



## City of Kenora boosts citizen engagement with .NET-connected software

### Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Government

### Customer Profile

The City of Kenora is the gateway to thousands of kilometres of recreational country, making it a bustling tourist centre. It's also home to 15,000 residents.

### Business Situation

The City of Kenora operated a static Web site that lacked a way for citizens to conduct transactions online, get more information about city council activity, or have their questions answered.

### Solution

The City of Kenora rebuilt its Web site using a tool from Imex Systems, iCity, which is based on Microsoft .NET-connected software and customized using Visual Studio 2005.

### Benefits

- Easy to use, engaging Web site
- Convenient access to city services
- Citizen engagement and collaboration
- Improved economic development
- Streamlined IT processes

“Taking advantage of Microsoft software has helped us prove that small local Governments can connect more effectively with citizens, provide a range of online services, and give their residents and businesses a powerful online presence.”

Ben Pawlowski, portal administrator, City of Kenora

The City of Kenora is located in Northwestern Ontario and home to 15,000 year-round residents. Until recently, citizens often had to travel to Kenora's city hall or fill out documents in person when they needed to access city services. The City of Kenora operated a Web site that was static and that lacked the means to handle payments or other interactive features. The city enlisted the help of Imex Systems Inc., a Microsoft® Gold Certified partner, which recommended a new site based on Microsoft .NET-connected software, and built with Visual Studio® 2005 operating system and .NET Framework 2.0. The new Web site contains a range of interactive and easy-to-use features that can be easily and quickly updated and revised by City of Kenora staff. Kenora also became the first city in Canada to offer residents single sign-on features, enabling them to conduct all the business they need in a single session.



## Situation

Founded in the 1830s in what is now the province of Ontario, the town of Kenora - then known as Rat Portage - was little more than a collection of shanties along the shoreline of Lake of the Woods. By the late 19th century, the town boomed as freight, lumber and passenger steamers plied the waters of the lake. Today, situated on the busy Trans Canada Highway a few hours drive from Minnesota, Kenora is the gateway to thousands of kilometres of recreational country, making it a bustling tourist centre. It's also home to 15,000 residents (as many as 60,000 during vacation season) who, as citizens, need easy access to a range of government services.

Until recently, citizens often had to travel to city hall or fill out documents in person when they needed to access city services. The City of Kenora operated a Web site that housed useful information, but it was static, and didn't allow citizens to conduct transactions online, get more information about city council activity, or have their questions answered.

The city also has a mandate to aid local businesses. As a tourist destination, many Kenora businesses rely heavily on off-season bookings and soliciting interest from travellers from around the world. Kenora wanted to help them raise their profile via a more powerful online presence - something many found too costly and time-consuming to do on their own.

The time and energy required to support Kenora's outdated Web technology was another concern. The site was based on PHP and required the skills of a specialized developer retained on a contract basis - at a cost of more than

\$1,000 per month - to make simple changes or additions to the site.

City officials decided to look at ways to increase electronic service delivery with a revamped and more interactive Web site.

## Solution

The City of Kenora enlisted the help of Imex Systems Inc., a Microsoft® Gold Certified partner, professional services firm and software developer with public sector expertise. After completing an assessment, Imex recommended that Kenora rebuild the site using its flagship iCity tool, which is based on Microsoft .NET-connected software.

"Microsoft software was clearly best suited to our environment. Not only was it inexpensive when compared to the other offerings we saw, but we found it easy to install and manage. This was important for an organization like ours that operates on a limited budget," says Ben Pawlowski, portal administrator, City of Kenora.

iCity is a ready-made service delivery architecture designed for local governments. It includes features that help make electronic service delivery easier to build and manage, including tools for identity management, user authentication and authorization, business process management, integration with backend applications, and security, scalability and system management.

Although Imex had been a longtime user of Visual Studio 2003 and .NET Framework 1.1, the company took advantage of the City of Kenora project to upgrade to Microsoft Visual Studio® 2005 development system and .NET Framework 2.0. Visual Studio 2005 provides a complete environment for individual developers building Microsoft Windows®,

Web, or mobile solutions. Imex developers also took advantage of ASP.NET 2.0, which is designed to help users create rich, dynamic Web applications. The City of Kenora site was built using Visual C#.NET.

“The Visual Studio 2005 and .NET 2.0 environments make it easy for us to integrate the iCity application with other Microsoft-based tools, and helped to improve developer productivity by 40 per cent. This means we can turn projects around even more quickly than before, and that was certainly the case with City of Kenora,” says Shamir Furtado, Director of Government Services, Imex Systems.

By upgrading to Visual Studio 2005, Imex developers were able to take advantage of a range of time-saving features. Chief among them was Master Pages, which helps developers who make a change on a particular web page ensure that the same change is made across the entire project. Developers were also able to quickly build interactive Web applications for the iCity platform by taking advantage of enhanced visual designers and editors included in Visual Studio 2005.

“For this project to be successful, Kenora needed us to deliver a rich, easy-to-use user interface that would be accessible to all its citizens. Taking advantage of ASP.NET 2.0 and Visual Studio 2005 helped us to deliver functionally complex, yet highly usable and intuitive applications,” adds Furtado.

Given that Kenora runs a Microsoft-based environment, Imex worked with another Microsoft Gold Certified partner, Ektron Inc. to build a content management system that enables users to post or update Web pages from their desktop using Internet Information Services software. The city also runs SQL Server™

2000 data analysis and reporting software as its primary database, with plans to upgrade to SQL Server 2005 in the future. Kenora is also investigating the use of SharePoint® 2007 portal server and BizTalk® 2007 server.

## Benefits

Since the revamped portal’s launch in December 2005, response from employees and citizens has been overwhelmingly positive. Portal content is now organized under four gateways: City Government, Tourism, Business and Economic Development, and Living in Kenora, all of which contain new, interactive features that can be easily and quickly updated by City of Kenora staff.

“Taking advantage of Microsoft software has helped us prove that small local Governments can connect more effectively with citizens, provide a range of online services, and give their residents and businesses a powerful online presence,” says Pawlowski.

### *Easy to use, engaging Web site*

With its rich, dynamic interface designed using the latest Microsoft developer technologies, the iCity portal helps residents - even those with little or no technical experience - easily interact with the site. By taking advantage of single-sign on features built by Imex developers, residents can login once to a common payment engine that processes transactions for a wide range of City of Kenora products and services, such as purchasing a dog license, paying a tax bill or making a donation to a local charity. The City of Kenora is the first city in Canada to offer its citizens this kind of broad functionality.

“Today there is a wide range of services citizens can learn about and pay for on our portal. Citizens appreciate the convenience we offer them, and we’ve heard nothing but positive feedback on how easy the site is to use. This is critical as not all of our residents are advanced Internet users. If our interface lacked user-friendliness, we’d risk alienating them,” says Pawlowski.

This ease of use has also encouraged more citizen engagement in government activities. Imex implemented a Webcasting system on the new site that enables residents to attend council meetings from the comfort of their home or office. The city also launched several community collaboration tools, including polls and surveys and an e-meeting space, where like-minded citizens can gather to help bring the community together.

“During a recent Council meeting, we decided to get our citizens directly involved in the budget debate, so we created a survey. It was a paper document, but we also put questions online. Nearly all our responses were received online - the survey document had virtually no traction. This is a confirmation that paper based processes are becoming redundant and the future lies in electronic communications and electronic services,” says Pawlowski.

“The ease with which we can add, delete or update features on the site really speaks to the value that iCity and Microsoft technologies brought to the City of Kenora. These technologies have gone a long way to making this project so successful,” adds Pawlowski.

Improved economic development  
Many of Kenora’s local businesses are seasonal, and focused on serving tourists.

It’s critical that they have a Web presence so visitors can contact them or research their offerings in advance. But with tight budgets and a lack of technical know-how, many businesses didn’t have the marketing and technological punch needed to build an effective online presence.

Taking advantage of a Web site building tool native to the .NET-based City of Kenora portal enables businesses to build and maintain their own hosted web pages and online shopping cart, free of charge. The higher-profile, easily searchable Web property helps them drive more business, which in turn helps boost tax revenue to the city. The process of building the Web site is made easy, as most users are already familiar with the Microsoft-based desktop environment.

“Businesses can now focus on their day-to-day work instead of worrying about technical issues or getting a vendor to help them. It really saves them time and money so they can focus on their actual day-to-day job and not have to worry about the technology and problems, because the CMS is all automatic,” adds Pawlowski.

#### ***Streamlined IT processes***

With the new content management system in place, the City of Kenora no longer has to employ the services of a contractor to make simple changes to the site. The site is now easily managed by staff and businesses alike, ensuring that the IT team’s time is spent focused on issues related to the computing environment, not on content management and update tasks.

“Almost overnight, our site was transformed from a PHP-based technically unsophisticated site that offered little or

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For more information about Imex Systems products and services, call 1-877-IMEXSYS or visit the Web site at: [www.imexsystems.com](http://www.imexsystems.com)

For more information about City of Kenora products and services, call (807) 467-2000 or visit the Web site at: [www.kenora.ca](http://www.kenora.ca)

no functionality, to an easy-to-maintain site that users can modify on their own with little or no assistance. What once took us days now takes us hours, even minutes,” says Pawlowski.

Giving staff the freedom to monitor, update and manage their own sections of the portal and e-services means they can quickly respond to the changing needs of City of Kenora citizens, enhancing the impact of government. And allowing the content experts to update and manage their own content has made the site one that’s truly people-ready.

“Thanks to the portal, the City’s ability to communicate with our citizens has improved dramatically, as we are now able to keep them informed with personalized information, alerts and bulletins, and make them feel more connected to local government,” says Pawlowski.

## Microsoft Visual Studio 2005

Microsoft Visual Studio 2005 is the world’s most popular development environment for designing, developing, and testing next-generation Windows®-based solutions and Web applications and services. By improving the development experience for Windows, the Web, mobile devices, and Microsoft Office, Visual Studio 2005 helps organizations deliver a variety of solutions more productively than ever before. Visual Studio Team System expands the product line with new software tools that enable greater communication and collaboration throughout the development life cycle. With Visual Studio 2005, businesses can deliver modern service-oriented solutions more efficiently.

For more information about Visual Studio 2005, go to: [msdn.microsoft.com/vstudio](http://msdn.microsoft.com/vstudio)

### Software & Services

- Visual Studio 2005
- .NET Framework 2.0
- ASP.NET 2.0
- Visual C#.NET
- SQL Server 2000

### Partners

- Imex Systems Inc.
- Ektron Inc.

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