



CUSTOMERS

North Carolina Fire Department Improves Response Time with Business Objects

Greensboro

"We're a much more flexible organization and that's going to help us focus on providing the highest level of service to our residents now and in the future."

Don Campbell, GIS Analyst, Office of Strategic Planning and Information Systems, Greensboro

Industry

Government

Business Pain

Greensboro Fire Department needed to track, understand, and manage fire unit response times to meet high performance standards and to plan more effectively for the future.

Why Business Objects?

Crystal Enterprise helps Greensboro Fire Department better understand and manage data—from employee records and payroll to critical fire response data. With improved visibility, the fire department is able to better manage resources, more effectively plan for the future, and improve fire response times.

Challenge

Established in 1808, Greensboro Fire Department holds an impressive record. Greensboro is the only fire department in North Carolina—and one of only 30 in the United States—that holds a Class One rating for fire control from the Insurance Services Office (ISO). In fact, Greensboro was the first fire department internationally recognized as an ISO Class One Organization and to achieve "Accredited Agency Status" through the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.



Like practically everyone else in the Greensboro Fire Department, Don Campbell, GIS analyst in the Office of Strategic Planning and Information Systems, is not one to rest on his laurels. Always on the lookout for new ways to deliver more effective fire protection, he routinely reports on the department's fire response capabilities and tries to keep abreast of the latest technological advances in the field of fire service delivery.

Campbell likes to think of his role as bridging the gap between technology, crucial planning, and research in the fire department. In Greensboro's case, Business Objects and ESRI technologies help make this a reality.

Approach

Crystal Enterprise™, a web-based information management solution, has helped Greensboro better understand and manage data from employee records and payroll to critical fire response data. And with ESRI ArcGIS Suite, Greensboro can see and act on geographic information, including emerging trends and challenges.

Campbell's Office of Strategic Planning and Information Systems routinely asks the tough questions: Are we meeting our standards? Where do we place our fire stations? What should our future planning and growth model look like? Explains Campbell, "The city of Greensboro annexes property into its city limits on a regular basis so we have to plan when and where we put new fire stations. Including seven contracted fire stations, Greensboro has 24 stations and will probably add three to four stations over the next six years."

In the early days, Campbell says, "It was basically just put the points on the map and look at them. What does it look like? Are we getting any patterns? Over the last two years, our analysis has become much more sophisticated. We're now doing hotspot mapping. We're doing geographical and geostastical analysis of the areas of the city where we're taking longer to get to."

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The Greensboro team works hard together to fight fires and save lives. Behind the scenes, another team works together to help: Business Objects and ESRI. Crystal Reports is included with ESRI's ArcGIS Desktop products—ArcView, ArcEditor, and ArcInfo—making reporting and analysis possible for ESRI customers around the world. For more information, visit www.esri.com/bobj, or email esri@businessobjects.com.

Results

With more effective decision making and enhanced departmental performance, Greensboro has seen plenty of benefits. But anyone in the department will tell you, the biggest plus has been getting to fires faster.

The Greensboro Fire Department's goal is to respond to 80% of all fire incidents within six minutes. A few years ago, the department was consistently hovering frustratingly close to the threshold, typically in the 75% to 78% range.

As Campbell explains, "We felt like we were doing much better than that, but we couldn't determine where the problems were. By using Crystal Enterprise to break down the information into districts and station levels, and also by being able to pull that information from Crystal Enterprise into our GIS system, we pinpointed the area we were having trouble reaching—an area that happened to be outside the normal response district of a fire station."

"Once we'd identified what was pulling our averages down, we looked at some other options and made some key decisions," Campbell says. "At the beginning of the last budget year, we implemented a contract with a local fire department and our performance averages went up to roughly 92%, all because of being able to identify the problem through reporting and GIS."

While a faster and more efficient emergency response certainly takes center stage, Greensboro has also seen some impressive process improvements internally. With easy-to-read, presentation-quality reports readily available online, all 415 employees have secure access to personal information with a few mouse clicks. Upper management can run reports from their desktops. Self-serve information, more accurate reports, and faster reporting have made life a lot easier for the office of strategic planning and information systems. With reporting burdens lessened, they've saved time and been able to move on to other priority projects. They are now trying to utilize the tools to analyze past performance and also future service demand.

Performance management is an ongoing exercise at any fire station. The move to more advanced mapping technology and web-based reporting has paid off here as well. "We now have a lot of time to really look at the information and ask some more indepth questions," says Campbell. "We're a much more flexible organization and that's going to help us focus on providing the highest level of service to our residents now and in the future."

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