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Interview with an IT Professional

Trevor OWEN –

NT GOVERNMENT IT SYSTEM MANAGER

Northern Territory Government

Hutchinson- Good afternoon my names Marek Hutchinson – Goncz currently conducting an interview for RMIT University Introduction to Information Technology. I have the pleasure of sitting here today Tuesday 7th of July 2020 with Trevor Owen. Trevor works for the Northern Territory Government in the space of Information Technology creating programs and managing programs for various emergency service agencies. Thank you so much for being with me this afternoon. If it's ok with you Trevor I have some questions to better understand what you do and how you do it. Trevor are you happy to introduce yourself to everyone listening.

Owen- Yea sure, my names Trevor Owen and I have been employed with the Northern Territory Government for the last 27 years with a particular focus on advancing technology in the Emergency Services space. A lot of the focus has been in the last 12 years as I gained additional skills and as I moved along my educational pathway I managed to get my self-involved in some fairly large projects with the Northern Territory Government. A number of programs are police custody systems, banned drinks register, mandatory triggers for alcohol mandatory treatment system which is a Northern Territory CLP Government initiative from the previous term of government.

I also sit on the Intrigtrated Justice Information System Business As Usual Committee making sure that the system meets the contemporary practise and contemporary needs of the agencies that access it. One of my primary roles at the moment though is I am an administrator for WEBEOC.

Hutchinson- Fantastic well thank you so much you've answered quite a few of my question already. So you've told us about your IT work and what you do and the industry that you work in. What other types of work do you do, you mentioned WEBOEC can you tell us what that is?

Owen- Umm WEBEOC is a web based interface used by Police, Fire and Emergency Services throughout Australia, New Zealand and America to manage major or critical incidents. It is essentially a job card board that you can add tasks and remove tasks from and mark them as complete and allocate to other sections. You can break it up over a number of spheres from logistics to planning, recovery and ahh response support. So in addition to running the boards for emergency operations it's also used by one of our agencies the Northern Territory Police, its used by them to manage their custodial episodes as an electronic whiteboard system. We started off with just some basics tracking people who came and went from Watch Houses and in custody and we have added further functionalities of identified need to include things like mandatory health checks, changing people's current status if people are at risk or they are not at risk ummm monitoring compliance with legislation of intoxication for notification of legal services. Recording receipt of custody files or stuff for court.

We also use it for monitoring compliance with requirements under the Youth Justice Act which has a four hour review period which came in last year. We had to make some short order changes to the system to ensure compliance with the four hourly review for youth in custody. The platform is such that it's very dynamic and able to be flexibly adjusted to suit the emerging needs and the turnaround time for a new board or development of a board can be as little as 3 or 4 hours for our developer to add a functionality in by cloning it off one of the existing functions. A time recording or time reminder is leveraged off the back end of the other time devices in the program being a 24 hour custody check or a 15 minute cell check. It's all the same simple program for counting a clock and providing a prompt on the board when the clock timer gets to the appropriate time.

Hutchinson- Thank you so much for that information now I understand you're not only an administrator for that program but your also as you said were instrumental in getting it up and running in the Northern Territory. In terms of how it's used by Emergency Services for disasters and large operations are you able to talk me through what exactly it can do in that sort of sense.

Owen- Umm in that space it provides a real time log of tasking's or incidents that come through, be it a notification of a cyclone or swollen river. Because it's a web based application all users logged onto the system and allocated to that project or that incident can see that there is an issue with a particular location, they can then see updates in real time as they are added to it. It's a rapid way of sharing information of emerging issues and response to emerging issues across a broad co hoard of people responding to an incident. The platform is so flexible it can be accessed from a mobile phone, iPad or a tablet or a desk top.

Hutchinson- Fantastic and if you don't mind I have some questions unrelated to WEBEOC now if your happy to answer them. Who are all the people you interact with in your work, are you able to tell us about them?

Owen- Suppose there's lots of people I interact with through work in this role, there are the developers for WEBEOC and the people who maintain the main frame Integrated Justice Information System and then there's the HTML developers who run the Banned Drinkers Portal as well which is a multi-agency portal for tracking people controlling their point of sale access to alcohol. I work with Licencing, Attorney Generals Department, Department of Health as well as members of the Nt Police.

Hutchinson- Thank you so much are you able to tell us about your interactions with other IT professionals such as people that I understatement your department employ to put in the physical changes that you want or make to the programs that you over see.

Owen- Some of the people we use for WEBEOC that development is done out of house while we can create new boards or create new incidents or location the actual board design is done out of house by Juvare which I think is a Swiss based company which has their main branch for Australia and New Zealand in New Zealand. We access their developers to develop new functionalities. In house we have a number of small application developers running things like our portable network MDEA which a multi-dimensional enterprise application which accesses data from a range of systems to pull out information from the Court System from the Police Information System the Motor Vehicle Registry System. It can give us a snap shot of a person in the field in live time whilst the information isn't live the access is in live time. The information is accessed by pulling it out of a data warehouse.

Hutchinson- Very interesting thank you. I do have a question here in relation to interactions with clients and investors but as you're a non for profit government organisation they aren't as applicable to you so we will move on from them. What aspects of your work do you spend the most time on? Please tell us about these.

Owen- Umm a lot of the time is spent around development or quality assurance checking and bench marking against expected outcomes for developing new applications. And that will involve usually several hours of testing in a testing environment to make sure the data is behaving in the manner you want it to behave in. It's pointless adding a functionality if it doesn't give you the outcome you need. Working with known fresh input data it allows us to predict what the outcome will be and monitor how that outcome is and see if we get the result we anticipate we should be getting. So when we go to dynamic data that is coming in in real time we are more assured the outcome is going to be what we require it to be.

Hutchinson- I understand you work on a broad range of different programs, which aspect of your work to you find most challenging?

Owen- Dealing with other people on committees and other peoples agendas, several of the working groups I'm on like the IJIS Business As Usual Working Group and the Banned Drinkers Register Working Group the agendas and priories of different agencies. Being able to manage them to meet the expectations and capabilities of our system is the hardest aspect of it. They become like a client I suppose if you wanted to call them a client they all come with their own agendas and issues and business requirements as well so it's sometimes a case of tailoring ours to meet theirs and theirs to meet ours.

Hutchinson- That does sound challenging are you able to share an example of your work that best captures the essence of the IT industry.

Owen- I was involved in a significant procurement process for the Northern Territory Government which was the new Police Information System. As part of that tender process we had to first start with identifying the business needs and business flow and then how much of the new program was contemporaneous and how much was redundant. Was it redundant to current practise or redundant to current legislation.

Owen- Was it best practise and how did it bench mark against systems that were already out there. Ideally we wanted a COT system that we could plug our processes into which was going to mean that a lot of our processes were going to have to change to meet the commercial off the shelf system. So in addition to identifying what we had to bench mark it against we had to test the tender evaluations and it was about a nine month process to determine the successful tender including a number of trips interstate. To vendors coming from the United States and Great Britain to pitch their products with us and working with other government IT departments interstate that have taken the same path as us to see what their journey was like and their implementation. The whole project wrapped up to a five year project around forty five million dollars. While I wasn't the lead on the project I certainly had a lot of input into the system interface with the systems I already working heavily with which is IJIS, WEBEOC and the Banned Drinkers Register.

Hutchinson- Alright and what is that new program called?

Owen- It's called SERPRO which is a contraction of Serve and Protect which is the Northern Territory Police's mission's statement and the underlining COTS program is called Niche RMS.

Hutchinson- Which career accomplishment makes you most proud?

Owen- The one that ultimately makes me the most proud is the establishment and implementation of SERPO without a doubt. The work I did on WEBEOC was ground breaking for the time but we are now eight years down that path. The boards from WEBEOC were some of the drivers for going to the SERPO system and moving the capability and implementation across to SERPO was going to be quiet challenging. To get the custody boards and the interaction interface up and working appropriately is going to be a significant achievement.

Hutchinson- Out of the systems that you work on regularly which one do you think is the most important for Emergency Services and which one works the best.

Owen- Well I don't think anyone is more important than the other, they all have different functions and different applications and you can't say one is more important than the other. Each is integral in making sure that Emergency Services system works as best as possible. The one that works the best I'm going to be bias here and say WEBEOC but that's mostly my work.

Hutchinson- (both laughing) That's completely understandable. So what attracted you to this type of work implementing these new type of IT systems?

Owen- Making peoples jobs easier and giving people a level of assurity and satisfaction around having their compliance met and their compliance requirements recorded. Being reportable so the data bases that we constructed are able to capture information that would otherwise be lost when a person's custody episode ended or their interaction with Emergency Services ended. So it provides that access to a permeant record to provide that level of assurity.

Hutchinson- So we were talking earlier about this new SERPO system you were working on. What system is that going to replace when it comes online.

Owen- It will replace seven systems including a Watch House Imaging System, IJIS,WEBEOC, PROMIS which is the Police Real-time Online Management Information System which is the general information system that Police use now which is something we picked up from Fed Pol. That was my first step into the IT Field with the implementation of PROMIS in 1999 which is 21 years ago.

Hutchinson- A long time ago!

Owen- A long times gone by and I've been a champion of improvement on that over the years, I guess that was my baby steps I suppose. Systems its going to replace, yep. It will replace the Crash Data Base, National Names Index, WEBEOC, Information Reports and Asset and Alien will all go in there as well.

Hutchinson- It certainly sounds like it will make a huge difference.

Owen- It will take seven systems out of the police operational and custodial environment.

Hutchinson- Wow that's very interesting and certainly I hope going to be worth the forty five million dollars it has cost so far. Why would you say that apart from replacing all these systems that this SEPRO system is going to be better?

Owen- Well people will access one system, it will be a one touch system so that when you have a touch point with a person or a data record all of the other information which pertains to that is linked behind. So you can seamlessly move from your name to your address to your telephone number to your contacts to your criminal history to your partner's contacts to their criminal history to any other involvement you have. It becomes a one touch one base system.

Hutchinson- And I understand that Northern Territory Police developed and now uses facial recognition technology did you have anything to do with the implementation of that?

Owen- Not a lot no, while I was certainly a champion of that new technology, that was implemented under the tutelage of Chris Brand who has now gone off to work for Axon.

Hutchinson- And finally, we are nearly there we will wrap it up in a second. What do you think the biggest IT decision you've had to make is in the past year and why is it so big?

Owen- Serpro, forty five million dollars and the fact it's going to integrate so many systems and in fact some of the systems it has to interact with it won't actually absorb those systems but it will allow the interaction with those systems seamlessly. So instead of going into the Motor Vehicle Data Base for example employees will be able to access it through SERPRO. It will make contact with the data base and retrieve the information. Same with the court system, Police will move to a basis where we have fully electronic court files and there will be no paper based files at all. We will also be moving through SERPRO into ODESSY which is the new court system replacing IJIS which will sit on the computer screen before the judge in court and on the computer screen before defence and the prosecution in the court house.

Hutchinson- So it certainly seems like it will stream line things and save the environment at the same time.

Owen- I have found the more paperless we go the more paper we seem to use.

Hutchinson- I think that really covers all of our questions and I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to sit down and talk with us I know you're a very busy man. Is there anything else you want to cover that you thought I would ask.

Owen- No I think you have probed very well there.

Hutchinson- Well thank you again my team is very grateful for your time. I'm sure everyone who reviews this interview will get something out of it and I hope you have a fantastic day.

Owen- Thanks mate.