SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM, CITY OF TILBURG
Tilburg, Holland

- Tool — Entera
- Industry — Government

OVERVIEW

• City of Tilburg, a Dutch local authority, needed to make the process of applying for social security and welfare benefits easier for its people, and in the time specified by government legislation.

• Tilburg needed to link into databases provided by third parties as well as connect their own disparate systems in order to process claims.

• Future-proofing the choice of platforms and systems also figured prominently in the choice of development environment.

• Using Borland's Entera middleware, Tilburg has reduced the three-fold duplication of labor formerly required to a single online data entry process, enabling the city to instantly obtain relevant data from many sources and issue an accurate contract for benefits during a single visit.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

• The Entera system slashed the time taken to process an individual social security claim from 50-60 days to 13-14 days, well inside the government regulation of 30 days, streamlining the process of dealing with claims and reducing the overall administrative cost per claim significantly.

• With an automated process in place to handle benefit claims, people entitled to welfare will now receive their payments much sooner and with a minimum of form-filling.

• The system allows the City of Tilburg to avoid costly fines by being able to respond to changes in legislation, which tend to be issued every six months or so, in a more timely manner.

• The project has proven so successful that seven other local authorities in Holland are evaluating the base system to speed up their own processing capabilities, and Dutch systems house CIOP is building the project into its financial systems offering.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

The City of Tilburg is a local government authority in Holland which is responsible for providing a wide range of services to the public in the city. Administrating payments for social security is only one of many activities that the city hopes to convert into a more streamlined process using online systems. Currently, Tilburg processes in excess of 22,000 applications for benefit from residents each year.

SITUATION

Holland is leading the way in Europe with innovative schemes to bring government closer to the people through greater use of information technology. Efforts are currently underway to make it easier for citizens to conduct their day to day business with the government on-line, particularly through Britain's Government Direct scheme with The Post Office's Genesis Direct consortium. The guiding principles of such schemes are to speed up routine inquiries for the public, reduce administration costs for the government, and allow records to be held centrally without duplicating effort.

The City of Tilburg, a local authority in the Netherlands, needed a way to speed up the job of processing requests for social security payments, and in so doing has created a model of electronic government for other European states. Now with a number of other cities in Holland considering adopting the system, electronic government seems closer to reality in Europe.

The City of Tilburg had for some years had a problem with processing claims from job seekers, the disabled, and disadvantaged people for social security payments. A labor-intensive process of hand-written forms and subsequent data entry meant that it could take up to 60 days for a claimant to actually receive benefits. Even a simple change of address for an existing claimant would mean making at least three separate changes to the city's records.

Because the task of processing one person's claim to welfare payments involves a series of routine checks with credit agencies, centralized government databases, and even the police in the case of non-Dutch nationals, Tilburg's employees faced a laborious task of manual detail-checking. Only after separate checks with various information centers could the financial system calculate a welfare payment.

SOLUTION

With a new system that has been developed at Tilburg using Borland's Entera intelligent middleware, the city has been able to reduce the three-fold duplication of labor to one single online data entry process. Tilburg's social security system now links directly into

other databases and performs automatic credit and police checks. The system then calculates the amount of benefits payable and prints out an automatic contract for the claimant to sign before leaving.

City officials felt it was very important that information appeared on screen immediately whenever a staff member requested an address or credit details. They first investigated message-based middleware from IBM to fill this need. However, after six months, IBM's MQ Series was still having trouble retrieving information from Tilburg's local and the national databases in an acceptable time frame. With message-based middleware, city employees experienced serious time delays when performing credit checks on different databases, because this form of middleware does not allow real-time data transfer.

When Borland analysts were called in to provide an Entera pilot, they were able to link the databases together in a matter of days. One of the major benefits with Entera lies in its platform-independence. A developer can do the work on UNIX, then transfer everything over to a second system running on NT without having to do any recoding or debugging. Code was successfully ported over with no problems. Because both Oracle and DB2 databases were running within the system, it was also important that the city keep options open for future plans, and Entera gave Tilburg the flexibility it needed.

TECHNOLOGY

Database Server	DB2 and Oracle
Platforms	IBM AIX, Microsoft Windows NT
Networks	TCP/IP

DEVELOPMENT

Tools Used	Entera, Visual Basic, Visual C++
Other Tools Evaluated	IBM MQ series
Development time	Eight weeks
Debut date	January 1997

CUSTOMER COMMENTS

"For us to be able to process a claim while a person is present in the social security office, being able to obtain the correct information from various databases is vital. Each claim requires us to make 180 separate procedure calls, so sub-second response time is required in order to process an application while the claimant is present.…We believe that the City of Tilburg system represents a first step along the road to making government more directly available to the public. We're hoping to be able to share our experience with a

number of government bodies throughout Europe."

—Bart Verwijst, Senior Developer
City of Tilburg, Holland