Union Rescue Mission
Supporting Citizens with Microsoft Power Platform

Caring is the core of the Union Rescue Mission. As LA's oldest and largest homeless shelter, Union Rescue Mission has been serving people experiencing homelessness in California since 1891 through their long-term transformation and rehabilitation programs and multiple facilities. The dawn of COVID-19 earlier this year posed critical challenges, which led Union Rescue Mission to collaborate with Compass365 to build an attestation app and tracking system for their staff members. In this case study, we tell the story of how Union Rescue Mission and Compass365 worked to rapidly deploy new solutions for their staff members and the guests they serve.

THE CHALLENGE

Last year, Chris Amerine, IT Director, hired Compass365, a division of General Networks, to create a Power App solution to automate their incident report form and process. Together they transformed a manual process with a series of uncontrolled, on-premises Word docs and blank emails into an automated process that staff members could now handle on their phones from anywhere.

Then COVID-19 happened and Union Rescue Mission, being an essential business, suddenly needed a daily screening process for their staff. Chris searched for a tool for temperature and symptom checks for staff arriving for work, but all the commercial off-the-shelf automated kiosks were way too expensive, backordered for months, and did not meet URM's requirements. They needed a custom attestation solution, and since URM is 100% privately funded, they needed it within a strict budget. An attestation solution is one where a person 'attests' to a set of questions and signs to confirm.

In addition to supplying PPE and medical equipment to its staff, URM wanted a turn-key way to ensure the safety of its staff while monitoring and complying with all CDC guidelines and local guidance from the Los Angeles Department of Health and Human Services.

SUCCESS METRICS

- Automate Incident Reporting
- Track screening of arriving staff for temperature and/or COVID symptoms
- Track screening of arriving guests for temperature and/or COVID symptoms
- Deliver quickly and stay within budget

INDUSTRY

Social Services

PLATFORMS AND SOLUTIONS

- Microsoft Power Apps
- Microsoft Power Automate
- Microsoft SharePoint Online

"The [LA] County asked us where we got the app, who built it, then told us to get more."

Chris Amerine
IT Department Director, URM

ABOUT COMPASS365

Compass365, an industry-leading IT systems integrator and Microsoft Gold Partner, combines our years of SharePoint and Office 365 expertise with proven methods to help improve the way companies work, operate, and confidently get the value from their Microsoft investments.

THE INVESTIGATION

"Off the shelf products were backordered, didn't meet our requirements, and cost at least twice as much as Compass365's custom solution."

Chris Amerine
IT Department Director, URM

Having worked with General Networks for IT Infrastructure needs, Union Rescue Mission chose their Microsoft solutions arm, Compass365, to assist with this project because of their expertise in building Microsoft solutions, the existing relationship with General Networks, and Compass365's long history of supporting nonprofits, who traditionally have very strict budgets.

Knowing the Mission would need more than a paper Excel printout on a clipboard at the check-in desk, and with other kiosks and applications being too expensive and on back-order Chris turned to Compass365 for help.

The team reviewed requirements and decided to create the COVID-19 staff attestation app again using Power Apps, connected to a SharePoint list, with triggers in Power Automate to alert HR via email if a question had been marked in a certain way.

THE SOLUTION

The result was a COVID-19 Union Rescue Mission attestation Power App loaded into a simple but efficient kiosk: a generic second-hand iPad with the Power App and a $70 kiosk stand. The Guided Access tool keeps the app as "always open" and staff started using the iPad to check in every day. Staff members can also access the app on their mobile phones.

Union Rescue Mission was ahead of any state and county mandates with the use of this solution. The Mission is monitored by LA County, and when they saw how well the kiosk worked for staff, they asked URM to use it to monitor guests as well.

Compass365 made a few tweaks allowing the app to accommodate duplicate guest names using bed and floor numbers. The system is working flawlessly. Both staff and guest attestations are completed in the Power App and the data is then housed in a SharePoint list that triggers an email to HR if needed by leveraging Power Automate.

"It's not sophisticated, but it meets all attestation requirements."

Chris Amerine
IT Department Director, URM

INNOVATIONS AND IDEAS THROUGH WORKING TOGETHER

From the original Power App to automate their Incident Report form, Union Rescue Mission and Compass365 worked together to continue leveraging the Power Platform when COVID-19 presented new and urgent issues.

Innovation and inspiration happen when people work together, looking for ways to improve business processes with technology, then implementing those innovations for their employees. By building Power Apps solutions, Union Rescue Mission was able to cut the delivery time down from months to weeks to keep their staff and guests safe. Deploying this rapid solution while complying with local and state regulations and guidelines, has kept the mission doing what it does best – embracing people experiencing homelessness with compassion.