

On-the-Go Dashboard

Enterprise oversight tool for the iPad

By Matthew DeMeritt, Esri Writer

Information on permits, license applications, and other municipal transactions is immediately available almost anywhere by simply tapping the location on a map, thanks to an iPad app from Esri Gold Tier partner Accela Inc.

Since the emergence of the iPad, government and business users have been eager to exploit the device as a serious business tool. Software professional Chuck Spink, senior product manager at Accela, envisioned an app that would provide real-time access to data from Accela enterprise software for government, Accela Automation. That data would be displayed as charts, graphs, and maps.

Hundreds of governments already use Accela Automation to monitor and automate many traditional tasks. Creating a remote dashboard to display back-end data seemed the next logical step in extending the system's benefits. A dashboard app would complement Accela Automation by providing a window to enterprise data, aggregating and processing it so it could be more easily analyzed.

When someone engages in any transaction with a city—applies for a permit or license, pays a fee, or schedules an inspection—Accela Automation keeps precise records of that transaction. These transactions can be represented as points on a map. The software's integration with ArcGIS provides the "what and where" component that organizations need to understand activity and make effective decisions.

Accela extended this value to iPad users by connecting to an agency's map data, whether it is published from ArcGIS Server or supplied by maps from ArcGIS Online. After successful testing at several agencies, Accela's iPad app, Accela Analytics, is now available for free to Accela Automation customers via Apple's iTunes App Store. With it, accessing the summary information for a permit, license application, or code case is as simple as tapping the map marker on the app's map.

Three of Accela Analytics' four screens connect to the Esri mapping engine for viewing geospatial data. Agencies and departments can view charts and graphs of activity, while maps show the location of records along with other related information. A Watch List screen drills down into each record, providing more detailed access to information such as the applicant name or parcel number. Because all information is read-only, items in the list can be removed without affecting the back-end data.

"Accela Analytics lets users track a range of application trends, such as inspections, open cases, and so forth," said Spink. "A

supervisor can view building permits, licensing activity, and other kinds of records in chart form and then tap the corresponding locations on the map to see address, record type, and record ID of the items represented in the chart."

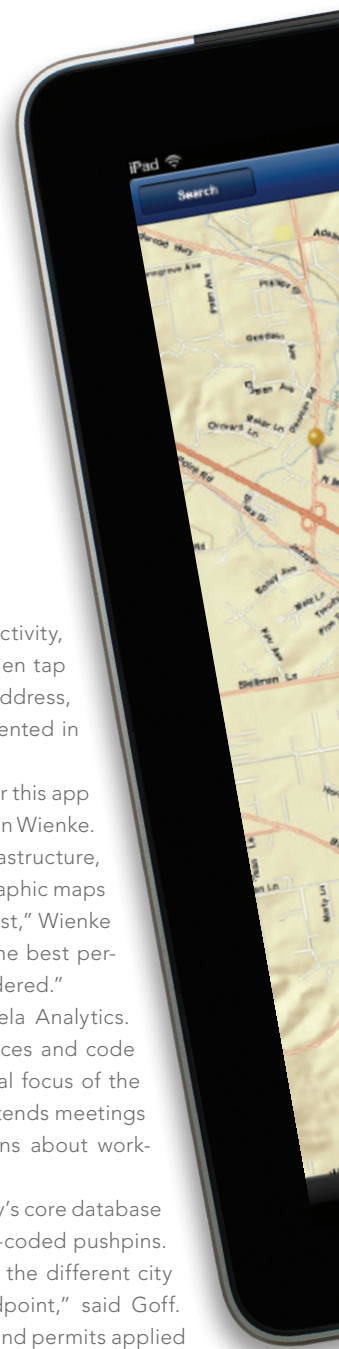
Speed and flexibility were paramount goals for this app according to Accela senior product manager Brian Wienke. "For agencies that may not have robust GIS infrastructure, our vision was to provide them with rich cartographic maps that look good, are easy to deploy, and render fast," Wienke said. "Esri's ArcGIS Online solution provided the best performance of all the mapping solutions we considered."

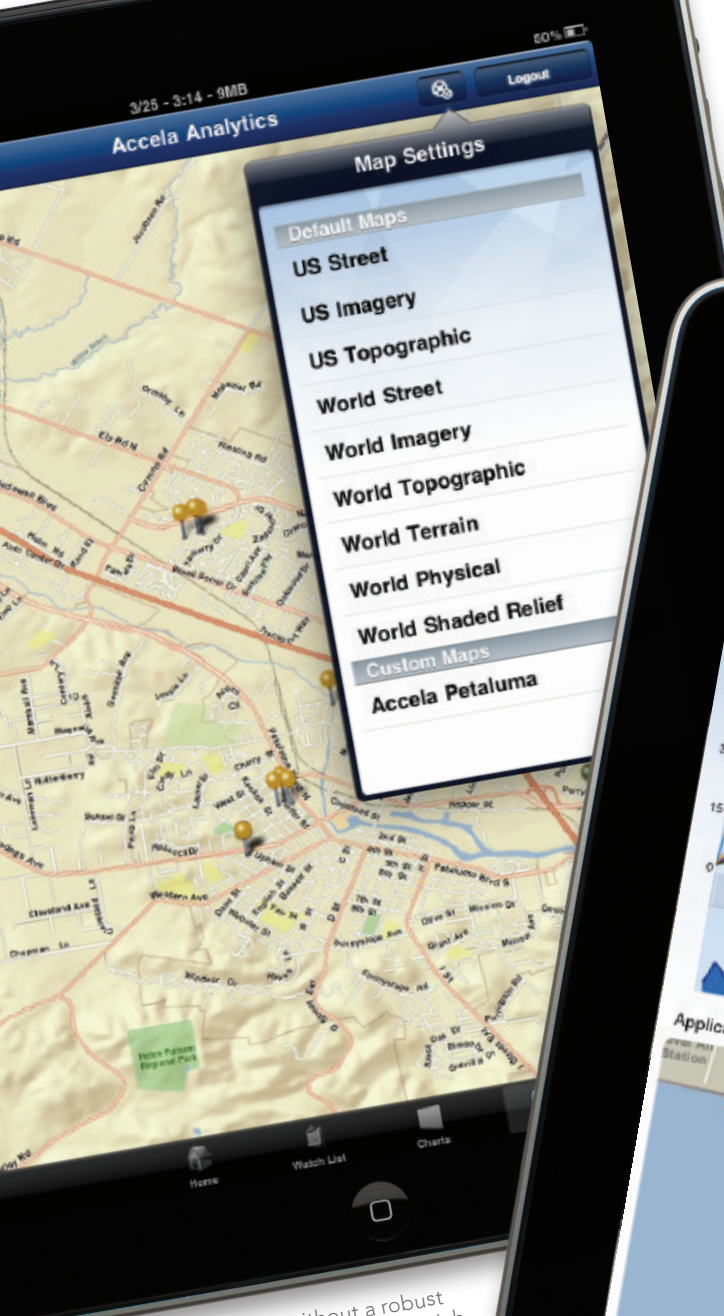
Salt Lake City was an early adopter of Accela Analytics. Orion Goff, the city's director of building services and code compliance, appreciates that maps are a central focus of the app. Like any city department manager, Goff attends meetings with government managers who have questions about workgroup activity and labor distribution.

The 16 different workgroups that share the city's core database are clearly represented on the map using color-coded pushpins. "That gives managers a broad view of what all the different city workgroups are doing from a statistical standpoint," said Goff. Current figures, such as the number of licenses and permits applied for in a given area, can be called up in an instant with just a few taps and swipes.

Goff also uses Accela Analytics to monitor building inspection calls. "Analytics makes access to the data for the purpose of administering processes really simple and quick," said Goff. "For example, I'm in a conference right now and checking how many inspections are scheduled for our building inspector group." From the app, Goff can drill down into the data to see if the number of inspectors is sufficient on a given day and balance the load if it isn't.

Like Goff, Keith Alvis, who is the maintenance management coordinator for the city of Westminster, Colorado, also uses the app to manage his resource needs. "If I need to reference asset data in my meeting, all I have to do is open the app and tap the location, and all the information is there," Alvis said. Analytics also lets Alvis see the quantity of calls received over time and allows him to graph out the number of calls received over a designated date range. "If we see that certain customer service calls trend up or down, this may give us an indication of future resources that may be needed," he added.





↓ Accela Analytics gives real-time access to enterprise data displayed as charts, graphs, and maps.



↑ For agencies without a robust GIS, the iPad app can use the rich cartographic maps from Esri's ArcGIS Online.

"Government transparency isn't just important for the public. It's also vital to give critical workers a window into the impact of enterprise technology on their operations, wherever and whenever they need it," said Maury Blackman, Accela CEO and president. With shrinking budgets and ever-increasing workloads, governments

need simple oversight tools that present enterprise information in real time. Working in tandem with enterprise systems that leverage GIS, iPad apps like Accela Analytics provide the ideal launching point for viewing the back-end data that drives government and business operations.