

# Netsmart Helps State of Illinois Speed Vital Records Process

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## Industry

Vital Records

## Netsmart Customer

Illinois Department of Public Health

## Constituent Associations

Illinois State Medical Society

Illinois Funeral Directors Association

Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association

Illinois Hospital Association

## Challenges

- Create sustainable vital records system
- Reach a sizable and diverse user community
- Shorten wait times for death records
- Address multiple user skill levels
- Control costs

## Solutions

Netsmart Vital Records System (VRS)

Netsmart University

## Results

- Shortened time it takes families to receive death certificates
- Training up to 6,000 - 8,000 users in 10 months
- Fax application sped cause-of-death reporting for physicians, funeral directors which in turn sped service for grieving families

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- Jill Alters, Illinois Funeral Directors Association

Like so many states, Illinois was facing the limited long-term viability of its paper vital records system. With nearly 8,000 users ranging from local registrar's offices, county clerks, coroners, hospital staff, physicians and funeral directors, wait times for vital records requests were becoming unacceptably long.

While taking its vital records system electronic was itself a tall order, the task of training thousands of diverse, ever-changing users to utilize the system was an even bigger challenge. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) assigned both of these tasks to Netsmart Technologies, which developed a solution that is evolving as practical, effective and affordable.

## **A FLEXIBLE, ACCOMMODATING SOLUTION**

Thousands of users -- one destination. This is the logic behind Netsmart's application for Illinois. After a thorough gap analysis, the Netsmart vital records team tailored an off-the-shelf vital records system to affordably meet the division's needs. The solution is extremely flexible, meets state-specific requirements and is accessible via the Internet. After extensive testing and analysis, a system with a unique self-user registration process was released as a pilot and field tested for three months. With feedback and refinements in hand, it is now being released in phases to outside users.

The cornerstone of the Netsmart implementation is a branded vital records Web site unique to the State of Illinois. The Web site serves as the springboard for the engagement's second and most daunting task -- user training. Getting several thousand users up to speed quickly on a completely new system is a considerable undertaking, but fortunately Netsmart already had experience developing large user communities. Using its own Netsmart University solution as a model, the company developed an online community and learning management system (LMS) that provided the comprehensive training solution Illinois needed.

“We co-authored the course content with the State and created a user-friendly interface that became their one-stop-shop for vital records education and information,” said Netsmart Training Coordinator Karol Wilson. “Users can register for training, take classes, track their coursework, review their results and confirm their successful completion. It was a huge process, but some of the online tutorials we created are getting attention from industry organizations as the best anywhere and could become the standard.”

Of course, online training wasn't every user's choice. Some wanted face-to-face training, while others preferred a combination of the two. After providing demos to professional associations and assessing user needs

# Netsmart Helps State of Illinois Speed Vital Records Process (continued)

throughout the state, Netsmart divided Illinois into seven regions in the process of training a potential 8,000 users in 10 months.

With a system as flexible as the one Netsmart designed, IDPH continues to make updates, add elements and create training on the fly – establishing the Illinois Vital Records System (IVRS) as a national benchmark.

## **OBTAINING A CERTIFIED DEATH CERTIFICATE: MAKING EXPEDIENCY A PRIORITY**

One area where the Netsmart implementation for Illinois is providing tangible benefits is in the death certification process. Illinois is also the only state where funeral directors can issue death certificates, enabling them to further assist grieving family members in the wake of a loss. Rather than having to navigate an unfamiliar bureaucracy during a difficult time, family members can receive an official death certificate at the funeral home and begin dealing with insurance and other urgent matters.

“We developed some unique capabilities just for this implementation,” said Netsmart Project Manager Patrick O’Malley. “One of the most valuable was a fax application that enabled funeral directors to issue electronic faxes to physicians requesting cause-of-death information. These busy physicians could then complete, sign and return them immediately. The savings in both time and frustration were enormous.”

Netsmart’s innovative application means those records are now more accessible, more accurate and produced even faster.

**“NOT HAVING TO LEAVE THE FUNERAL HOME TO PROCESS DEATH RECORDS HAS RESULTED IN NOTABLE TIME SAVINGS FOR OUR MEMBERS...”**

“This is something our members have been anticipating for a number of years, and it has proven to be well worth the wait,” said Jill Alters, Director of Communications for the Illinois Funeral Directors Association. “Netsmart and IDPH went county to county talking to funeral directors, collecting their feedback and refining the system and the training. Not having to leave the funeral home to process death records has resulted in notable time savings for our members, who can now enter information in a matter of minutes.”

Simplifying the death certification process and educating the users involved may not seem like the most pressing government challenge, but to Illinois residents trying to find their way through an already emotional and trying time, it feels like a priority.

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