A Case for Integration

Maine's Department of Corrections migrates to an automated offender-management system—and opts for xwave's fully-integrated, web-based CORIS solution

There are a number of states across the U.S. whose four areas of correctional services—adult institution, adult community, juvenile institution, and juvenile community—are all governed under one jurisdiction. Maine is one such state: the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) uses one centralized administrative system to look after offenders of all ages, both within correctional facilities and under community supervision.

This method of management was a key consideration when Maine decided to fully automate its offender-management operations. "There were eight bidders, and four final demos presented to us," says Dave Packard, Agency Technology Officer for the Maine DOC. "Only xwave showed us a solution that was both web-based *and* fully-integrated."

The solution is CORIS (Corrections Information System). CORIS supports all prison services, community corrections, and central office management, and provides a holistic, or complete, view of offender status and history.

Prior to adopting CORIS, the Maine DOC was using six different legacy systems, all implemented independently of one another. Over the years, they had become increasingly disparate. Some systems, built by developers who had since left the state, contained information that couldn't be retrieved. Other systems had mushroomed into elaborate homegrown networks whose sporadic and inconsistent operation made data analysis almost impossible.

The simple sharing of information among all relevant stakeholders became a daunting challenge. Dave Packard offers the example of community caseworkers who, due to the inadequacies of the legacy systems, had collected case histories on their laptops that were not being stored in a central database.

The fact that the adult and juvenile and institutional and community systems didn't comply with one another posed another significant challenge: that of tracking offenders over the course of their entire history with the Department.

"There was no effective, centralized means of managing information," says Packard. "The need to be able to globally query the system—and obtain a holistic view of offender profiles and program effectiveness—formed a large part of the impetus that got this project underway."

CORIS provides the DOC with that global-query capability: the solution monitors all offenders and—because it is web-based—can easily make data available to all relevant users: corrections officers, community workers, courts, family services, and public-safety agencies. CORIS is not a collection of independent modules. Nor is it a client-server or mainframe system that's been web-enabled. It has been built from the ground up as a complete integrated solution that, using Microsoft's .NET web-based architecture, merges seamlessly with legacy systems. **xwave** is,

incidentally, the preferred offender-management solution provider for Microsoft's state and local government (SLG) clients.

"These government agencies are dealing with tight budgets and strained resources," says Tom Demerson, Director of Systems Integration at **xwave**. "There isn't the money to go out and hire more people. The alternative, therefore, is to do more with what you currently have." CORIS, he says, helps corrections agencies overcome their operational constraints by improving the operations. The fact, for example, that data is keyed into the system only once—and is then available immediately to all system users in real-time—significantly streamlines the DOC's administrative workload.

Modeled on the award-winning Client Information System developed for the Government of New Brunswick, CORIS is—first and foremost—an operational system: it was designed by users, for users. It manages four key areas of administration. The first encompasses offender profile: this includes demographics; photos; security alerts; special medical needs; sentence calculation; and automatic release-notification for victims. The second area of administration is prison management: security classification; housing; offender movement; job assignments; daily schedules; and financial management. Thirdly, CORIS handles community-based corrections: investigations; risk assessment; treatment plans; caseload management. Finally,

"Only xwave showed us a solution that was both web-based and fully-integrated."

Dave Packard, Agency Technology Officer for the Maine DOC

CORIS supports all administrative functions related to tracking, reporting and security.

The solution is fully scalable, and accommodates varying sizes of offender population. Prior to its launch, it underwent rigorous scalability testing in a Microsoft lab, having large volumes of offenders, users and metrics added to it. The results were positive: the solution scaled in a linear manner, directly in proportion to the capacity of the database and web-application servers.

The Maine Department of Corrections' total offender population is 15,000, with 2,300 of those housed in eight facilities state-wide. About 1,400 DOC employees look after that population and approximately 700 are regular CORIS users. They've been onboard since fall 2003, adopting the solution in three incremental phases. Phase one delivered basic offender-management capabilities; phase two, classification, visitation, discipline, grievance, and financials; phase three includes interfaces with Public Safety's Criminal History Information System, and the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). When the first phase was rolled out, all six DOC legacy systems were migrated simultaneously; this was deemed feasible given Maine's relatively small offender population. While there is, regardless of size, a certain amount of business risk in this kind of migration, Tom Demerson points out that for Maine, the risk was outweighed by the advantage of eliminating the cost of long-term

bridging between old and new systems.

So far, Dave Packard is pleased with the results: "We now have a tool that will allow us to analyze program effectiveness, viewing specific elements such as the number of new intakes, the rate of recidivism, sentence length, and amount served to date… The broad sharing of such data offers significant benefits both to offenders and administrators."

In addition to facilitating the sharing of data, CORIS has also improved the integrity of the data. Packard cites the example of the universal drop-down fields that ensure users entering data are consistent. "In the old system," he explains, "administrators might describe brown eyes in any number of ways: 'brown', 'br', 'brn', and so on. CORIS offers one spelling, and everyone selects the same option."

Data integrity had, in fact, been a particularly troublesome issue prior to adopting CORIS—for parole officers, as an example, meeting clients at locations where there was no Internet connectivity, and therefore no easy means of receiving and relaying information. As mentioned earlier, these workers were acquiring extensive case histories that were being stored on their laptops or on paper but frequently were not shared agency-wide.
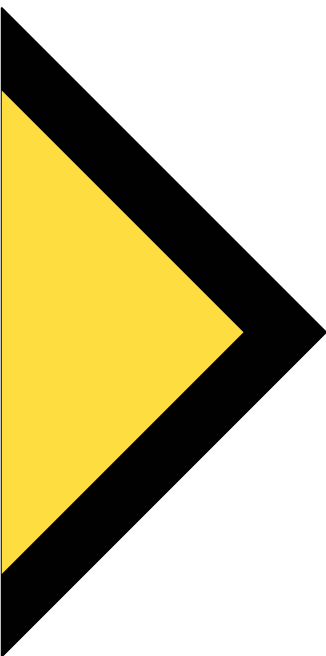
"There isn't the money to go out and hire more people. The alternative, therefore, is to do more with what you currently have."

Tom Demerson, Director of Systems Integration at **xwave**

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For this reason, the DOC wanted a solution that offered field workers effective off-line capabilities—while maintaining data consistency and integrity in the on-line system. **xwave** solved the problem by developing an XML data store that resides on each laptop; upon logging on, users simply upload and download current information. "Everyone's on the same page," says Dave Packard, "yet from an administrative standpoint, there's almost no extra work."

Another notable success, says Packard, was the company's ability to 're-gear' part-way into the project. "We were several months into it when we expressed a strong desire to implement CORIS as a complete .NET solution. **xwave** understood our reasoning and did a remarkable job of retooling their team and delivering a great product on schedule and on budget." He adds this observation: "They were the only company that didn't try to simply push a product on us. They made it clear that they had the experience and technology we needed, but that ultimately, they would provide whatever system worked best for us."

In considering the broad operational benefits of CORIS, Dave Packard uses the word 'continuity'. In his words: "We now have a continuity of information that allows us to understand clients better. We can determine appropriate treatment, and follow up on it."

He adds, "It's one thing to develop standards for governing offender management and agency administration—it's another thing to consistently implement those standards across institutions and probation offices. CORIS helps us meet that challenge."

And while he believes Maine still has a way to go before it can fully leverage the benefits of CORIS—the solution is still, in his eyes, relatively untapped—he quickly adds this qualifier: "The infrastructure is there. The promise is all there."

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