Value?		
<i>Hint: Make sure they can articulate their value proposition and benefits for the prices they are charging. Prices should be broken down to each line item to allow an “apples to apples” comparison.</i>		
2. Is the product offered as a Site License?		
<i>Hint: If it priced on a per user basis this can be an expensive proposition and typically results in a system that is not used by everyone, every day, thus limiting the efficiency and productivity benefits.</i>		
3. What is the total cost of ownership over a multi-year time frame?		
<i>Hint: Vendor costs should include a projection of the total cost of ownership over a period of time, say a 5-year time frame; don't just evaluate based on the initial purchase price.</i>		
4. What are the on-going costs for support, service and updates?		
<i>Hint: Look for loopholes and caveats, such as planned price increases that prevent them from guaranteeing a multi-year price for this.</i>		
5. Can you purchase just the functionality you need to start with and add modules based on your future needs/budget?		
<i>Hint: Look for a direct “yes” to this question.</i>		
6. Does the company provide Tiered pricing?		
<i>Hint: Look for a pricing model that offers a discount for smaller operations.</i>		
7. Is the Annual Maintenance reasonable?		
<i>Hint: Calculate the Annual Maintenance as a percentage of the software cost and compare vendors on that basis.</i>		
8. Does the company offer leasing or “Pay as you go: option?		
<i>Hint: These are difficult times financially; look for a company that is sensitive to this.</i>		

When it comes to cost, the focus should be on total value. This means looking at total costs over multiple years.



Support and Service		
(Key support and service-related questions to ask)		
Question	Yes/No	Comments
1. When you call their toll free support line do you get to a Live person?		
<i>Hint: Make sure you will always get a live person and not voicemail if you call during normal business hours.</i>		
2. Does the company have the ability to solve most problems via Remote support?		
<i>Hint: The company should have remote access to your system and be able to help you with our issues right away.</i>		
3. Will the company go On-site if the problem is not resolved right away?		
<i>Hint: If going on site is the answer, make sure they are committed to being there at no extra charge, if this is required to fix the problem.</i>		
4. Ask what their Customer Service Philosophy is?		
<i>Hint: Look for a crisp and direct response that shows total commitment on their part.</i>		

Once the system is installed and the training is over, you will live with the system for many years. There will certainly be support and service from the vendor, the question is will it be provided in a timely, helpful and courteous manner or not.

### **Summary**

There are a new set of challenges facing local governments and authorities that are impacting how they do business. With less resources, rising costs and enhanced taxpayer scrutiny, the stakes for local government to do more with less is higher than ever before. Information Technology (IT) can become the great equalizer for municipalities and authorities during budget time. In a 4.0 world, IT infrastructure and software is being viewed as a “must have” tool to address the need to create efficiencies, automate and streamline operations. The emergence of a new breed of software, referred to as “Municipal Management Software,” has given management the ability to change the way they run government.

Municipal Management Software is a web-based, low cost application designed for the entire organization allowing automation of virtually all aspects of a municipality. One of the hallmarks of these new solutions is their delivery of powerful tools for the entire organization. As such, they include an asset management system that puts true GIS mapping on every desktop and

provides full, robust document management as well as extensive reporting capability. There are communications capabilities providing a shared calendar, contacts and tasks right from a dashboard view. A Property module is foundational to the other modules and contains critical information and detailed data for all real property. Administrative functionality allows user customization and assigns user privileges on a module by module basis. Moreover, there are add-on modules which provide for specific departmental needs and take full advantage of the other modules, working together as a single shared application.

Municipal Management Software provides important benefits in terms of efficiency and productivity. They make it easier to find information and ensure better decisions are made. They are essential to providing improved service levels to constituents.

#### **Key Benefits of Municipal Management Software**

- **Improves Decision Making**
- **Facilitates Communication & Collaboration**
- **Improves Service Levels**
- **Increases Efficiency & Productivity**

The bottom line is this software improves internal efficiencies and delivers better government.

However, products vary widely in terms of their design, architecture and pricing. It is up to the discriminating municipal buyer to screen vendors on a number of key criteria to ensure they are purchasing the best available software from firms providing the highest assurance of a successful implementation. As outlined in this white paper, the benefits from using Municipal Management Software are real, but there are many factors to consider. There are significant differences among offerings, so it is essential to have an established set of criteria to evaluate vendors prior to signing on the dotted line.

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