



UNIT4 Agresso Case Study

Laguna Niguel

Reviewing hundreds of invoices at a time, searching through old boxes of documents and responding to a myriad of complex requests from the public; the city of Laguna Niguel has seen major improvements in efficiency and reduction in costs since switching to the UNIT4 Agresso ERP solution.

About Laguna Niguel

Nestled in the San Joaquin Hills of Orange County in southern California, Laguna Niguel is a warm, airy, colorful city that offers its residents stunning views of the Pacific Ocean and abundant year-round recreational opportunities. The enviable climate and generous proportion of green space and parkland have attracted an estimated 65 thousand people. From its origins as a 'turn-of-the-century' sheep ranch, to its incorporation in 1989, the city has prospered and it is no surprise that real-estate is its number one industry. Citizens there enjoy a truly exceptional community.

Laguna Niguel is a full contract city. The majority of its services, such as park and street maintenance, utilities, fire, and police are contracted out to private companies or outside agencies. The headcount at city hall is minimal; to oversee all the municipal operations and functions, there are only about 60 full-time employees and a similar number of part-time employees. This lean approach to permanent staff obviously translates into considerable oversight and management responsibilities, and it is clearly a successful strategy. In a resident satisfaction survey conducted by True North Research, an impressive 92 percent of residents were satisfied with the city's delivery of municipal services, and 98 percent of residents rated the quality of life as good or excellent.

Doubling the efficiency of Invoice Approval and improving the accuracy of Financial Statements

The finance department at Laguna Niguel, responsible for all financial reporting for the city, has only three full-time staff

and one part-time employee. They are a very busy group, led by Cheryl Dyas, Director of Finance. They went live with the UNIT4 Agresso Financials solution in 2006 and have since enjoyed significant improvements to efficiency and reduced costs.

"I love it – before, when approvals were manual, I couldn't even look at the invoices coming into the finance system from various departments until we actually cut the checks, because it was so difficult to keep track of them. I was getting hundreds of invoices at once and I had to address coding errors or approval issues afterwards," reveals Dyas. Now, using the workflow component of Agresso, invoices come into Laguna Niguel's finance department a few at a time, as they are approved, and Dyas can easily address any issues before the invoices are posted into the system. Fewer journals entries and more accurate financial statements are the result, "and that has been a big benefit to me in my role," adds Dyas.

Obviously, being able to click on an invoice in electronic format rather than hunt for a piece of paper is extremely beneficial. Laguna Niguel has only been using Agresso Workflow for about a year and a half so as time goes by it will become even more valuable as more historical information is stored electronically. It used to take an entire day to hunt down all the invoices from one of their bigger suppliers, who might generate dozens of invoices every month. Pulling, copying and filing all those invoices was terribly cumbersome, especially when the invoices were in storage. "With Agresso, it easily cuts the time we spend in half," adds Dyas.

Drastically reducing the cost of fulfilling public requests

The finance team at Laguna Niguel also responds to a lot of external requests for information – sometimes from the public or media, often from a contractor, auditors of course, and occasionally for litigation purposes. Sometime there could be 100+ warrants (or checks) associated with a request – with Agresso they save an enormous amount of time, and an enormous amount of paper. The city is obligated by law to fulfill all the information requests they receive, and aside from a nominal copy charge, they are not allowed to recover any of the costs they incur (including their time, the paper and printing costs, electricity, etc.). In addition to the environmental advantage of using Agresso, Laguna Niguel can save a significant amount of money in material costs. The most recent request Dyas recalls cost the city approximately \$500 in labor alone to fulfill, and she can count on four or more requests like this annually with the potential to cost Laguna Niguel thousands of dollars each year.

The finance team never knows when it is going to receive a really major request. “The worst case I can recall was when we had a public request to see all costs associated with every Council member ever elected to office, going back to Cityhood! The amount of time we spent on that was unbelievable. We had to pull out almost every box in our storage room,” states Dyas. “Fortunately now with Agresso, we can simply click on the warrant, bring up the scanned document and email it to the requester.”

Improved tracking of significant Capital Projects

Another area in which Agresso has helped Laguna Niguel is in tracking projects costs, especially on major capital projects such as the expansion to their senior center. Previously, all expenses associated with a project were grouped together under the same account code; the city could track the total cost of that project, but couldn't do any analysis, short of running a report and manually going through all the line items in the account. With Agresso, they have set up their account structure so they can properly track projects. For instance, construction costs are assigned to a construction account, and they assign the project name as an attribute of that cost. “Now I can run project reports by account, by vendor, by period; I have more flexibility, I get much better information, and I get it in minutes rather than hours,” observes Dyas.

Looking to the Future

With a recession building, the City of Laguna Niguel is considering the future. “Currently, we have managed to produce a balanced budget without cutting any staff or reducing any programs,” admits Dyas. “But we are starting to see hints that sales tax revenue and other revenue we get from the State are decreasing.” With this uncertainty, Laguna Niguel is prudently considering other UNIT4 tools that might help them plan for the future. “In the next few years, we see value in the “what-if” scenario comparisons that are possible in Agresso Planner, to help assess the best way to fund city operations given limited revenue” says Dyas. With more cities in the U.S. facing the squeeze of falling revenue, the need has never been greater for tools like Agresso that help reduce costs, streamline processes and respond to the unpredictable demands of an economic crisis.

About UNIT4 Business Software

UNIT4 Business Software is the North American subsidiary of UNIT4, a global business software and services company that creates, provides and supports software for Businesses Living IN Change – delivered via the cloud or on-premise. We offer solutions that help these fast-changing public, private, non-profit and higher education organizations embrace business change – simply, quickly and cost-effectively.

Our Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) suite, UNIT4 Agresso, is ideal for people- and service-centric organizations that face ongoing pressure to respond to change. Agresso users are able to make system changes themselves, without re-implementing or incurring external IT or services costs, benefiting from post-implementation agility, independence and control.

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