

The makings of a digital capitol.

How the city of Sacramento is becoming a force for digital transformation in California government.

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Incorporated in 1850

4,083 employees
Ninth-largest capital city in the United States
www.cityofsacramento.org

508,529

city residents as of 2020*

Products:

- [Adobe Experience Cloud >](#)
- [Adobe Campaign >](#)
- [Adobe Experience Manager >](#)
- [Adobe Document Cloud >](#)
- [Adobe Acrobat Sign >](#)

Objectives

- Increase number of subscribers to city email list
- Gain visibility into data across existing software systems
- Prove value of technology upgrades

Results

- 30% increase in number of subscribers
- 24% campaign open rate
- 4 months from purchase to implementation

“As more people are relying on government service in this crisis, it is more important than ever before for the government agencies to be agile to find creative ways to provide residents easy access to services. It is apparent that having a right solution/partner and concrete strategy for creating, distributing, and monitoring the impact of critical communication to residents is helping to improve transparency and effectiveness.”

Mrudul Sadanandan

IT Manager - Enterprise Apps, City of Sacramento

The city of Sacramento is ambitious. On first glance, it appears nothing more than a quaint Northern California town with tree-lined streets and a historic city hall dating back to 1908. But as the capital of California, the city is the seat of political power for the country's most populous state. Within its parks, coffee shops, and neighborhoods reside some of the most influential players in the United States government. Everyone has something big they want to accomplish.

Mrudul Sadanandan is ambitious, too. As Sacramento's IT Manager for Enterprise Apps, he plays a fundamental role in how the city functions. Together with his IT Supervisor, Venkat Yerneni, Sadanandan has been looking for ways to bring digital transformation to his hometown. With a handful of solutions already in place—

CRM, ERP, CMS, and more—the IT team holds a significant amount of responsibility for the systems that allow their city to thrive.

With twenty years in civil service, Sadanandan has the kind of clarity about government technology that can only be gained through experience. Over the course of his career, he's seen how the pitfalls and triumphs of evolving technologies have reshaped cities. He's committed to using his position to improve the lives of fellow citizens. And change the attitudes towards his colleagues at city hall.

"I am really passionate about delivering technology solution to make it easy for Sacramento residents to interact with city hall. I understand that this is a long and a hard journey, but I am committed to provide the best customer experience to our citizens," said Sadanandan.



Connecting systems to connect citizens

In Sadanandan's role, technology serves two main purposes. Improve how the city works. And prove it to citizens.

But therein lies the problem. Many cities are behind the curve in terms of how they communicate with residents. This makes it challenging to streamline city operations, and extra challenging to showcase the value the government has to offer. And the size of Sacramento doesn't help. With a population of just over 500,000 people, it's far from a metropolis. But compare it to a business, and you're looking at a number that's greater than the headcount of IBM and Apple combined.

Knowing that they were effectively running enterprise-level IT for the city of Sacramento, Sadanandan and Yerneni had been using all the right enterprise-grade tools. Each on its own worked effectively, forming the technological basis on which the city ran. But the approach was inherently siloed, which put strict limits on their potential for digital transformation. Failing to address the problems in their system now would only set them up for failure later.

Plus, staying siloed risked a ripple effect for the city. Unsatisfied citizens, armed with the power of their votes, essentially held Sadanandan and Yerneni's jobs in their hands. But without strong IT leadership, the city wouldn't get the technology upgrades it so badly needed. Sadanandan had to seize the moment to start creating a truly digital city.

"There were multiple areas we were struggling with. We realized that a highly siloed model was not going to work for us very long. So we started looking at our cloud infrastructure, CRM, and customer engagement. And we wanted to find best-of-breed solutions in these three areas," said Sadanandan.

"People have changed, and technology has changed people."

Mrudul Sadanandan

IT Manager - Enterprise Apps, City of Sacramento

The business of government

Finding a solution that would make a meaningful impact on Sacramento residents was critical. But "citizen" doesn't mean what it used to. With new e-commerce technology—especially around customer experience—citizens are getting used to higher standards. Typically, governments haven't been expected to supply the same sky-high level of service as the private sector. But that expectation is changing.

As Yerneni said, "People have changed, and technology has changed people. They expect the same level of service and SLAs from a government that they expect from Amazon. They do not want to come to city hall anymore. They want a digital city hall. They want one place where they can log in and finish all their stuff. So while the citizens think that government employees underperform, they still want the best out of their government. And that's where I think we have the opportunity to step in and make a difference."

With today's changing customer expectations, experience counts for as much in government as it does in the private sector. Customer reviews on platforms like Nextdoor.com are just one way for citizens—even politically disengaged ones—to voice their opinion about their city government experiences. The challenge for city hall is that, unlike in the private sector, they provide essential services like water and electricity that residents are effectively locked into. The stakes are higher because citizens never stop being their customers.

"If you fail to meet people's expectations, the consequences in government are much bigger than what you see in the private sector. In the private sector you can decide not to go with a certain vendor anymore. Whereas in government, your customers are always going to be your customers. They're not going to move somewhere else," said Sadanandan.

For Sadanandan and Yerneni, this means that their jobs aren't just technical. They're political. The task isn't only to be technically proficient, but to balance the real needs of residents with the limitations of software. In order to run a successful IT department for the city of Sacramento, Sadanandan needed to rethink the relationship between government and citizens—and also reconsider how IT in a government setting should run in the first place.

For Sadanandan and Yerneni, the logical answer was to look for inspiration in the business world.

"So I always ask, why can't I run IT the way Amazon does? My hope is that in the next few years, we'll start to see this happening more and more. I'm really excited and passionate about trying to bring this way of thinking into government," said Sadanandan.

Working with companies like Adobe to implement enterprise-grade technology solutions has helped save the city—and residents—a lot of time and effort. Sacramento had already begun going paperless using products like [Adobe Acrobat Sign](#) and Adobe Forms. The next step was to extend a business-grade level of service to the full citizen experience.

service to the full citizen experience.



Making email more neighborly

After careful evaluation of their options, Sadanandan decided to implement [Adobe Campaign](#). The goal was to address their siloed communication issues head-on by using a single product that covered all the city's use cases. The solution needed not only to be enterprise-worthy, but also flexible enough to work with their existing systems.

The biggest test of Adobe Campaign would be the treatment of the city's email list of over 200,000 subscribers. Email had long been Sacramento's primary form of outreach to over a third of their population, from parking restriction notices to public health updates and beyond. But with their legacy system, Sadanandan and team faced problems that prevented them from reaching their communication potential.

Running the actual email campaigns wasn't the issue—but getting insights to improve and personalize communications was. The city of Sacramento had no visibility into the results of their outreach. Between every government department and customer segment within the city, there was an abundance of data at play. But without insights, there was no way to tell whether emails made it into inboxes in the first place. Or what happened if they did.

Within a few months of using Adobe Campaign, the city's list skyrocketed by 60,000 subscribers. The new approach meant that emails no longer ran the risk of looking like spam and winding up in junk mail. The modern system helped the city create better-looking emails that attracted positive attention, and that residents engaged with and shared with their neighbors. With this huge success in communications, Sadanandan could finally prove the value of the digital upgrades he had championed.

"About 98% of our emails are now delivered to inboxes instead of junk folders. We were able to track that in Campaign. Before, we weren't even able to track it. Now we have numbers that show a reduced bounce rate on emails and higher click through rates to our webpages, showing that people are really reading—and not just deleting—email from city. All that, we credit to Adobe."

But the real highlight for Sadanandan has been the personalization that can be achieved with Campaign. Previously, the city lacked the customer segmentation they needed to really engage readers. Now, the city can segment their lists and craft unique emails that apply to their distinct populations.

Easing in to change

Usability was another important consideration for the City of Sacramento's digital upgrade. With a staff that included interns and volunteers, the city had a higher-than-average turnover rate. Combined with permanent personnel across departments, it was important to bring in a solution that everybody could use without spending a lot of time and effort on trainings.

Sadanandan found that, despite implementing several different Adobe products, teams were better able to self-manage than before. [Adobe Campaign](#) was easy for teams to use and simple to integrate with existing systems. The result was that the IT department experienced fewer—not more—help requests than before.

"Digital Signature, eSign, Adobe Campaign, Sites, Forms, Assets—they're all playing a big role in the city's transformation. Not just from a marketing point of view, but in how we collect data and interact with the customer. All of these are playing a big role in actually providing a higher level of service," said Sadanandan.

The transition from a siloed system towards a unified one wasn't something the city took lightly. Implementation needed to be timely and seamless to preserve the flow of city life. With Adobe Digital Learning Services as a resource, Sadanandan and team decided to run the set-up of Adobe Campaign in-house. Sadanandan credits his talented team for successfully going live in a total timeframe of just over two months.

"Any time you make a massive software platform shift, you're always nervous. But we no longer have that nervousness we had a year ago," said Sadanandan.



Becoming the best-managed city in California

Though he has made massive progress in a short time, Sadanandan is still ambitious about Sacramento becoming a first-rate digital city. The mission, as set out by leadership, is to become "the best-managed city in California"—and Sandanandan will play an important role in achieving that. He already has clear vision of how to proceed.

"The goal is for every citizen to have a single login for the city so they can interact with all of the different departments through a single lens."

The reality of a single login isn't far off. Sacramento has already taken definitive steps towards building a modern, unified experience for citizens. From improved segmentation to personalization to insights, Sacramento is on track to provide service that's equal to—or better than—private corporations. While it's a big goal, it's attainable. Yet it won't happen at the flip of a switch.

But as Sadanandan says, "Adobe is helping us lay the foundation for us to get there someday."

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