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Boston Business Hub Provides Resource for Businesses

The web portal for Boston businesses connects entrepreneurs and city services

The Boston Business Hub (BizHub), Boston's internet portal to the government for new and growing businesses, provides a technological bridge from government to businesses and residents in an effort to improve customer service. Rolled out last Fall, the website is the result of a successful collaboration between the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, the Department of Neighborhood Development, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Inspectional Services, Public Works, and the Fire Department.

Functionality

The website provides information about possible locations for new businesses, likely sources of funding, requirements for new licenses and permits, and access to help from specific city employees who can best answer business start-up or expansion questions. The BizHub also serves as a hub in itself, housing a catalogue of state, federal, and industry resources that can be used for quick-at-a-glance research.

Connect With An Expert

The "Connect with an Expert" function allows business owners to submit questions online, have the questions routed to the best qualified person in the City, and receive an answer within two business days.

This achievement showcases a collaboration across city departments as they must quickly work together to find the right person to answer each business owner's questions promptly. The query also creates a file for that business with the City, so when the owner calls

back, city employees will immediately see the business' history and be able to provide informed assistance.

Licensing & Permitting Wizard

The "Licensing and Permitting Wizard" allows users to answer a comprehensive battery of questions about their business and receive a report listing required licenses and permits, information about the requirements for each license and permit and the department or agency that issues the licenses and permits.

Interest From the Community

Since the BizHub's launch, the City has been able to track and answer over 730 queries and provide over 680 permitting wizard reports. Now 39% of all new inquiries come to the City from the BizHub and over 8,000 different people have viewed the website with a third of them returning to the site. Over 450 people have signed up to become registered users, which helps the City track businesses and their issues. The goal now is for the site to be better known among businesses so it becomes the place where all business owners start their research.

Directions for Future Innovation

The BizHub runs on a sophisticated cloud-based platform, Salesforce, that can include more functionality in the future. The City is currently researching ways to incorporate customizable market research, online permit applications, and crowdsourcing, which would allow users to provide practical feedback for common problems.