

Action for Children Delivers Its Digital Transformation Strategy on Mendix

Action for Children seeks to give as much of its time to children as possible. Recognizing old reporting and administration processes were a drain on staff productivity, the charity defined a digital transformation and enterprise mobility strategy, selecting the Mendix platform on which to build a new set of multi-channel applications. Creating a Mendix center of expertise, the non-profit is working closely with users to deliver precisely the applications they want to use, whilst ensuring change and innovation can be quickly accommodated.

Challenge

In 2015, Action for Children made life better for 300,000 people: children, young people, their parents and carers. Across 400 sites in local communities across the United Kingdom, a team of 6,000 staff work to make sure every child and young person has the love, support and opportunity they need to reach their full potential.

Committed to improving lives, Action for Children always looks to ensure its operations are run efficiently and that staff can give as much of their time as possible to supporting every child's welfare. Under a strategy for continuous improvement, the charity recognized that management and reporting activities across its sites had become burdened by a plethora of localized and often unwieldy spreadsheet and Microsoft Access database applications. Frequent manual input and even regular paper-based form-filling consumed staff time. Action for Children also identified that field staff such as social and care workers were having to regularly return to the office just to access its computer network.

Led by its heads of children's services and of corporate services, Action for Children set a goal for digital transformation and for improved enterprise mobility. Under the 'Digitally Enabling Action for Children' program, management and reporting processes needed to be rationalized and re-innovated as modern, centralized, multi-channel applications. High user adoption would be crucial to success.

"Turning digital transformation into a working reality presented challenges," recalls Daniel Roberts, business systems development manager at Action for Children. "Processes in many areas here are unique with no off-the-shelf applications available, and coding our own, we'd previously had low take up from users, then struggled to accommodate requests for changes or new ideas for process innovation."

Solution

Action for Children had some years back experimented with the Mendix platform. Roberts knew that Mendix's visual, model-driven development approach allows applications to be created rapidly, via a no-code, drag-and-drop build process. He also understood that applications built on Mendix can be adapted easily to support new ideas and requirements. "Earlier achievements with Mendix prompted us to re-engage with the platform and after some small successes early on, we decided to scale our use of the platform," said Roberts. "We also decided to establish what we called a Mendix center of expertise."

The Mendix center of expertise at Action for Children comprises three staff, none of which had any prior coding expertise. The lead developer was previously a business analyst and the more recent recruits are from administrative backgrounds. Each member of the team has good insight into the charity's operations, an aptitude for process logic and an affinity for working with people.

Results

In tandem with provisioning field staff with mobile devices and upgrading the hardware and systems needed to support mobility, Action for Children focused Roberts' team on creating web-accessible management and reporting applications to replace old-fashioned spreadsheet processes. Very quickly, the success of these projects gave the team confidence to tackle larger, more mission-critical applications too.

At Action for Children, one of the most important enterprise-scale applications built to date on Mendix relates to child protection. Enabling case reports and administrative processes to be conducted efficiently by field staff, it has replaced paper and spreadsheet reporting, to provide a central and easily accessible information repository. Built on Mendix, the application is modular and flexible, growing organically as best practice for child protection, the charity's needs and statutory requirements change.

"We operate in an environment where change is frequent," said Roberts. "Mendix allows us to build flexible, agile applications that we can easily adapt to better meet user requirements, changing needs and process innovation."

An enterprise health and safety application, which today has 1,200 users, is the largest built to date by the charity on Mendix. It allows every site and every project manager to check compliance with UK health and safety laws. Also, a new property management application provides details of each asset, lease, building location, facilities and maintenance plans and more. And a client feedback application captures for analysis and action service users' complements, complaints and suggestions.

"Constructing applications in Mendix is really fast, giving working prototypes you can demonstrate to users in just days," said Roberts. "While in our

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experience traditional code-based approaches can fail to meet user expectations, Mendix facilitates, step-by-step, the creation of user-friendly, fit-for-purpose applications our staff are keen to use."

As staff across Action for Children work with Roberts' team and enjoy the results, so rapport and trust has built, energizing users to approach the developers with new ideas for process innovation.

"Using visual models to develop applications supports collaboration, engagement and a close relationship between the developer and the user," said Roberts. "The process has sparked a raft of new requests from staff for digital innovation wanting to spend less time on reporting and administration so they can focus even more on the needs of children and young people across the UK."

About Action for Children

To learn more about Action for Children, please visit www.actionforchildren.org.uk/



Mendix helps enterprises achieve their digital goals. Our digital innovation platform empowers customers to bring new products to market, digitize customer engagement, and automate unique business processes. Facilitating an iterative, collaborative approach, the platform brings business and IT together to build and deploy innovative applications at the speed of ideas.

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