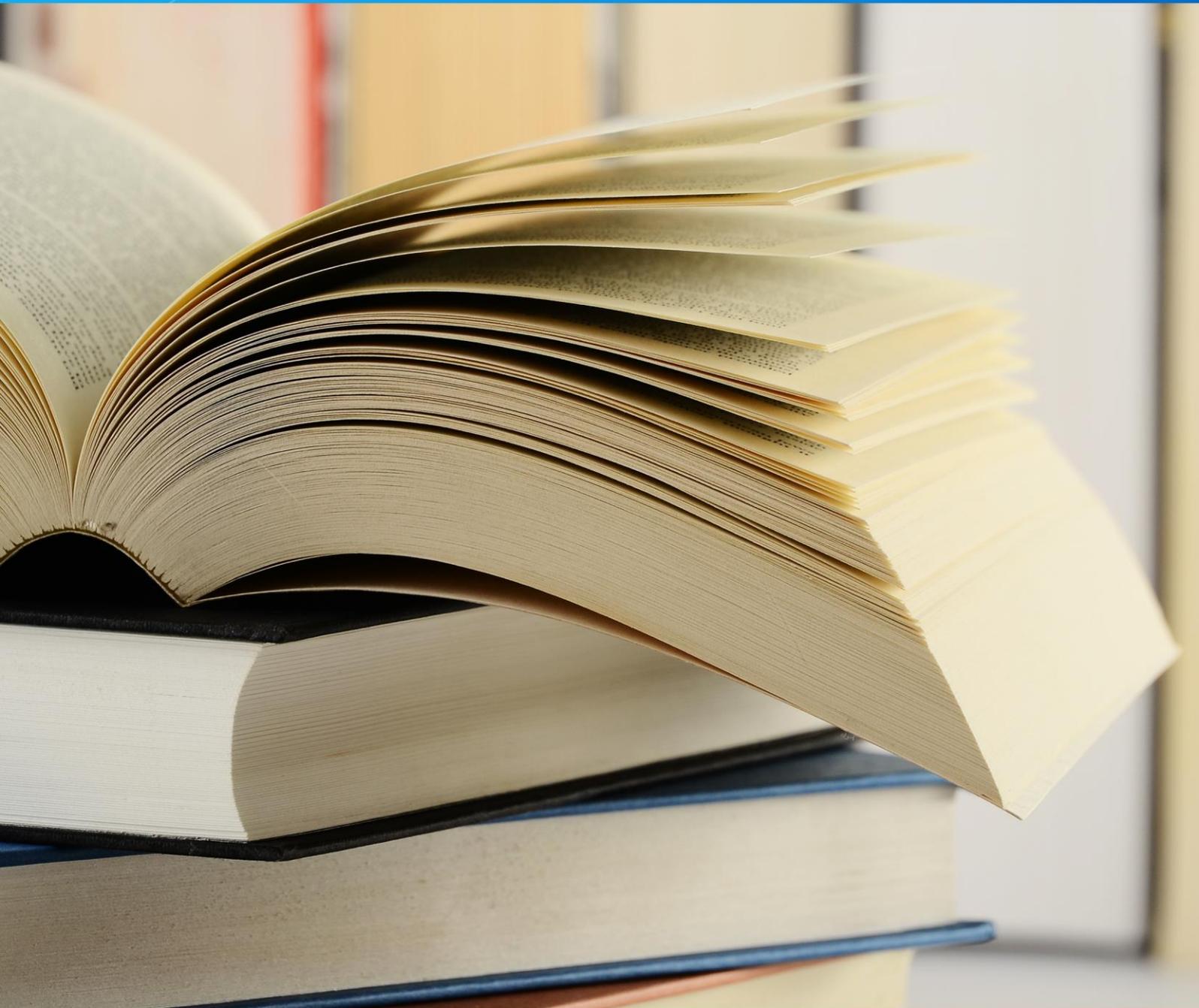




CASE STUDIES

ITQAN Helms State-of-the-Art Portal Project for ADEC





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Introduction

ITQAN has always cultivated its status as the key and renowned implementer of enterprise content management projects, as well as being the foremost introducer of this horizontal of solutions in the UAE. Together with Microsoft, a longstanding partner that recognized ITQAN 15 times in the past 18 years, this power duo has revolutionized operations and introduced a higher level of automation in several organizations across the UAE. The caliber of these projects and the added value experienced by such organizations has undoubtedly made ITQAN the "go-to" solutions provider in this field. The breadth of solutions offered by ITQAN in this domain is not restricted to portal solutions. The complete spectrum of content management solutions is a firm component of ITQAN's portfolio, covering areas such as document management system, imaging and archiving, workflows and integration, and web applications. Throughout its course, ITQAN migrated more than 100 million documents to the digital era.

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The Need

There were several triggering factors that prompted the decision to recreate a more advanced and sophisticated portal that would meet the needs and demands of ADEC and simultaneously reflect the prestigious and important status that ADEC holds.

Before ITQAN implemented this portal, ADEC’s data was scattered across the portal in a highly disorganized and troublesome manner. There was no classification of data according to departments or functions, and the portal map was not structured in a way that would make users find the documents they need easily. This drawback made the portal a burden more than anything, with an absence of a centralized document library. Furthermore, there wasn’t any integration with any application. The HR application for instance that regulates the leave system was working individually, and the communication between the HR department and the rest of the organization was not ideal. A common need across organizations when requesting the deployment of a portal is to allow the HR team to communicate with the employees in an automated, efficient means that saves time for both parties. However, the former state of ADEC’s portal made the departments and divisions segregated from one another and working in silos. In a way, it wasn’t going to be that much of a difference if there wasn’t any portal in the first place, because the benefits of a portal were not experienced to their full potential. And even though the older portal was built on MOSS, there was not any customization. Instead it consisted of out-of-the-box features that did not allow any ADEC branding to customize the portal and mold it according to its needs and preferences. An organization as crucial as ADEC requires specific features that can be configured with the help of an experienced and veteran technology partner. In essence, ADEC needed to have the new portal aggregate information by allowing ADEC stakeholders to create, share, and publish documents from a single access point. The portal is planned to create a single point of entry for all ADEC backend systems such as the ERP, eSIS® and other line-of-business applications and services with a seamless user experience.

The way content was added to or modified in the portal was far from ideal and posed a huge risk on the performance of the portal. ADEC users were formerly using CMS (content management system), which literally is an archaic and extremely inefficient means to add content and manage a portal. The content is continuously added to the server, burdening and overloading it with data and consequently slowing it down. With 15,000 users accessing the portal, this was far from acceptable. All pages were static and the forms were not automated via proper business processes that can even verify the data. It was simply neither reliable nor comprehensive.

A goal that ADEC is trying to reach with this portal is to basically become a model of governance excellence. Having a portal of this caliber is definitely the right means to reach this vision, since ITQAN wholeheartedly believes that IT is the best means to achieve business goals. The state of the portal before ITQAN’s overhaul was definitely an impediment to this goal, and ADEC knew it needed to upgrade its performance to a much higher level.

The Solution

ITQAN delivered this portal using the MOSS (Microsoft Office SharePoint Server) 2007 technology. MOSS 2007, a server program part of the 2007 Microsoft Office system, provides a unified, integrated repository

where members of an organization can efficiently collaborate with team members, find resources, search for expert information and manage content and the workflow. Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 supports all Intranet, Extranet, and Web applications across an enterprise within one integrated platform, instead of relying on segregated fragmented systems.

ITQAN also utilized the Web Content Management Features and SharePoint Designer Workflows for simple external workflows. Moreover, InfoPath 2007 was availed to create the online forms within a short period of time. This has increased the productivity for the development team and the quality by minimizing the coding part for the forms.

The portal would also be integrated to other applications, namely the ERP system, the ADEC-customized application e-SIS, and the Active Directory.

The Benefit

Both sides of the portal were developed based on MOSS 2007, and are characterized by their unique features and breadth of functionalities that go beyond the capabilities of a regular portal.

The Intranet portal was developed to accommodate nearly 15,000 users. Fundamentally, the core need was providing a central point or repository of information that employees can access to extract important information, collaborate with each other and have an automated mode of operations that should ultimately result in processes being completed in a faster, easier and more accurate manner. The portal was designed in a way where every employee has a section solely dedicated to him/her, known as “My Site”. All requests residue in this personalized section, either forwarded by the employee or forwarded to him/her. The employee’s line manager can assign a task for instance, which will automatically appear at “My Site”. The portal also includes the HR self-services section, which is easily and directly laid out on the homepage, and is a constant indicator of the employee’s leave balance. Needless to say, every employee has an individualized homepage in the portal as soon as s/he logs in. Besides the leave balance, the employee can also view the status of pending requests forwarded to the HR department. The data in this function is automatically loaded to the ERP system, which typically is integrated to the portal. The portal is also integrated to the Active Directory, which consequently allows for the presence of an instant indicator of the number of employees who joined the company and enable the search for employees via a comprehensive employee search engine. A user can click on the user icon or profile and gain access to the employee’s background, experience, hobbies, etc., which is typical information provided in every employee profile. This is powered by Ajax technology with no “post back”. Furthermore, there is also a school finder search engine that allows users to find and locate schools with the help of Google maps.

Self e-services are not only restricted to the HR department; employees among themselves can communicate through e-services. For instance an employee can make a request to translate a document or call for a support engineer or register an asset check-out through automated processes available in the portal. The requests reach the concerned personnel for approval through a workflow chain and the request is acted on accordingly.

The Intranet portal was designed in such a way that it is also availed as a document management system. The data is no longer stored in storage area networks, or SANs. Instead MOSS will be the central point for all data and external users such as the partners, parents, etc., who will have specific credentials to access the portal, and gain access to specific documents of importance to them. The documents in the portal are

also version controlled with check-in and check-out facilities that trace modifications made to the document through an audit trail. There is also an automatic archiving system that archives the documents after a set expiration date. All documents in the portal are intelligently stored and managed, making sure they facilitate operations and are constantly within reach.

Two of the most unique customizations of this portal entail the Projects Section and Department Websites. Employees who are part of a project will access the Projects Section, with each of them exclusively granted specific access rights to view this section of the portal. In this section they would find all documents related to the projects, and have the opportunity to discuss and interact with other project team members via discussion forums and message boards. Another extremely broad and intelligent feature is the Department Websites. Every department in ADEC has a website, organized in this way: The departments are organized by sectors. There are 7 sectors in ADEC, each having 5-10 divisions. Each division has 2-3 sections. For every sector there is what is called a site collection. In the site collection you would find:

1. Latest news pertaining to every sector
2. Project details – project name and project completion status
3. Tasks – assigned by manager, HR or other team members. There is also an SMS gateway integrated to this functionality that gives a notification to the employee through SMS.
4. Employee directory for every sector, with an outline of all the employees' roles.
5. Discussions boards, forums, wikis, events, and all MOSS features are in these department websites.

Other features of the portal include the news, announcements and events, which are all specific to ADEC internal affairs. The news section is actually imported through the Internet part of the portal and appears automatically in the Intranet portal. After a specified period of time it automatically moves to the press releases section. Other features include a weather forecast updated through RSS feeds, prayer times' notifications, and an e-magazine whose layout was also designed by ITQAN.

One of the unique aspects of this portal is highly the available, redundant and secure hardware platform. The architecture and infrastructure backend is almost a datacenter upheld by 17 servers. The portal is powered by the most state-of-the-art infrastructure to ensure maximum reliability, scalability and continuous availability. Through a redundant and secure architecture, a sudden data crash or technical glitch will not pose a risk to the performance of the portal, and the data is almost never prone to getting lost. There is a total of 60 to 70 GB of data upheld by this infrastructure setup to have it available to 15,000 users, so maximum reliability and availability was not an option.

The beauty of this solution is how it's literally a portal. Unfortunately many of the portals designed and developed lately are not true to the meaning of the word portal. The solution designed by ADEC is a gateway to all sorts of information required by ADEC employees. It is not just a central point where employees can easily communicate with each other. It is a gateway and unified source of information, which is facilitated by the integration of MOSS with several solutions:

1. ERP system: this is how the HR processes are automated whereby HR and payroll modules in the system relay the information to the portal and control the processes.

2. e-SIS: this is a custom-made system developed for ADEC that connects all schools, universities, institutions and everything regulated by ADEC, together with providing a unified information framework for all entities under its name. Through this integration, there is the school finder module, which is further integrated to Google maps. You don't only find the school, but you can track it based on its location with a detailed and highly advanced visual representation.

3. Active Directory: through this integration, there is the employee finder module. An employee looking for a fellow colleague to make a request or collaborate on a joint assignment will have the search process vastly facilitated with this feature. Employee profiles can also be pulled via this integration.

4. Integration between Intranet and Internet: both are opposite sides of the spectrum but at the same time should not operate in silos. News from the Internet automatically reaches the Intranet and then gets archived after their expiration date.

"ITQAN implements and accomplishes projects on a usual basis, but there are always some unique exceptions held at a particularly esteemed and high regard. ADEC's portal is one of these projects that ITQAN immensely prides itself with. We aspire it opens the door for a fruitful partnership between us and ADEC where we can both work together on initiatives that support IT and education in the UAE," said Al-Jabi.