NSW Department of Customer Service unifies projects portfolio with Microsoft Power Platform and 365

COMPANY NAME
Department of Customer Service (DCS)

INDUSTRY
Government

LOCATION(S)
Australia

HEADQUARTERS
Sydney, New South Wales

The NSW Department of Customer Service (the Department) is one of the State government's 10 main departments, and is made up of more than 30 agencies, entities, and business units. Its 12,000 people focus on delivering excellence in customer service, digital leadership and innovation, with their work impacting millions of people each day.

When the Department was established in July 2019, it assumed most of the functions of the previous Department of Finance, Services and Innovation. It also inherited functions from several other NSW Government departments, agencies, entities and business units.

According to Nathan Frick, PPM Altus Product Owner at the Department, these divisions often brought with them different ways of working.

"For instance, Service NSW, which is essentially the front door for citizens and businesses to interact with government digitally or in person, has a very speed-to-market focus," he explains. "In all of its projects, the importance is on getting them up and out and going very quickly."

"Whereas if you compare something that's being delivered in Digital NSW, that's more about defining policies and standards as to how things should be done across government consistently and meeting that right standard, so they might have a different working pace."

"Those different ways of working and slightly different cultures have resulted in some traditional [project management] silos across the cluster."

The Department wanted to break down those silos and improve transparency across its portfolio of work. However, its existing project and portfolio management (PPM) technology only provided visibility of some projects. The PPM solution had also become very expensive to maintain and didn't support reporting enhancements, which made it difficult for the Department to develop project reports.

"We needed a new solution that enabled us to consolidate all of our data in one place to ensure that we make the right investment decisions going forward," says Frick.

Guided by Sensei

Following a thorough process, the Department chose to replace its existing PPM technology with Altus from Microsoft partner, Sensei. The solution is built on the Microsoft Power Platform.

Altus is designed to help organisations track portfolios of work and align them with their business strategy, while also balancing resource utilisation, optimising work processes, fostering collaboration and enabling objective decision-making through trustworthy insights. It also integrates seamlessly with various task management tools and line-of-business systems.

"We were able to work closely with DCS to understand and refine the key outcomes they required when connecting their projects across multiple agencies and departments, and how this created business value," says Paul Oppong, Sensei's project lead for the implementation. "DCS presented a high innovation appetite, and together we aligned on what success looked like, prioritised the big rocks, and forged a fun-to-work-with team working shoulder to shoulder, to deliver key business outcomes."

He adds, "As Altus is built on the Microsoft Power Platform, DCS were in a strong position to leverage their investment in Microsoft technology to create a robust project management solution across the department. Further integrations with other Line of Business systems, like SAP, enhanced their access to data providing reliable and visible information for all teams and importantly, to leadership."

After three months of development sprints, which included customising the solution to represent its complex organisational structure, the Department launched Altus at the beginning of July 2022.

"We had to get the product live [by 1 July] and that timeframe was dictated by retiring our legacy system," explains Colin Munro, Project Manager at the Department. "Sensei brought their expertise to the table and our teams worked really well together."

Platform's capabilities creating "a lot of excitement"

There has been a strong uptake of Altus across the Department, with approximately 2000 users and counting. Frick says the platform's user-friendliness and intuitiveness is one of the main reasons behind its rapid adoption.

"A lot of people were already using Power BI for their data analysis and visualisation functions, so being able to easily take a Power BI report and, for instance, publish it outside of Altus on SharePoint, is great," he explains. "That's functionality that we didn't have previously."

"It's also great to have all [the] information in one place so we can start to slice and dice it more reliably using a powerful tool like Power BI."

Altus is also enhancing productivity by automating and streamlining manual processes, further empowering the Department to make more informed investment decisions at speed.

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"We are now able to have visibility across multiple project types, bringing a whole of Department perspective to how are we tracking on our commitments."

Daniela Polit, Director of Portfolio Management and Assurance, Corporate Services, DCS

"Having a view across the entire Department and being able to reinforce governance, because we have better transparency and visibility, is creating a lot of excitement among our leaders and project managers."

Munro notes that Altus' advanced integration capabilities will be key for extracting and ingesting large volumes of transactional data from its SAP financial management system.

"Ideally, what we would like is a one-way flow of data out of SAP and into the Altus environment to display the actual transaction expense information against each project for the project managers," he explains.

"If we can achieve that, then phase two might be writing back the approved budgets from Altus into SAP. It is a gap in [our finance team's] existing process and they're keen to validate that in the near future."

CONTACT INFORMATION

📞 1300 SENSEI

✉️ LetsChat@Sensei.Cloud

🌐 www.sensei.cloud