

Case Study

St Albans City and District Council
Local Government
Outsourced Digital Transformation

Ricoh helps St Albans Council deliver digital transformation for mailroom services



St Albans City and District Council has a digital transformation strategy to improve services for customers and internal operations. But one area - outbound mail - was still a labour-intensive process. With Ricoh Mail

Solutions and Digital Technology Services, the council has automated the whole process. This is helping to reduce costs, improve efficiency and release resources to focus on more valuable functions and services.

Executive summary

Name: St Albans City and District Council
Location: Hertfordshire, UK
Size: 350 staff
Activity: Local Government

Challenges

- Improve services and operations through digital transformation
- Existing mail service labour-intensive and inefficient

Solution

- Ricoh Digital Transformation
- Ricoh Mail Solutions and Digital Technology Services

Benefits

- Helps council develop more effective digital operations
- Frees up resources for valuable, customer-service focused activities
- Reduces costs by 40%, outbound mail by up to 15%
- Automates and streamlines manual mailing processes
- Improves operational efficiency

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Challenges

St Albans City and District Council is the local government authority for the historic city of St Albans in Hertfordshire serving a community of around 129,000 people. Like many local authorities, St Albans is striving to deliver the best services to the community in the most efficient and cost-effective way. It sees digital transformation as a key enabler to achieve this goal. In the council's *Corporate Plan 2019-2024* it states that one of its priority projects is to "implement digital technologies to transform services for customers".

The council has already introduced the *MyStAlbans District Account* which is an online portal for customers to access and manage their council services. As well as outward-facing services, the council is also using technology to improve internal operations.

One area where the council saw it could improve operations was the mailroom. The council sends out thousands of letters every year to customers for things like council tax and benefits notifications, planning applications and parking offence information.

But the process was inefficient and labour-intensive. Staff were having to produce letters and manually select inserts, then send them to the mailroom. Volume mailouts for revenues and benefits were taking one person in the mailroom up to two hours every day. Since individuals were posting their own letters, it was difficult to keep a centralised view of items being posted.

Adam Staples, Digital Services Manager at St Albans City and District Council, says, "People used to print a letter, pick it up from the printer, go back to their desk, find inserts and envelope them. Then someone would collect the letter, take it to the mailroom to be franked and sent out the door. The



drive for change was to get rid of this painful process so staff could focus on more valuable activities."

Via its Local Government Framework, St Albans investigated several solutions from industry-leading service providers to help improve mailroom operations. One of the businesses on the framework roster is Ricoh. Staples says, "The tender response from Ricoh was the best match for our needs and demonstrated that Ricoh was capable of doing the job."

Solution

As part of Ricoh's Digital Transformation solution, St Albans City and District Council is using Ricoh Mail Solutions and Digital Technology Services to automate and outsource outbound mail. The first phase of the project involved revenue and benefits mail, but now it is being rolled out across the whole council to incorporate all outbound mailing. When staff create a letter they simply click print and it is automatically sent to a Ricoh Production Centre for processing and posting. At the centre letters are printed, sorted, relevant inserts added and then dispatched.

An online portal enables the council to track and audit mailroom operations so it can monitor activity accurately. Auditing data is available to other council systems so that when a customer contacts the council staff can see quickly relevant correspondence they have received.

The portal also allows users to preview their own letters before processing. Another feature of the solution that increases flexibility is the ability to schedule mailing so that letters can be prepared in advance and then sent automatically on due date.

While individuals usually handle single and low volume letter runs, the council's mailroom manages high volume runs. A typical daily mail out from the council is around 2,000 A4 letters each with an A5 and A4 insert.

Benefits

As a result of the new Ricoh service, St Albans has seen a significant improvement in mailroom operations. It has removed time-consuming, manual processes away from staff so they can concentrate on value-added, customer facing services. By automating the process, making it more efficient and monitoring the operation, the council has reduced the number of letters it sends out by up to 15 percent and reduced the overall cost of outbound mailing by 40 percent. Better and more accurate information enables management to identify where there are too many letters being sent and suggest more efficient or alternative communication tools.

continued overleaf

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"We were a bit nervous about introducing the Ricoh Managed Mailroom Service because it was a big change for staff. But now it's in place and operating effectively, we don't know how we coped without it. It supports the St Albans City and District Council's strategy to digitise services and operations by replacing manual functions with more cost effective and efficient processes," says Staples.

As well as helping individual staff, the service has reduced manual workload for the mail room and released staff to concentrate on more useful functions. The mailroom is now doing more document scanning and indexing to increase information digitisation.

One benefit of the Ricoh solution was looking at how the new mail service integrates with associated council operations to help make those more efficient as well. For example, if an individual's benefit entitlement changes and impacts council tax payments, it triggers a new letter process to inform the individual about the changes. Also, the system will automatically select the appropriate supporting inserts that need to go in the same envelope.

Improved auditing information is enabling management to identify where there appears to be a lot of mailing to see if it is necessary and if it can be replaced with an alternative form of digital communication.

Other council locations around St Albans benefit since they no longer need to have separate mailroom equipment and resources. Because mail is now an automated, digital service it can be accessed from any location including home and remote workers.

The first phase of the project has been for revenue and benefits communications. The next phase will see the technology rolled out to all council staff. This will help reduce demand on in-office print resources and deliver further cost saving by reducing the printer fleet and associated costs.

Ricoh Solution/Products

- Outsourced Outbound Mail Solutions
- Outsourced Managed Mailroom Service
- Outsourced Document Composition
- Outsourced Digital Transformation

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Adam Staples, Digital Services Manager, St Albans City and District Council

