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DUBAI COURTS GET SMART

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DUBAI COURTS HAS ROLLED OUT A NEW SMART APPLICATION TO AUTOMATE JUDICIAL PROCESSES AND PROVIDE THE CONVENIENCE OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA MOBILE DEVICES

BY MARK SUTTON



The ultimate aim for smart services is to have all processes available through mobile devices, says Almudhareb.

Dubai's drive for smart government continues to move at a rapid pace, with Dubai Courts becoming one of the latest to push its services to smart devices, through the launch of a new, highly integrated smart court application.

Dubai Courts had already established a number of e-government services several years ago, which enabled online processing for a wide range of the court's activities including online case registrations, online petitions, document attestation and family services. While the new smart services would be complementary to the existing services,

the existing IT platform would not support mobile services, so Dubai Courts would require a new solution.

Due to the unique nature of Dubai Courts processes, there were no off-the-shelf solutions which would meet its requirements, so a large degree of customisation would be required from any solutions. Dubai Courts began a

process of assessment, looking at a number of mobile platforms that were in the market. The organisation selected the OutSystems Platform, a rapid appli-


cation delivery platform for mobile and web applications, from US enterprise software vendor OutSystems.

Although the OutSystems Platform had not previously been used in the judicial sector in the region before, Dubai Courts had already been successful in deploying e-government solutions which also had not been used in the region before, Abdulrahim Ahmad Almudhareb, IT director, Dubai Courts, explained, and there was strong commitment from the vendor, so there was a good degree of confidence in the project.

"There were lots of reasons why we chose OutSystems, one of them is that it is an agile solution, and the company was keen for this project to be successful. It was a challenge for them and for us, but they are very confident about their product," he said.

"We did a proof of concept for their product, and we sent our people to get initial training, to get familiar with the product. And the outcome from this training was very good, the feedback from our staff was good, that it was a good product, it would save time."

The main challenge in the project would be in ensuring that the solution could be fit to Dubai Courts processes, and to also account for the process-based nature of the required solution. Rather than being simple, one-step processes, the smart services that Dubai Courts offers involve a number of different processes, with approvals from different parties required, as well as documents needing to be submitted at different stages. The solution would need to be customised to reflect these different processes. Dubai Courts also required a solution which would be agile, to account for the need to make changes to the mobile application in order to update and expand it easily.



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“THERE WAS A GOOD TEAM BEHIND THE PROJECT, A GOOD TEAM OF JUDICIAL CONSULTANTS, ADMIN CONSULTANTS AND IT. THIS WAS ONE OF THE REASONS THAT THIS PROJECT WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL.”



Work began on the project in the summer last year, and services were rolled out within six months, going live in January. An initial batch of 30 services were selected for the smart application, based on feedback from the court's administration team and the judicial team, with the aim of engaging different user groups.

“Our plan is by the end of the year to have over 200 services. The initial release was 30 smart services, these services have been selected by the administration, and the judicial sector. There was a good team behind the project, a good team of judicial consultants, admin consultants and IT. This was one of the reasons that this project was very successful,” Almudhareb said.

The application has been developed for iOS and Google Android devices, as the most popular platforms in the market, although the OutSystems Platform will allow the app to be easily made available on other platforms if required.

“One of the advantages of the platform is you can develop once, and deploy on the desktop, you can deploy it as an e-service, you can deploy it as a smart service, you don't have to rebuild every time, you can develop only once,” Almudhareb commented.

Because of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the procedures and documents involved, security was also a major requirement. The OutSystems Platform uses HP Fortify solutions to validate the security of the applications, and to ensure that security standards are being met during and after development.

Another major aim for the project was to ensure that all processes could be fully integrated into the smart platform, to include all processes from the submission of the original petition to the judge making their decision and the ruling being filed. Almudhareb said that he believes the application is unique in the judicial sector in this regard, as it is the only fully smart processed service in the world.

“The idea of delivering smart services, [other organisations] always looked at delivering [services] just for the client. My ambition was big, I said no — it does not stop there. If I develop services just for the client now, I will have to come back again and develop something for the employees, then for the judges, then develop something for the administration. We will develop it once, for the whole process, and for everyone who is involved in that particular service.”

This integrated approach has resulted in the creation of a multi-function app, with all processes accessible on mobile devices. Users are able to track the status of the processes, submit documents and the app includes email and SMS notifications to update when there is a change in status. The app is also integrated with the Dubai Smart Government payment gateway, to enable financial transactions. The service also includes a passcode functionality, so that judges can authenticate themselves on the service for digital signing, while decision documents are automatically generated from the application and archived in Dubai Courts internal systems.

Almudhareb outlined the key functionality of the solution: “For the external clients, they can submit a petition using pre-designed templates, he can submit documents that are required, he can make payments, he can change the template if he wants and edit it. He can enquire about all of his petitions, he can follow up on the status of his petitions, and he can see all of his petitions that have already been finalised.

“For internal auditors, they receive notifications, he can review the petition and the attachments, he can make a case enquiry and request changes in the type of petition or the fees to be paid, and he can assign the petition to the correct judicial circuits.

“For the judge, he will receive notifications, he can review the petition, he can review the case information, he can reassign to another judicial circuit, he can take the decision and sign on the mobile, and send to the clerk for follow up.”

Initial feedback to the smart service has been good, Almudhareb said, with users satisfied with the flexibility of being able to work on a mobile device, wherever or whenever they want. Dubai Courts is now in the process of opening up the solution to other stakeholders. The ultimate aim will be to automate all processes.

“This is smart government, when you deliver a service where you don't need the judge or the employee to be present in the court, because the service is mobile now. The judge can take the decision whenever he receives the petition — we have noticed judges taking decisions at 2am,” Almudhareb said. “I really want to turn this into smart government. My vision is no employees in the courts, no judges, no customers — the entire process of administering the cases is fully automatised.” ■