Fairfax Water: Gaining Deeper Insight into Service Quality and Costs to Deliver Superior IT Support

Fairfax Water

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

Company

Fairfax Water

Industry

Utilities

Products and Services

Water treatment and sales

Web Site

www.fairfaxwater.org

SAP® Solutions

SAP® Solution Manager application management solution

Fairfax Water has a relatively small IT department, but it has the sizable goal of delivering exceptional IT support for its SAP® software landscape – the backbone of the business. To eliminate manual tracking and handling of service requests and gain deeper insight into service quality, costs, and other metrics, it deployed the service desk functionality of the SAP Solution Manager application management solution.

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

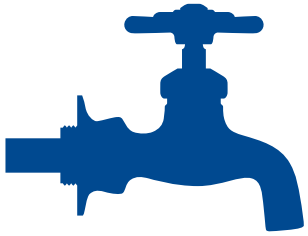
Benefits

Future plans

Providing clear leadership in water quality and service

Fairfax Water, one of Virginia's largest water utilities companies, serves one out of every five Virginians who obtain their water from public utilities. Almost 1.7 million people in the Northern Virginia communities of Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, and Alexandria depend on Fairfax Water for superior drinking water. As a nonprofit utilities company with revenues of US$136 million, Fairfax Water operates two water treatment plants with a combined capacity of 345 million gallons (1,305 million m^3) per day. Water is distributed throughout Fairfax Water's service area through more than 3,400 miles (5,470 km) of water mains.

To support Fairfax Water's mission of establishing, operating, and maintaining a comprehensive, integrated water system, the company began deploying a comprehensive SAP software landscape in 2004. "We've deployed nearly all elements of the SAP for Utilities solutions," explains Tammy Powlas, business process analyst at Fairfax Water. "It's the backbone of our business."



167 million

Average gallons of water produced per day

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

Increasing productivity through better IT support services

SAP software was used by Fairfax Water's 400 employees to optimize key business processes spanning human resources, finance, asset and materials management, operations management, and sales, marketing, and service. To help ensure the company realized maximum value from its investments, employees needed timely, efficient, high-quality IT support. "We'd been using a legacy Remedy system to capture help desk requests, but we weren't consistently recording them in the system," notes Powlas. "Help desk support was being handled in a manual, inconsistent manner, which made it difficult to measure the quality and efficiency of the services we were providing to the business."

For example, calls were sometimes recorded on slips of paper, which meant no one could track the current status of an issue. In other cases, they were entered into Remedy, but the software couldn't provide the detailed reporting they needed to improve service quality, efficiency, and effectiveness. "How could we improve if we didn't know where we were having issues?" asks Powlas. "We needed accurate insight into the number of tickets generated by department, application, and feature, as well as the time spent on SAP support, the cost of this support, and the types of problems users were experiencing. Armed with this kind of information, we could be proactive about improving IT support services for our users and the departments we serve."

"Our goal was to improve service levels to the business and our users – and the first step was to implement a way to closely monitor, track, and report on the quality of our help desk services."

Tammy Powlas, Business Process Analyst, Fairfax Water

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

Getting the perfect help desk tool from SAP – for free

When considering alternatives to their Remedy system, Fairfax Water's IT department looked to SAP first for a solution. "We already owned SAP Solution Manager because it comes as part of our SAP Enterprise Support agreement, so we didn't need to buy anything," explains Powlas. "It comes with service desk functionality that was well suited to our needs – for example, it offered prebuilt reports that we could generate with a click of a button."

Long term, the IT department knew that SAP Solution Manager had a great deal of additional functionality that supports application lifecycle management (ALM). States Powlas, "Until now, we'd only been using the 'early watch' functionality of SAP Solution Manager. Getting started with the help desk functionality was a great opportunity to jump-start greater use of this tool, and long term we hope to use it to gradually roll out support for ALM best practices, like change request management or test management."

"SAP Solution Manager provided us with a complete service desk ready for action – no modifications or customized reports were needed."

Tammy Powlas, Business Process Analyst, Fairfax Water

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

Easing deployment with expert guided implementations

Fairfax Water's IT department completed all of the implementation work in-house. As a customer of SAP Enterprise Support services, it relied on expert guided implementations – remote working sessions with SAP experts – which ushered in a hassle-free deployment. "The support engineers we worked with on the expert guided implementations were terrific," states Powlas. "They were a huge help in getting everything set up in our sandbox."

The entire implementation took approximately two months. The service desk functionality was first rolled out to a few employees who tested it and later served as "champions," capable of assisting others if needed.

"The service desk functionality is very intuitive. We spent a half hour walking people through it – and people were using it with ease from day one."

Tammy Powlas, Business Process Analyst, Fairfax Water

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

Tracking support requests in real time

Fairfax Water now has a service desk where IT staff can enter all support requests and centrally manage and track them in real time. "The system prompts users to input time spent, so pretty much everything is tracked now – regardless of how requests or questions come in," explains Powlas. "And this means everything is measured and reportable."

SAP Solution Manager comes with prebuilt reports that provide management with granular visibility into IT support service quality, costs, and types of SAP software–related issues. Management can understand the actual time and cost associated with providing SAP support, as well as how often requests get escalated. "Now we always know the status of every request and can identify trends – for example, if we're seeing an increase in certain types of issues or escalations to SAP support," adds Powlas.

The software provides a solution database where the help desk team can document how it handled different requests and issues. When a request comes in that someone can't answer, he or she can search the database to get an accurate answer and address user issues more quickly. The team also leverages root cause analysis functionality provided by SAP Solution Manager for rapid issue resolution.

"The service desk functionality in SAP Solution Manager has given us greater accountability because we can instantly see if anything is left undone."

Tammy Powlas, Business Process Analyst, Fairfax Water

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

Empowering IT to deliver better support services

Fairfax Water realized a quick return on investment, achieving greater accountability, visibility, and service quality for its IT support services. Because SAP software–related requests are centrally tracked and managed using the service desk functionality of SAP Solution Manager, IT staff can check on the status of each one; see what's been done, when, and by whom; and check on what's left to do. "The visibility boosted accountability at all tiers of our support team, which ultimately leads to better service," explains Powlas. Service quality improved through growing use of the IT support database by support staff; they can find answers more quickly, so they're seeing higher first-call resolution rates and shorter resolution times.

Leveraging the built-in reporting, Fairfax Water now has better insight into how much time, money, and resources are being spent on SAP support. "We can instantly view service requests by application module, priority, severity, escalation level, the department and person responsible for making the request, and more," states Powlas.

Armed with accurate reporting, the IT department is proactively addressing service issues, as well as working with lines of business more consultatively. "For example, we're meeting with department heads monthly to discuss service levels, trends that indicate employees need more training, and what requests we're working on," adds Powlas. "Long term, we hope to define service-level agreements."

"For us, the real value is in the reporting. The service desk comes with all of the canned reports we need. It's fast, accurate, and really easy to use."

Tammy Powlas, Business Process Analyst, Fairfax Water

Overview

Company

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

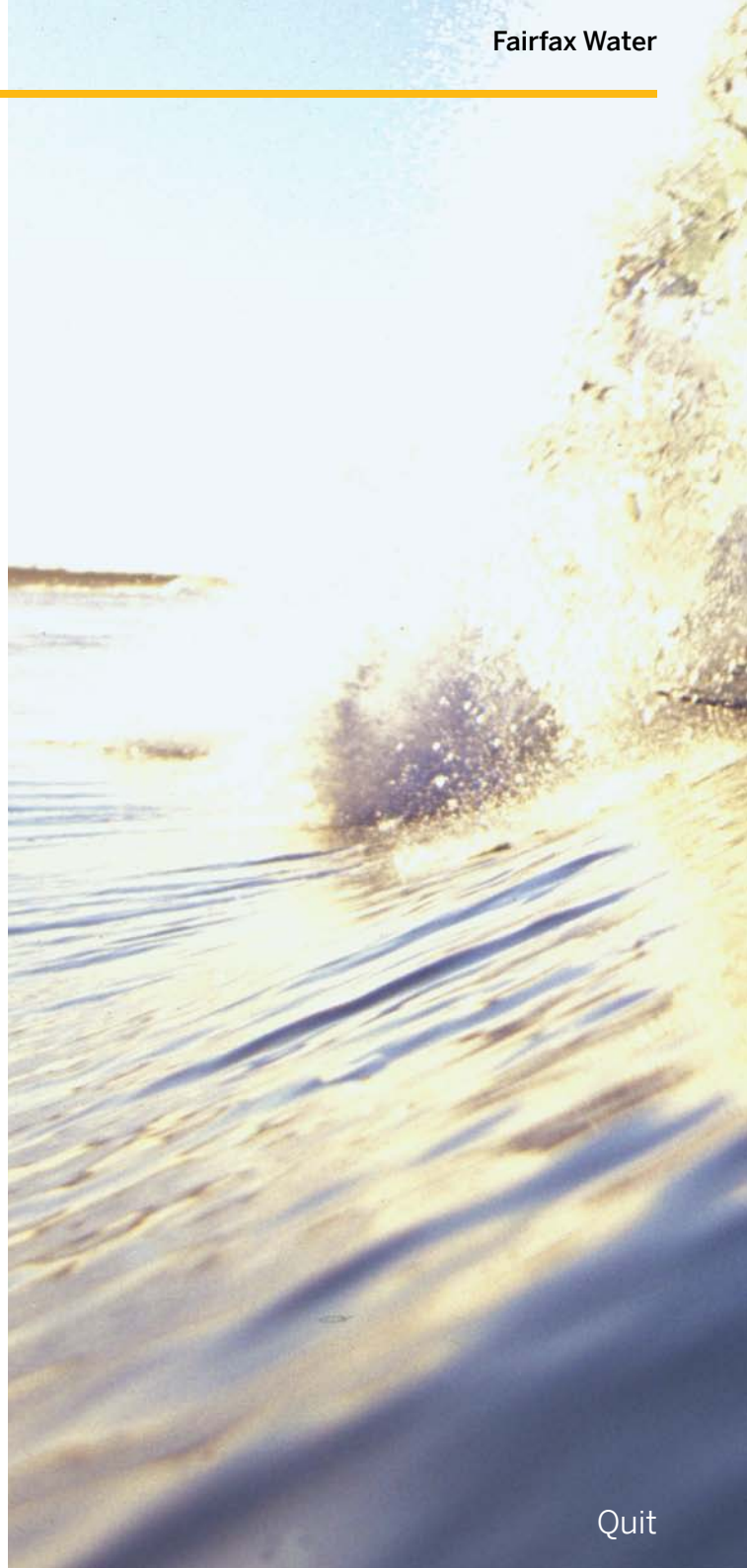
Future plans

Taking small steps toward application lifecycle management

Looking ahead, Fairfax Water's IT department would like to gradually leverage more functionality in SAP Solution Manager to enable ALM. For example, Powlas would like to deploy functionality for change request management – currently managed using their Remedy system – and test management. "We're planning on integrating change request management with our service desk, handling everything with SAP Solution Manager, and fully retiring our Remedy system," forecasts Powlas.

"The more we leverage SAP Solution Manager, the more we can automatically track everything – from production to promotion – and have the transparency needed to eliminate mistakes."

Tammy Powlas, Business Process Analyst, Fairfax Water



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