



Case Study:

New CAMA Product Results in Dramatic Increase in Unaccounted Revenue and Large Operational Savings for Pickens County, SC, Assessor's Office

Abstract: Colorado CustomWare's CAMA product, RealWare, has helped the Pickens County, SC, Assessor's Office establish fair and equitable values, and has enabled them to bring in an additional \$1 million dollars in unaccounted mobile home tax revenue. Tax Assessor David Day set out to identify and rectify inefficiencies like duplicative administrative functions and lack of data sharing. After forming a committee with various departments, Day realized the need for a fully integrated CAMA system. He selected Colorado CustomWare due to the functionality of the product, RealWare, and the reputation of expertise and excellent service within the company. The system has increased office efficiency with a \$260,000 reduction in reassessment-operational costs. The integration of Colorado CustomWare's CAMA system has paid for itself, while benefiting County employees, residents, and property owners.



David Day Pickens County Assessor



Pickens County Assessor Links Data with RealWare

Pickens County is a rural community of more than 112,000 residents in Northwestern South Carolina. Encompassing some of the most beautiful, pristine parts of the state, the county has enjoyed steady growth and the development of several new posh lakeside resorts. With the county experiencing sustained prosperity, the Pickens County Council challenged each and every department to support its objective to improve the efficiency and public service of county government.

Under the direction of David Day, Pickens County tax assessor, the assessor's office set about to identify, and then rectify, many of the process inefficiencies that plague similar municipalities throughout the country. Day and his team found that many of their processes were outdated and required duplicate and time-consuming administrative functions. More importantly, though, they found their current technology platform – comprised of two completely separate, proprietary systems – resulted in a total lack of data sharing. This forced residents and county employees alike to access and process assessor and GIS mapping data separately, a highly inefficient process considering the close relationship of each set of land-related data.

Lastly, the tax assessor recognized that his department had yet to harness the power of the Internet. Having the ability to offer online data to residents, including digital photos, GIS data, house sketches, field data, building code information, deeds, property cards and other forms, would greatly improve county service and reduce printing and production costs.

The Need for Integrated CAMA

With a clear need for improved technology identified, Day and his associates in Information Systems and GIS formed a committee to identify the most cost-effective and proven software on the market. The team knew that advanced Computer Aided Mass Appraisal (CAMA) systems had the ability to manage all land records, imaging and GIS information from a single, totally integrated database.

"We recognized that a fully integrated CAMA system would offer more flexibility to end-users, reduce redundant data entry functions and eliminate year-end processing backlogs," said Day. "We decided to attend one of the major trade conventions to review all of the latest technology offerings available. From there, we created a short list of vendors and began a more in-depth analysis."

After a rigorous review process, Pickens County selected Colorado CustomWare's (www.coloradocustomware.com) RealWare™ and FieldWare™ software solutions. The Fort Collins, Colo.-based firm offers customizable software modules designed as two-tier client/server applications that run in an open systems environment. RealWare uses Oracle as its supporting database and provides the technical foundation for all CAMA functions. The FieldWare module allows assessors to remotely collect property data and then port the information back to the RealWare software engine.

"We selected Colorado CustomWare over five other competing solutions," explained Day. "Colorado CustomWare demonstrated its domain expertise immediately by configuring a CAMA package that met our exact needs – not their desires. Its reference customers all offered the highest praise for both the people and services they provide, as well as the elegant, highly intuitive software that seamlessly integrates the entire spectrum of tax assessor, imaging and GIS functions."

RealWare and FieldWare In Action

After going live with the system in May 2001, Day and his team have seen a complete transformation of their assessor systems and procedures. Internally, the benefits have been most



profound in the area of data integration. For example, Day said his agency now offers a real-time, single-entry permit system that links building permit data with parcel data, maintains the status of all permits, tracks mobile home registration, permitting and valuation, provides appeals tracking and calculates the total mill levy for each county district. The software also has virtually eliminated data input errors made each year through its user-friendly, rules-based data input interface.

Perhaps the most significant benefit to date of deploying the RealWare software program is the improved degree of equity and uniformity of tax assessments and collections. In addition to ensuring that property owners all pay their fair share of taxes, Assessor Day says the system has directly helped bring in approximately \$1 million in previously unaccounted mobile home tax revenue.

"The increase in county revenues during the past three years has been astounding as we automated the identification process of delinquent taxes and properties that had slipped through the cracks and weren't properly registered," said Day. "The county is now receiving its rightful share of tax revenues based on the ability of our CAMA/GIS system."

Another noteworthy area of improvement centers on the collection of delinquent mobile home taxes. Through the integration of property data, the county has been able to run a full audit of mobile homes against real properties in the county. The results have uncovered scores of mobile homes that have been missing from the tax rolls for as long as 10 years. The system also has helped identify numerous residential use cases on agriculture-classified properties, resulting in an additional \$291,000 to the county's coffers.

In addition to the RealWare CAMA platform, Pickens County also implemented a pen-based tablet solution utilizing Colorado CustomWare's FieldWare software. The system allows appraisers in the field to gather information quickly and easily, and perform sketches, data collection and data entry at each parcel site. The results have been equally impressive, as reassessment-operational costs have decreased by \$260,000. These savings are attributed to a reduction in duplicate data entry and general paperwork, and through the improvement of appraisal quality and uniformity.

Within the GIS department, which co-sponsored the CAMA effort with the tax assessor office, employees and members of the public can view parcel data geographically along with assessor data. Data pertaining to surrounding parcels are presented and made easily available. The system also allows users to overlay additional GIS data layers on any individually drawn parcels. In essence, all imaging and assessor data are now fully integrated, including property cards that are directly tied to all assessor attributes.

"RealWare has allowed us to link in an intelligent, interactive format all of the information that relates to property taxes, deeds, splits and mergers, together with every available type of imaging data we have," said Day of RealWare's data integration capabilities. "We've reduced so many redundant processes that the benefits are almost too numerous to count. We also have reduced our reliance on temporary personnel during our busy reassessment periods."

For the citizens of Pickens County, the convenience and quality of service improvements have been just as profound. While the County was traditionally four-to-six months behind in processing property deeds, those same deeds today are processed within 24 hours. Residents and businesses also have online access to data that was once only available through an in-person visit. In addition, property assessments are more accurate and appeals are far more easily submitted and processed through the County's online public interface.

On the technology front, the County's Information Systems service group has saved an enormous amount of time and effort that went into maintaining its outdated and inefficient legacy system. The prior database also was a relic and offered absolutely no relational data sharing and bridging capabilities.



RealWare - A Smart Decision

Today, Pickens County operates a state-of-the-art CAMA system that benefits County employees, residents and property owners of this diverse and sprawling county. The RealWare system has empowered the agency to improve its operational efficiency while boosting the service it provides to the public. Having carefully selected the technology based on the parameters and objectives set by the County, Day and his CAMA team have partnered with a technology vendor that truly understands both the current and future needs of property assessment agencies.

"Having worked with numerous technology providers during my career, I can say that Colorado CustomWare has clearly exceeded our expectations in regards to the quality of software, the level of service and the ease with which we transitioned from our legacy system to the new platform," concluded Day. "The move to a CAMA system was an independent step for Pickens County and we couldn't be happier with our selection of RealWare software and Colorado CustomWare as our partner. Looking forward to our 2005 re-assessments, we're confident the system will allow the county to achieve the highest degree of equity and uniformity throughout the county and further improve our services and efficiency for residents."