

Austin Fire Department uses QlikView to improve operations, performance, and service

“ AFD used to manage by anecdote, intuition, and assumption. With QlikView, our decisions are based on data-supported facts. We can test an assumption before we act on it and measure a decision after it's made. ”

*Elizabeth Gray,
Business Systems Analyst Supervisor, Austin Fire Department*

Austin Fire Department (AFD) has a proud history of serving the more than 750,000 residents of Austin, TX. The department, which responds to approximately 75,000 calls annually, holds as its mission to protect lives and property.



Responding to tough economic times

Recently, difficult economic times forced AFD to identify ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness of operations in order to streamline spending and improve services.

The department collected high-level annual performance measures, but daily operational data was spread across multiple divisions in different data sources. AFD lacked a useful tool for extracting or integrating it efficiently. “We shoveled data into our systems with a bulldozer

but pulled it out with tweezers,” said Elizabeth Gray, AFD’s Business Systems Analyst Supervisor.

QlikView: Better business intelligence for better service

The department began the search for a Business Intelligence (BI) solution. It turned to QlikView after reading about the software in *DM Review*. “We approached QlikView with a good deal of skepticism,” said Gray. Today it provides AFD with the direct ability to easily query and analyze over 10 GB of data. She remarks, “We can absolutely verify that it works as advertised.”

Simple, fast, affordable

QlikView’s next generation in-memory association technology made it a simple, fast, and affordable solution. Because QlikView doesn’t require a data warehouse, OLAP cubes, or other components of traditional BI systems, AFD deployed their pilot in 12 weeks. Using space on an existing server eliminated the need for expensive hardware. Users require little to no training and are able to answer “hmmm, what if...” queries without having to rebuild reports.

Improving operations one division at a time

AFD has more than 20 QlikView

Solution Overview

Austin Fire Department (AFD)
Municipal fire department serving the City of Austin, Texas

Industry
Government

Function
Executive, operations, finance, HR

Geography
United States

Challenges

- Lack of visibility into operations and performance data
- Unable to effectively extract, integrate, and analyze enterprise data from seven distinct databases
- Improve reporting efficiency to improve operations, staff morale, and to ease staff stress

Solution

AFD deployed QlikView to 16 users in 12 weeks. With QlikView, AFD now analyzes 911 calls, response times, apparatus deployment and usage, personnel absences and leave, budgets and finances, firefighter staffing, cadet recruitment and hiring, and work orders. Using QlikView (64-bit), AFD immediately leveraged the data stored in different databases to achieve the department’s first-ever real time view of operational performance.

Benefits

- Saved 300 hours, representing an equivalent cost of \$131,000
- Enabled fact-based decision making and improved business processes
- Eliminated staff frustration and stress

Data Source Systems

Application: Banner Payroll, AIMS financial, FDM RMS Fire Incident Management, AFD in-house legacy systems
Database: Firebird, MS SQL, Access, Excel
Hardware: Dell R805 2RU Server with 2.3 GHz Dual Quad-Core CPU, 32GB memory, 1 TB storage



applications. Chief officers use it to track 911 calls and responses by jurisdiction, station, battalion, number of runs, and hour of day, day of week, and year. With QlikView, they have direct and immediate insight into call volume and types, response times, workload, and call distribution. QlikView also provides decision support for the allocation of fire trucks to existing and new stations.

For years, AFD could not easily present financial information for effective analysis and cost tracking. QlikView helps finance managers manage strategically by enabling comparison of forecasted to actual budgets, accounting forensics, cost of service analysis, and much more.

AFD's HR managers use QlikView to analyze personnel leave and daily absences, payroll trends, staff demographics, and years of service for talent management and succession planning. They are able to simulate "what if" scenarios related to specialty payments. Instantly, they can track the impact on negotiated labor contracts of raising or lowering specialty pays related to education, firefighter certification, bilingual ability, or other metrics.

Cost savings are high; true benefits "priceless"

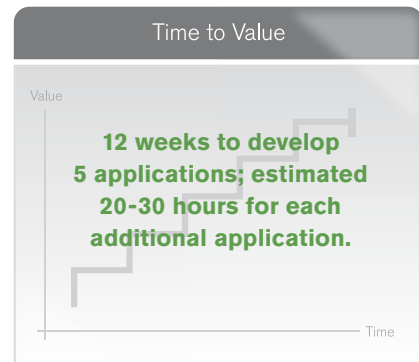
After 15 months, AFD has counted cost savings across divisions and seen distinct improvements in business decisions. AFD estimates having saved \$43,000 in off-site training costs for initial users. Additionally, managers involved in the pilot estimate that before QlikView they spent approximately 300 hours annually coaxing data out of reporting systems and preparing it for analysis, which

represents an equivalent staffing cost of \$131,000. And without the need for an army of technical staff, the total cost of QlikView ownership is much lower than typical BI systems.

For many users the benefit of now being able to perform critical analysis is "priceless." QlikView replaced the non-value added time spent chasing numbers with value-added time spent analyzing data and improving decisions. And the analysis is worth more because the data is trustworthy.

Austin taxpayers have also benefited from AFD's new decision-making abilities. A neighboring jurisdiction had claimed AFD owed it money because its units responded to calls within AFD's territory. Using QlikView, AFD compiled data on the frequency and types of response runs into both jurisdictions. The result demonstrated that both areas provided approximately the same level of service to each other and avoided an added expense for Austin's taxpayers.

QlikView also helped AFD make a politically charged decision about locating fire engines and ladders. Firefighters assigned to one area of town asked for additional equipment because they "sensed" a high number of calls were delaying response. After initial analysis, AFD saw that a different part of town received more calls and had a greater need for apparatus. Using QlikView-generated data, AFD determined that moving an engine to this area balanced the workloads of responding engines and had the net impact of decreasing the number of long response times. Because the decision was based on facts, there



was no backlash from the neighborhood that "lost" an engine or from the ladder company that had originally asked for additional help.

Future plans

AFD plans a Phase II rollout that will extend licenses to all section heads and operations managers. And it will deploy a dashboard, showing status on key performance measures, to all 1,200 members of the department. Eventually, the department hopes to use QlikView to pull and analyze enterprise data held outside the department. Finally, it plans to integrate QlikView with its enterprise GIS system.

“ AFD had very different ways of doing business across divisions. QlikView allows us to standardize definitions, find norms and trends, and address issues pro-actively. ”

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