

case study

GOVERNMENT APPLICATIONS

Customer

Napier City Council

Needs

An efficient system to utilise a web browser that could display a map type interface, query capabilities, and an effective presentation of property data.

Problem

Cost effective means of implementing a system that was operational within a few days.

Solution

Implementing Encounter as a MapXtreme for Java application. This allowed a high level of customisation using own logos, colours and graphics.

Benefits

This solution enabled Napier City Council to access property information dynamically, efficiently, and easily. Encounter allowed access to numerous data sources using the one application. Encounter also enabled Napier City Council to design special queries and map views for different users that eliminated the need for external consultants.

Napier City Council opts for Encounter spatial software

December 2000 - Located in picturesque Hawkes Bay on New Zealand's North Island, Napier City Council is the first local government authority worldwide to install MapInfo's *Encounter* web mapping software to deliver its internal spatial data.

Launched in June this year, *Encounter* is an off-the-shelf MapInfo MapXtreme for Java spatial application that visually distributes information to large numbers of users within the organisation or to the entire world.

Having already pioneered a first generation web browser spatial solution, the progressive council found they wanted to develop the system a lot further. They required a more sophisticated system utilising a web browser that could display a map type interface as well as query and present property data and provide superior printing capabilities.

Rather than continuing to develop the system in-house, the council found they could improve their system most cost-effectively by implementing the breakthrough *Encounter*. As a MapInfo MapXtreme for Java application, *Encounter* used identical technology to the council and could be installed and operational in a matter of days.

Simon Nitz, GIS Administrator, Planning Department of the Napier City Council, said *Encounter* was a superior product in every way. "It was highly attractive because it gave us a lot of front end functionality that we didn't have and we were able to customise it using logos, colours and graphics, to look like the rest of our system."

Blazing the Trail

In many ways, *Encounter* is Napier City Council's second generation GIS solution, blazing the trail for many councils who have yet to embark on their first generation stage in New Zealand.

"We have resolved our major challenge which was accessing property information dynamically in an efficient and easy way," Nitz said.

"Finding property information used to be a nightmare – disparate databases, numerous reports and individual staff knowledge – was scattered across the council. We are now able to pull all the planning data sources together to minimise the risks of missing information resulting in inappropriate decisions being made."

Centralised Data

He said *Encounter* had been a breeze to implement and had wide application for other councils and any organisations requiring centralised data with mapping capabilities.

"The key benefit for us has been to use a spatial system to access multiple datasets all at once. Instead of having to open several different applications, we're now opening up one application. It pulls together a lot of data sources and becomes the front end to a lot of systems," Nitz said.

"We can design special queries and map views for different users, which in turn reduces the need for external consultants and reduces the time we needed to modify and update the front end," said Mr Nitz.

"It also has benefits at the back end with good administration tools that allow us to add our own data ourselves and make our own changes. *Encounter* allows us to take control rather than having to use external consultants," he said.

Encounter is set-up by SiteBuilder, a GUI configuration tool that is used by the administrator to manage functionality without software development.

Encounter

A map view is the ultimate way of conveying information quickly and effectively. *Encounter* is a breakthrough in Internet technology because it is:

- Fast and easy to use
- Map-based and intuitive
- Internet secure
- Run on any internet browser that supports Java 1.1 and any server operating system that supports Java 1.2
- Linked directly to database servers such as Oracle
- Accessible simultaneously by a large number of users
- Able to be customised to suit a particular look and feel

Encounter enables staff to access property information using multiple search parameters such as address, legal description or valuation code. The enhanced map tools allow access to spatial layers and zoom in and out in a single or multi click windowing capacity. There's also faster printing direct from the user's browser.

Sitting on the Napier City Council intranet, *Encounter* is accessible to most of its 300 staff and has around 40 core users based mainly in the planning department. These are the planners, building inspectors, health inspectors and rating staff who are involved in planning projects on a day-to-day basis.

Access to all types of property information is simple yet comprehensive. For example, a building inspector can access information on whether there is contaminated fill on a property; its flooding and erosion history and its potential for wind, mass movement and earthquake hazards.

Cadastral type information can be overlaid on aerial photos to ascertain boundaries for subdivisions and new buildings.

NCS Interface

The council has already developed a vital interface with NCS, (Napier Computer System), the property and rating system used by the majority of councils in New Zealand.

"A key focus has been linking *Encounter* to this system so we can access information such as building and resource consents, swimming pools and health licensing," Nitz said. "Other councils will be able to take advantage of our groundwork."

Mapping Future Potential

Nitz said that while *Encounter* had created a smarter workplace, it had also brought a lot of exciting potential for future development, particularly in making information available to the public via the Internet.

"Right now, we have the ability to put it on the Internet but we're still working through policy issues of what data we make accessible," Nitz said.

He expects this will take six to 12 months and is looking to link it with an eBusiness solution. "Currently, if someone wants to find information on their property, they have to come into council and look through hard files. Potentially, they'll be able to log in at home or from a kiosk and access information much more quickly and easily. Eventually, people such as property developers will be able to log on, do their consents and pay for it, all on line."

Encountering Encounter

Napier City Council purchased *Encounter* from Critchlow Associates, a MapInfo reseller based in Wellington. Business Development Manager, Carl Wezel said the implementation of *Encounter* at Napier City Council provided Critchlow with a flagship installation and a reference site for promoting *Encounter* to other New Zealand councils.

About Critchlow Associates

Critchlow Associates are a locally owned New Zealand company specialising in packaging total solutions around software, data and services. They are resellers for MapInfo products in New Zealand.

Critchlow Associates service well over 400 clients in New Zealand in all market verticals including Banking, Central and Local Government, Utilities, Forestry, Petrochemical, and Telephony.