Search Usage Skyrockets With New Platform

A single website for 4 million weekly visitors enables collaboration across all 26 federal agencies

Summary

Grants.gov is tasked with managing federal grant program information and enabling people to apply for funding. Faced with an ineffective legacy system, it switched to Liferay, improving search and user experience for a modern audience. The new website is now the fourth most visited site in the government space.

grants.gov

In Brief

INDUSTRY:
Government (Federal)

COUNTRY/REGION:
United States

USE CASE:
Public Website, Collaboration Platform, Content Management

KEY FEATURES:
Unified Data Management, Collaboration, Search

> " Using Liferay to manage our CMS
> was cost-saving, not just in licensing costs,
> but also the labor that was required.
>
> Omar Toor
> Senior Director, DMI

Challenges

- Platform needed to meet the needs of 4 million weekly visitors accessing the site worldwide
- Outdated search functionality required an entirely new system
- Information for more than 1,000 grant programs was siloed across 17 legacy solutions

Results

USAGE INCREASED BY 98%
Due to smarter, federated search

ENORMOUS COST-SAVINGS
In labor and licensing fees due to Liferay's CMS

MODERN USER EXPERIENCE
And an improved collaboration site for a global audience

LAUNCHED IN 6 MONTHS
Implementation took only 6 months once requirements were set

Liferay

Modernizing the Federal Grant Application Process

Grants.gov, an E-Government Initiative, was chartered in 2002 to deliver a single system that allows people to find and apply for federal funding opportunities online. Today, the Grants.gov system houses information on over 1,000 grant programs for federal grant-making agencies.

Grants.gov knew that its legacy platform required a new solution to bring it up to modern standards. Grants.gov serves 4 million page hits weekly with users from all over the globe. Its diverse and vast audience requires a solid platform that reliably meets user expectations, so users can focus on what they need to get done. Modernizing the site would be like fixing a bullet train while it was moving; there was no room for lengthy processes, backtracking or mistakes.

After extensive research, Grants.gov chose Liferay as its new platform solution, in part because its open source nature would reduce operating costs by allowing for more customized solutions than a proprietary vendor would. Grants.gov also liked that Liferay was secure, affordable and fit a modular architecture approach, which allowed the agency to build a hybrid platform with options of third-party plugins, custom coding and Liferay applications that integrated together.

Turning 17 Legacy Solutions Into a Single User Platform

The team at Grants.gov aimed to make Liferay the standard architecture for the site as they integrated 17 legacy solutions in a single user platform. Grants.gov took a templated approach to the information architecture. This allowed them to look holistically at Grants.gov and create a roadmap for bringing modules under the Liferay umbrella. They used Liferay templates to test new pages with global partners in order to ensure they were creating the most effective solution.

A key goal throughout the process was to enhance the user experience for everyone who interacted with Grants.gov. For business users, this meant using Liferay's out of the box content management system to maintain documents and web pages. Employees used to hire professional services whenever an update or change needed to be made. This new system gave them the flexibility to update content as they saw fit, as well as providing enormous cost savings in licensing fees and labor.

Grants.gov was able to use the new platform to create a custom interface for partners that apply for large numbers of grants, such as universities that have a large amount of government programs. These end users are now able to apply without ever going to the Grants.gov website. The team also created microsites and communities of interest in order to bring parties together and enable collaboration. Many funding opportunities require the collaboration of multiple agencies. The new platform made it easier to work within Grants.gov throughout the application process because of built-in capabilities for blogs, document management and discussion boards.

New Search Increased Usage by 98%

One of the largest challenges the team faced was redesigning the search experience. Search is the bread and butter of Grants.gov. They have to make it easy for people to find relevant funding opportunities from over 1,000 program options. The team at Grants.gov researched effective search experiences extensively while developing the plan, and the work paid off. The site went from a simple search method to a federated search with a Liferay and Solr implementation. People no longer have to know what they're applying for in order to find it; they can be directed to the right grant programs as they click through the filters, and results update in real time. After the new implementation with Liferay and Solr, Grants.gov saw search usage increase by 98%.

An Enhanced User Experience in Only Six Months

The new, modern website design has enhanced the user experience all around. As they updated the site, the team looked through every single web page and developed a roadmap that accounts for future enhancement plans. Once the requirements were determined, the development cycle of the entire site took six months from start to finish. The new site experience caused web traffic to jump, making Grants.gov the fourth most visited site in the government space.