



**Online Application System for
Integrated Services (OASIS) –**

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A project that delivers an integrated Online Business Licensing Service for businesses

Abstract

Singapore firmly believes in leveraging on technology to maintain her competitive edge globally. On the national and international fronts, the Online Application System for Integrated Services (OASIS) project showcases an unprecedented effort in the application of Infocomm Technology to foster a pro-enterprise environment for businesses in Singapore.

The OASIS project provided an opportune platform to purge bureaucratic inefficiencies within and across Government agencies. The project was conceived in August 2001 to foster a pro-enterprise environment in Singapore by reducing the burden and hassle that businesses faced in obtaining licences. The integrated e-service that was delivered, called the Online Business Licensing Service (OBLs), allows the businesses to apply for different licences and to check the outcome of these applications at one single portal, instead of having to access multiple websites, fill up multiple forms or travel to different agencies. This project involved more than 30 Government agencies. Extensive policy reviews were conducted for 154 licences, of which 11 were identified to be unnecessary and were removed. As part of the OASIS project, extensive effort was put into reengineering the

existing processes, so that the OBLIS is not just an automated version of the existing licensing process, but a much improved one with shorter turnaround time and fewer interactions. OBLIS was officially launched in January 2004 with 19 licences available for online application. By August 2004, another 50 business licences were implemented online. The application procedures of these licences were systemically re-engineered and this allowed the average processing time to be reduced from 3 weeks to 12.5 days. Coupled with the revised fee structures, it was estimated that businesses saved S\$11.4 million while government agencies reaped cost savings of more than S\$1.6 million since its launch.

Today, 80% of all new businesses in Singapore, or more than 30,000 businesses annually, can apply for one or more of the 69 licences which are commonly needed to start their businesses online through the OBLIS. For instance, businesses in the Public Entertainment, Education, Food & Beverage and Telecommunications sectors, amongst others, can now benefit from the OBLIS. From August 2005, the OBLIS will allow applicants to renew, update and terminate licences online. The vision is that throughout the entire business licensing cycle, business users will only need to access a single portal to meet all their licensing needs.

Background

Given Singapore's small population and scarce natural resources, technology has consistently served as a crucial multiplying factor in maintaining our competitive advantage. Since the 1980s, the Singapore Government has embarked on a series of initiatives to tap on the capabilities of Infocomm Technology to increase the efficiency and connectivity of our workforce. The OASIS project reinforces the Government's efforts in realising its vision of "Many Agencies, One Government".

Life before OASIS

Through feedback sessions and focus groups held with businesses, the Government identified the difficulties faced by entrepreneurs when starting businesses in Singapore. Entrepreneurs typically had limited knowledge of the licences required for them to start a business. The process of visiting various agencies to fill out forms that asked for similar information was also time-consuming and cumbersome. In some cases, the entire application process took months. In the worst case, after expending significant time and money, an applicant may end up not being able to start his business if his application for a critical licence was denied.

Due to the lack of a common platform and infrastructure, agencies could not effectively communicate and coordinate with each other.

That was the grim reality facing potential business start-ups in the past.

Dealing with multiple agencies (Before OASIS)
One Confused and Frustrated Start-up, Many Silo Agencies

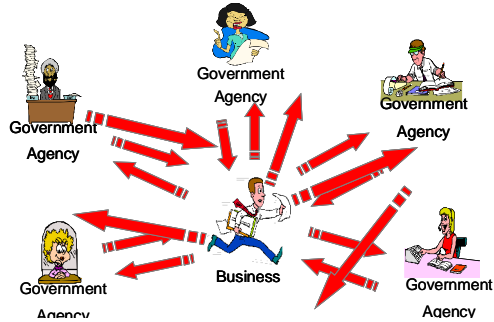


Figure 6 Life Before OASIS, businesses had to run to different licensing agencies, fill out forms that asked for similar information, making the process of applying for the relevant licences a time-consuming and cumbersome one. The problem of starting up a business was made worse with the silo-mentality many of these agencies had.

The Innovation and its Benefits (After OASIS)
One Networked Government supported by Multiple Agencies

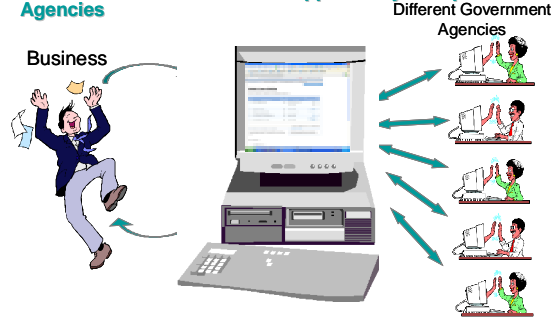


Figure 7 Life After OASIS, businesses now can enjoy the convenience and benefits of integrated licence application and concurrent agency processing brought about by the introduction of a one-stop licensing portal.

The turning point came in August 2001, when, in the spirit to foster a pro-enterprise environment in Singapore, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), with support from the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) and Ministry of Finance (MOF), started the OASIS project with more than 30 public agencies.

Strategies

The OASIS Journey

To eliminate red-tape and to make the process of starting a business more hassle-free, MTI, MOF and IDA together with more than 30 Government agencies embarked on a journey which was divided into three key stages, as illustrated in the following figure.

The OASIS Innovation Journey and Outcomes

Infocomm Technology as Platform

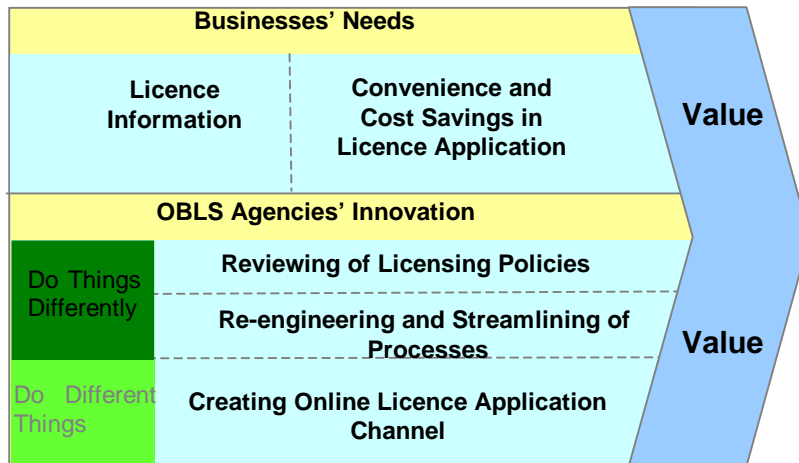


Figure 8 OASIS Innovation Journey and Outcomes

The first objective of the OASIS project was to scrutinise existing Government policies through comprehensive review and re-engineering processes. This preliminary step often proved to be hardest, as it involved challenging agencies to re-examine their respective policies and practices. The project team acted as an institutional third party that challenged regulatory assumptions and pushed for policy rethink in an effort to reduce red-tape that was a regulatory drag on businesses. Only when the team was satisfied that there was a genuine need for the licence and that the processes had been sufficiently streamlined, the team would consider implementing the licence online. Without the process improvements, e-enabling the licence application process would mean no more than transferring bureaucracy online.

A systematic approach was needed for a project of this scale to maintain a high level of transparency and fairness. The 3 key processes of the OASIS project were:

Review of Licensing Policies

(i) Licences could potentially impose substantial regulatory cost for businesses, especially start-ups. First, licensing requirements imposed certain restrictions on the businesses, resulting in compliance costs. Second, the time taken to process licence applications was time costs for the businesses. Third, licence fees imposed direct financial costs on the businesses. Together, they created a cumulative and substantial burden.

(ii) Hence, the review process involved validating the need for a licence. Should there be a need to continue regulating an activity, a less burdensome regulatory framework involving accreditation schemes or simple one-time registrations was studied and proposed.

Re-engineering and Streamlining Efforts

(i) In the event that licensing was deemed to be the most appropriate form of regulating the business activity, the licence would undergo process re-engineering. The re-engineering process involved reducing unnecessary licensing requirements and streamlining the internal approval processes. The effective and innovative use of technology enabled agencies to perform backend verifications and tap on central databases to share information across agencies, thus eliminating the need for repeated requests of the same information from businesses by different agencies.

(ii) Through process re-engineering, procedures were simplified, efficiency was improved and processing times were reduced. In addition, licence fees were scrutinised to ensure that they were aligned to cost-recovery principles. Cumulatively, the re-engineering process expedited the time to market for businesses and reduced the cost of starting a business. Licensing agencies also benefited as their internal approval processes were streamlined.

Putting Licences Online

(i) Once the policy reviews as well as the process re-engineering were completed, the licences were made available online. The Online Business Licensing Service (accessible at <http://www.business.gov.sg/licences>) was therefore developed with the businesses' needs in mind and contains several key features.

(ii) The Online Business Licence Profiler allows the user to search for licences they need by selecting the appropriate business activity. If the user applies for more than one licence at the same time, the system dynamically generates a single integrated application form. The system then 'intelligently' routes the various applications to the respective agencies. Applicants can then pay for all the licence and/or processing fees in one consolidated payment via online credit or debit payment.

(iii) Following the submission of the application form, concurrent processing of different licences reduces the turnaround time for the applicant to receive all the required approvals. Once the authorising agency has approved the application, an email and Short Messaging Service (SMS) will be sent to alert the applicant of the outcome.

Benefits to Businesses

The OASIS project aims to make it easier and more convenient to start a new business with the following benefits:

- a) reduced number of licences needed and reduced set of rules and regulations; simplified procedures and shortened turnaround time, and single place for all licence applications online.

To date, 8,000 businesses have benefited from the OASIS project by applying for their licences online via the OBLS and the number of businesses doing so is growing every day.

Businesses do not need to go through the hassle which they faced previously in applying for licences. 87% of the feedback that the team has received so far has been positive and encouraging.

Out of the 154 licences reviewed, 11 licences had been slated for removal. 2 licences had been converted to lifetime licences and 5 licences had been partially removed. The re-engineering exercise had also reaped significant time savings. The average processing time of the 154 licences was reduced from 3 weeks to 12.5 days. For example, the Energy Market Authority's Licence to Generate Electricity was reduced from 6 months to 6 weeks. Furthermore, it used to take 5 days to register a company. Today, a company can be registered in 2 hours.

Through the re-engineering exercise, the application processes for most of the licences were simplified. For example, in the past, an applicant who wanted to obtain a Public Entertainment Licence would need the approval of the Fire Safety and Shelter Department (FSSD). After the re-engineering process, this dependency on FSSD's approval was removed. Instead, the applicant would be responsible for ensuring that he had complied with the safety standards.

Another example of the simplification of the application process was the licensing of establishments at company level rather than branch level. Singapore Tourism Board (STB) used to license each branch of the same travel agent. After the re-engineering process, STB agreed to replace the licensing of each individual branch with a simple notification process. The main outlet would be held liable for ensuring that its branches adhere to the legal and proper operating standards.

Achievements

Among similar projects found in countries such as Australia and the United States of America, the OASIS project is currently the forerunning leader of the pack, in terms of its scale (countrywide), comprehensiveness (69 licences available online and many more with external links or contact information) and the degree of integration (more than 30 participating Government agencies).

The project was awarded the UN Public Service Award 2005 in the category of "Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Government: eGovernment". The award was given to recognise the Singapore Government's efforts to streamline, simplify and integrate the application of licences from various agencies, to save time and costs for enterprises.



Figure 9 UN Public Service Award 2005



Figure 10 OASIS Core Team, 2005

Mr Peter Ong, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) said: "We are delighted and honoured to receive this prestigious award, which recognises the effective application of Infocomm Technology in government services. The OASIS project has delivered a one-stop integrated e-service that allows businesses to apply for licences with ease and convenience. This UN award represents a significant milestone in the government's journey towards the 'Many Agencies, One Government' vision".

"This award is a testimony of our agencies' efforts to collaborate and integrate services to create a seamless experience for businesses and citizens when they transact with the Government," said Mr Chan. "The government, however, cannot do everything on its own. We need to work closely with industry partners, who are at the forefront of technological developments, to achieve our e-Government objective of offering innovative and more convenient ways to deliver government services using ICT.", Mr Chan Yeng Kit, CEO, IDA, received the award on behalf of the Singapore government at the fifth annual City Informatisation in the Asia-Pacific Region (CIAPR) forum held in Shanghai in May 2005.

Lessons Learnt

Being a pioneer in driving a project of this nature, it is without a doubt that the team underwent a steep learning curve. Some of the key learning points the team picked up are summarised below:

- a) It is important to maintain the balance between the need to regulate the activity with the interests of businesses. The team adopted a customer-centric approach, conducting regular focus group sessions with businesses to obtain feedback on their start-up experiences. Such feedback sessions drove the team to constantly seek ways to improve the design and features of OBLs.
- b) The team had to manage concerns faced by individual agencies. For some agencies, the nature of its regulatory function hindered any pro-enterprise effort. To secure buy-in and commitment from agencies, the team had to recognise, acknowledge and manage their specific concerns. Consultations and meeting sessions helped us understand requirements of specific agencies. Where possible,

commitments from senior management of agencies were secured from the outset to ensure smoother implementation.

c) The team also learnt the importance of having in place a mechanism to refer unresolved matters to higher authorities. In cases where problems or issues could not be resolved at the working level, the team escalated the issue to committees which were chaired by senior public service leaders. Agencies would generally try to resolve issues without the intervention of these high level committees.

d) For a project to be implemented successfully, the commitments of various stakeholders were needed: (i) Dedication from the team to drive changes; (ii) Participation from government agencies who understood the value proposition of the project; (iii) Support from public users with their feedback and suggestions; (iv) Strong support from senior management to push for policy changes and business process re-engineering to reap the full benefits of online implementation; and (v) Close co-operation amongst the OASIS team, participating agencies and vendor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, OASIS is not merely an IT project. It presents a significant strategic value for the Public Sector and Singapore as a whole. This includes harnessing Infocomm Technology as a competitive advantage for Singapore, strategic learning to reinvent public services around its customers, catalysing the cleaning up of inefficiencies as well as organisational review within the Government. In a way, OASIS symbolises the next phase of Singapore's e-Government; unparalleled in its immense scale of Government-wide collaboration, integration, policy rethink and process reengineering. It also revolutionises the manual and cumbersome process of licence application into an easy and smooth experience for businesses by:

- b) Providing clear and comprehensive licensing information that an entrepreneur will need to know prior to starting a business;

Allowing applications for the various licences to be processed concurrently; and

Integrating the process online so that entrepreneurs will enjoy time and cost savings by being able to transact with the Government agencies from their desktops, anytime and anywhere.

Footnotes:

(i) About the UN Public Service Award

The annual UN Public Service Award seeks to recognise institutional contributions made to enhance the role, professionalism and visibility of the Public Service. The Award has since drawn attention to some of the top practices and innovations in the Public Service in various parts of the globe.

Nominees in the “Award for the application of ICT in e-Government: Local e-Government” category are judged based on the extent to which they have fulfilled the three main criteria; namely Enhanced service delivery, Re-engineered government operations and e-Participation.

For year 2005, 10 nominees were selected out of the 193 nominations received for the Award. This year, Singapore is the only country in the Asia and the Pacific region to receive the “Award for the application of ICT in e-Government: Local e-Government”.

Mr Guido Bertucci, Director for Public Administration and Development Management of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, described the OASIS project as an “outstanding achievement which has demonstrated excellence in serving the public interest and made a significant contribution to the improvement of public administration in your country.”

(ii) Participating Agencies are listed on the next page

The Government agencies participating in the OASIS project include:

Accounting & Corporate Regulatory Authority	Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore
Board of Architects	Building and Construction Authority
Central Provident Fund Board	Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore
Composers and Authors Society of Singapore	Economic Development Board
Energy Market Authority	Health Sciences Authority
Hotels Licensing Board	Housing & Development Board
Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore	Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore
International Enterprise Singapore	Land Transport Authority
Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore	Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore
Media Development Authority	
Ministry of Communication Development, Youth and Sports	
Ministry of Education	Ministry of Finance
Ministry of Health	Ministry of Home Affairs
Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts	
Ministry of Law	
Ministry of Manpower	Ministry of Trade and Industry
National Environment Agency	Monetary Authority of Singapore
Professional Engineers Board	National Parks Board
SPRING Singapore	Public Utilities Board
Singapore Customs	Singapore Civil Defence Force
Singapore Police Force	Singapore Land Authority
Urban Redevelopment Authority	Singapore Tourism Board