How one council solved its delegation management challenges

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How Sutherland Shire solved its complex delegation management challenges

A routine internal audit identified the need for more automation, increased efficiencies and better management of assigned delegations. Here’s how the Sutherland Shire Council made it happen.

BY TREVOR ROWLING AND ALEX PALMER

In today’s litigious society it is crucial that the delegations handed to Council staff are accurately recorded and managed. This can be extremely challenging for organisations like the Sutherland Shire Council with over 400 staff who require different levels and types of delegations.

Managing and reporting on hundreds of delegations against just as many staff is by no means a trivial task to start and is made all the more difficult by people changing roles within their department, staff departing and new staff commencing. This problem was brought sharply into focus recently when a large council in the New South Wales region had to remove its entire senior management team as a result of a failure to properly manage delegated authority.

No proper system was in place to monitor and track who had permission to sign off and approve particular building budgets. This resulted in staff, in most cases inadvertently, carrying out activities and making approvals without the correct authorisation.

A routine internal audit at Sutherland Shire Council highlighted the need to strengthen its own processes in this area. Council needed a more automated and efficient process to easily manage and view its users, and all of their assigned delegations.
Trevor Rowling, Manager of Administration and Governance at Sutherland Shire Council, contacted Seamless (SSC’s content management system provider) to discuss the concept.

He explains his role as project manager: “I originally approached Seamless and asked them to develop a delegations management system for Sutherland Shire Council. The process we were using was very manual and as a result very time consuming. The new system needed to manage the whole end-to-end process, and make it easy to set up and track the many delegations we have to deal with. Over 400 staff at the council had delegation responsibilities, many of which continually need to be altered and updated.”

“As project manager I was involved right from the very outset, and worked with Seamless throughout development and delivery of the final system. As well as providing a simple way to view and manage delegations via Browser (we didn’t want to install yet another application on their computers), the system needed to be easy to set up and maintain.”

**HOW SUTHERLAND SHIRE DESIGNED ITS DELEGATIONS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

To drive the design of the solution, Sutherland Shire mapped its delegations process and identified the most time elements of the process. Five key areas were identified as keys to success.

**1 User management**

SSC needed to get a large amount of users from across different corporate applications (HR & Payroll, Active directories) into its new delegations system.

To simplify this process, we built the delegations software to read staff details directly from our Payroll system, and let us set up users directly within the delegations software or bulk import users from a range of file formats including SQL, CSV and XML.

We designed the software to support a large range of fields during the import process (such as photos, location, multiple roles) to ensure there was no extra re-keying of information.

Using bulk imports, hundreds of users can be imported in a matter of minutes.

**2 Roles management**

Because of regular staff changes, we made a conscious decision to build the software around roles rather than individuals. This ensured that delegations assigned to roles were automatically propagated to the right individuals without requiring any additional effort, particularly when staff changes occurred.

Just like users, we were able to either create roles directly in the software or import them into the system via standard file formats such as CSV and XML. (and group them into hierarchical folders for ease of maintenance to better manage staff changes).

**3 Delegations management**

Most importantly for our non technical users – delegations had to be easy to set up, categorise and assign. Because of the large number of delegations we had to manage (some of which are quite complex and consist of multiple components) we developed a tree-view approach.

We found this was the most logical and intuitive way to manage our delegations – and combined with an intuitive desktop style interface – allowed users to import or right-click and create new delegations and sub-delegations within minutes.

Once delegations are created, they can be assigned to roles and users, and the system handles all subsequent version management so we can see how the delegation changes and evolves over time.

**4 Reporting**

Since one of the drivers of the project was improved compliance, a key feature of the system was the ability to see the full history of each delegation.

The history report needed to give us a complete and accurate picture of how any given delegation has been used and managed with Sutherland Shire Council at any point in time.

The delegations software automatically tracks any changes to the details of the delegation (such as its name or any of its properties), and records assignments of the delegation to and from users and roles.

Because this was such a regularly used feature, we extended the reporting capability to let users design custom reports based on any parameters (such as role, dates, delegations and more).

These reports could also include generic text, logos and information layout, and be sent to print for signing, and/or exported into PDF format to save as a permanent record.
THE SYSTEM NEEDED TO BE EASY TO SET UP AND MAINTAIN

5 Presentation

Once we set up our users, roles and delegations, we needed an intuitive and simple way for all staff to find this information.

As our intranet staff directory was already the primary point of reference for people/role based information, we linked the delegations system to automatically display what delegations a staff member holds, and allow intranet users to easily view, export to PDF or print off required delegations.

We can now introduce an advanced search on the intranet that allows staff to search for people based on delegation. We can also add any of the reporting screens from the software to operate directly from within our intranet, and using web services, extract any other information managed in the delegations system for output to any of our sites.

BENEFITS TO SUTHERLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Trevor Rowling thinks that the end result has met the significant challenges inherent in building a delegation management system. "The previous process for managing delegations was very time consuming, and not at all user friendly. One of the key success factors in this project was always going to be the speed and ease with which users could update information in the system. This objective has been achieved absolutely.

Similarly providing quick access to historic delegation information was extremely important. Management of this information is now simple to access and report on. Again Seamless have over delivered. We are extremely happy with the finished system and confident it solves what has been a significant problem area for us."

Leon Gelb, Director of Technology at Seamless, is already looking toward future enhancements to the system: "We have had some very positive feedback from Sutherland Shire Council, and are already looking at ways to improve the system further. We've already built the system as a standalone tool so other councils facing similar delegations challenges can configure and implement SSC's software in-house or subscribe to it as a web service."

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