



Tennessee General Assembly Sets Standards for Open Government

Granicus Provides Web 2.0 Technologies with Streaming Media and Integrates Legislative Content

Problem

The Tennessee General Assembly was using an outdated streaming video process to provide information to the public. The presentation quality was poor and it was difficult for citizens to find what they were looking for. The process to encode and stream video was cumbersome, a manual process that required up to 48 hours of staff time per week.

Solution

Tennessee deployed a customized solution that automated the encoding and distribution process, integrated into their existing workflow and provided greater access to the streaming of assembly meetings over the Web.

Benefits

The General Assembly replaced an outdated process, improved the quality of their streaming video, reduced staff time for encoding video, and provided new features for searching that enabled citizens to access legislative content quickly and easily.

Tennessee improved the quality and transparency of its legislative website and achieved record-breaking visits

In the summer of 2008, the Office of Legislative Information Services of the Tennessee General Assembly was tasked with redesigning its website to improve performance and usability. According to Steve Kriegish, Director of Legislative Information Services, the website and the navigation needed an update to align with the information requirements of Web 2.0 sites. "The goal was to improve transparency in government and to provide a positive experience for citizens of Tennessee when visiting the legislative website," says Kriegish.

With this project came the need to modernize the streaming video operation. Although the Tennessee General Assembly had been streaming floor sessions and committee meetings for over two years, the video content was neither presented nor organized well on the website. Also, the basic process for encoding and publishing streaming content to the Web was manual and very time-consuming. The Tennessee General Assembly has over 60 House, Senate, and Joint committees as well as floor sessions, which translates into streaming 150 public hearings per month. They had one full-time position dedicated to encoding, compressing, and posting these hearings to the Web. "Because of the volume of events we were recording, Web staff couldn't keep up with the media posting schedule," says Kriegish. It sometimes took between 24-48 hours to keep streaming content up-to-date. On top of that, staff frequently had to re-encode data. This was a lengthy process because the raw video had to be re-digitized in real-time, meaning it took the entire length of the meeting to re-encode before publishing to the Web.

Client Profile

Agency Type: State
Population: 6 million
Client Since: 2008

Tennessee is ranked the 14th fastest-growing state in the U.S. The legislative authority of the State is vested in the General Assembly, which consists of a Senate and a House of Representatives; there are 33 Senators and 99 Representatives. In 2009 the General Assembly was recognized as the nation's top legislative website.

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-Steve Kriegish, Director of Legislative Services

Granicus enhanced public records search while maintaining existing workflow

The agency needed a system that would automate its encoding and distribution processes. In order to improve the accessibility of legislative information, it also needed audio/video tagging known as timestamping. Timestamps create chapters in the streaming media so that viewers can “jump-to” specific policy discussions in the video recording.

Another imperative was the ability to add value to its existing, homegrown solution for capturing bill data and action called “committee automation”. “We were adamant about maintaining our existing architecture. One component of that was using our in-house application, not purchasing a new system,” recalls Kriegish. Granicus’ open platform allowed the Office of Legislative Information Services to use a software development kit (SDK) to easily exchange data between the Granicus MediaManager platform and the Committee Automation system.

Due to the tight integration between the two systems, the Clerk of the Committee was able to perform video indexing live during the meeting—

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-Steve Kriegish, Director of Legislative Services

without changing her existing recordkeeping process. As a result, the agency could add timestamping functionality easily to the existing meeting process.

“Using Granicus technologies, we were able to create a Web environment for finding legislative info and viewing integrated streaming video,” explains Kriegish. The technology workflow created an integrated public record on the Tennessee General Assembly’s website containing audio/video streaming media and integrated, meeting-related documents including agendas, minutes, calendars, journals, bills and resolutions—all cross-linked and searchable by keyword. As a result, citizens could instantly retrieve information pertaining to a House and Senate Committee meeting using a simple keyword-search or quick navigation options.

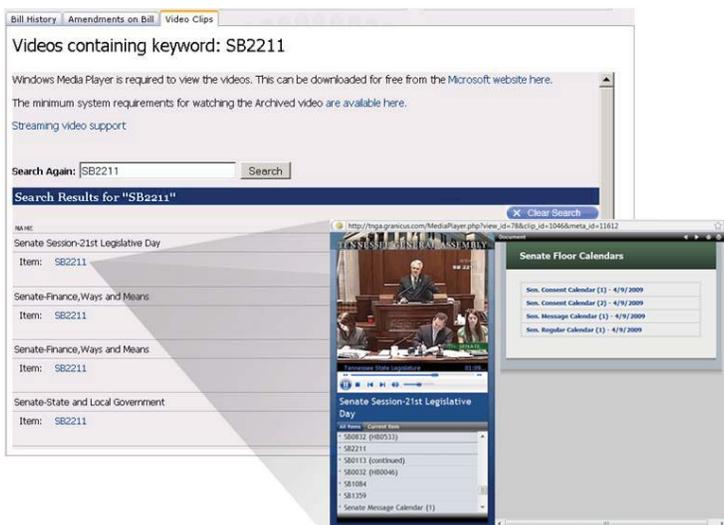
State agency’s website achieved record-breaking visits

Since the implementation of Granicus, the agency has grossed nearly 30,000 hits to its archived

video content and averages nearly 4,000 hits per month. In fact, it has achieved a record-breaking 1,400 live hits to the House session streaming video. These numbers illustrate the vast improvements the Tennessee General Assembly has made to the accessibility of their information. Due to their integrated public record of meeting information and streaming media, citizens have stayed informed of proposed legislation.

Beyond transparency and citizen involvement improvements, the Tennessee General Assembly has increased operational efficiency with the Granicus system. “Management and organization of video over our previous practices were improved significantly. Because fewer people are involved in the process there has been far less error in the scheduling, recording, and posting of events both real-time and on-demand,” says Kriegish.

Granicus’ multicast functionality, called StreamReplicator, has enabled the agency to minimize bandwidth consumption on its internal network. Video storage has also become a much simpler process. “With Granicus MediaVault, we’ve achieved more time savings. Our previous method for storage was manual and relied on a person to accommodate the workflow,” says Kriegish. With on-site media servers, the staff has been able to automate its internal streaming and media storage process, freeing-up the staff time that was previously required. Working together, the MediaVault and StreamReplicator architecture has enabled the Tennessee General Assembly to preserve bandwidth by reliably delivering streams to citizens or staff according to their position on an internal (LAN) or external (WAN) network.



New search features help citizens stay informed on key issues without wading through hours of video.