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By Samuel Greengard, freelance writer, Baseline.
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May 2, 2013

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Miami-Dade County has turned to predictive analytics to catch crooks, slash costs, improve transparency across agencies and provide better service for residents

Over the last few years, government organizations have been squeezed from two sides: They're under greater pressure than ever to perform at a high level, and many have faced harsh budget cuts.

Miami-Dade County, which operates a wide range of public services for a population of approximately 3 million residents and 38 million annual visitors, isn't backing down from the challenge. It is turning to predictive analytics to transform the way it operates.

Although the county has relied on business intelligence tools for several years, officials recently deployed a more advanced IBM Cognos Business Intelligence system. The cloud-based system, which runs in a Linux environment on an existing IBM System z mainframe platform, is ushering in a new era of efficiency.

"It is allowing us to put data to work and transform it into useful information," says Carmen Suarez, division director in the Miami-Dade County Information Technology department.

The system operates across 35 municipalities and delivers a holistic view of events and operations. For example, a smart metering project tied to predictive analytics is expected to cut water consumption by 20 percent and generate up to $1 million a year in savings by predicting leaks and other problems at parks and open spaces. Officials can view data from a central dashboard.

The Miami-Dade Police Department will also use the system to engage in predictive policing. It will tap predictive analytics tools that provide clues about crime patterns and help police deploy officers more effectively. The system also amps up investigative capabilities and allows agencies to share data that can help solve crimes.

Still another use for the technology is providing real-time updates of traffic patterns and public transit ridership in order to better deploy resources. Much of this data will flow to mobile phone apps that the public can use to avoid delays or to adjust if a train or bus breaks down or is behind schedule.

Along four key bus routes, the county is also hoping to use the system to reduce bunching. It also plans to tie in local restaurants and shopping, along with coupons for users. "We want to make it

more convenient for people to use transit systems," Suarez explains.

Finally, the consolidated analytics and reporting tools, part of IBM's Smarter Cities initiative, aim to improve transparency across various county agencies, including finance, budgeting, planning, transportation and human resources. In addition, the private cloud-based system will provide citizens with key metrics and spending data via the Web.

In the coming months, Suarez says, Miami-Dade will likely use the technology to better plan for hurricanes and other possible disasters. "The goal is to handle emergencies and other events more effectively and improve response times," she says. "As more agencies and municipalities get on board and we share data, new opportunities will open up."

"The goal is to put data to work and create a more responsive environment," Suarez concludes. "In reality, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The county—and other government organizations—must find ways to use technology resources to address a wide array of challenges."

By Samuel Greengard, freelance writer, Baseline.

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