

PSC Open Source Case Study



Open Source Meets Journalists' Need for Quick Results

PSC trimmed the web application development process to three days.

The Problem – *Idea-to-application in less than a week*

The Client, a national publisher with local business publications in major U.S. cities, wanted to supplement their print and online publications with web applications that presented supporting data from their articles allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. This meant that each application had to be conceived and executed in the same week to coincide with the release of the associated print article, a process that could not be easily achieved with legacy programming technologies.

The Analysis – *Speed, control, and flexibility*

The client was serious about developing a better way to present information dynamically as part of their reporting process. For example, if they were running a story on their website about foreclosures, they would provide a link to the unfiltered source data that would be updated on a continuous basis. The obvious advantage was that the original story did not have to be re-written or republished every time the data changed.

The challenge was developing the supporting application within days of the editor's request. To keep the information fresh, the applications had to scale to accommodate spikes in traffic associated with their release, and had to be interactive enough to allow readers to explore data and draw their own conclusions. In many cases, the Client knew that application ideas would be vague at best, leaving the implementation details to the development team. The team would have to show a large amount of initiative and self-direction in order to fulfill the Client's vision, despite the fact that the vision might not be fully described until hours before launch time.

The Solution – *Flexible tools paired with flexible processes*

Although legacy programming technologies could have been used, PSC sensed that Open Source was tailor-made for this project. Not only was it less expensive, but it was also faster, and easier to create a state-of-the-art interactive mapping application.

Using the Django/ Python web framework created by several web developers working for the Lawrence Journal World newspaper, PSC found it to be particularly well suited for fast development in high pressure environments. To present data, a variety of methods were employed, including integration with the Google Maps API and several AJAX/Javascript utilities.

Since the Client was not able to provide utilities typically associated with development shops, like version control or a ticketing system, PSC implemented Trac, an Open Source collaboration tool that allows for development by groups spread across a large area. PSC was able to closely monitor the lifecycle of an application by properly identifying tasks and assigning them to a team of developers.

To meet the "instant" nature of this new way of reporting, PSC was able to provide multiple resources, ensuring quick delivery, timely communication, and quality execution. Where an application would have taken a long period of time to implement in the past, PSC was able to deliver software that fulfilled publication needs in just a few short days. During the dynamic and somewhat chaotic development process, demos of the developing product were presented to the client on a near-hourly basis in order to minimize rework and ensure that the Client's vision was being realized.

The Technology

- Django/Python Web Framework
- Google Maps API
- AJAX / Javascript

The Benefits

- Reduced costs
- Reduced development time
- Allow readers to draw their own conclusions by presenting data in an open format



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PSC Group, LLC is an information-technology and professional services consulting firm that specializes in business process architecture and back-end integration. We have extensive experience in developing innovative ways to maximize profitability and improve internal processes using Open Source technologies.

As trusted advisors to businesses who view IT as a strategic resource, we focus on business processes, portals, website and on-line development, and application integration.

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