

## Background

### How did the EasyBiz Project come about?

In 2004 a Federal Election commitment was made to reduce red tape for small and home based businesses. Local government authorities were invited to apply for project funding. In December 2005 the Minister announced the Easybiz project had a successful bid and \$6.2 m was allocated from the Federal Government's Regulatory Reduction Incentive Fund.

A consortium of 29 councils, led by the City of Whittlesea, was formed to administer the EasyBiz project. A demonstration project was implemented to prove the concept ahead of funding submission. Easybiz was rolled out to 30 councils over 2006-2008.

In 2008, under a project of the Victorian Government's Councils Reforming Business Initiative, **EasyBiz Phase II Project** has been approved to consolidate the work already undertaken and roll out the EasyBiz suite to the remaining councils by 2009. Local Government Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Small Business Victoria have partnered to support councils deliver Easybiz Phase II.

### World Class Services and EasyBiz

The **World Class Service initiative** is a key program for the Department of Innovation Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) and delivered through Small Business Victoria (SBV). Commenced in 2006, it aims to reduce the cost of regulation for businesses through 'joining-up' and improving Government service across all three tiers of Government. In 2008, over 120 government agencies across the 3 tiers of government are involved, with services being used by over 100,000 people a month. Evaluation of the initiative shows a strong correlation between users and satisfaction with Government service, increased regulatory efficiency, and economic growth.

The EasyBiz is operated and supported by Small Business Victoria as part of the Business Victoria platform developed from the World Class Service initiative. The platform was enhanced to meet the needs of EasyBiz by:

- redeveloping Business Licence Information System,
- Forms Platform,
- Council Integration Hub,
- Council Integration Mechanisms

Small Business Victoria assumes responsibility for operational and technical maintenance including:

- Performance Requirements
- Maintaining Content relevant to all councils
- Supporting council to manage their own content

### What is the EasyBiz Project?

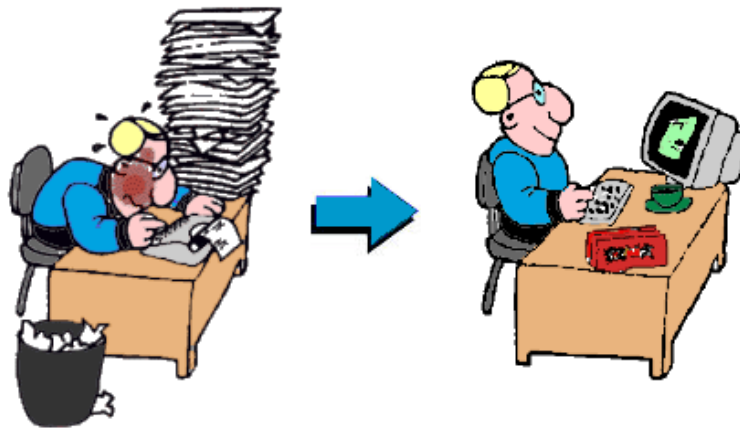
The EasyBiz project allows small and home-based businesses in participating councils to identify and understand the need for various local government licences, permit and registrations online in the areas of land management, health, food safety, local laws, planning and building.

Small and home-based businesses can complete and submit application forms online, via email, by fax, post or in person, speeding up the application process. Council receives this information and determine whether the licence, permit or registration will be granted.

EasyBiz is not a 'public' brand, it is a project name, it doesn't have a website, and it is not marketed directly to business consumers. It is a project designed for Victorian councils, to assist them with addressing and processing applications for local government permits, licences and registrations. The forms and guides developed by the EasyBiz project are only accessible through participating council websites and through the Business Victoria website.

EasyBiz phase 1 involved 30 Victorian councils.

No more nightmares with filling out preprinted forms and paper forms!



## Harmonisation of forms across councils

By collaborating with other councils and relevant state government bodies there is a significant opportunity to improve how councils work to better meet the needs of customers. Greater consistency of processes and forms will make it easier for businesses and citizens who have to deal with more than one council e.g. a mobile food business who must register in each municipality it sells food in.

The adoption of standard data structures across local government will also enable statistics and service improvements to be more easily shared as well as improving connections across councils.

## Why do small and home-based businesses benefit?

The EasyBiz project reduces the time and effort required by small and home-based businesses to comply with local government regulations:

- **Flexibility.** Businesses can discover the licence, permit or registration they need, and prepare and submit applications 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, without visiting council.
- **More time to run the business.** Businesses can re-use data across forms, which reduce the time and effort to comply with regulations.

- **Confidence.** Businesses obtain online guidance including information on the rules and regulations and fees regarding an activity or applications. Through integration with other sites providing local, state and federal licences, permits and registrations are also accessible. A record of the guidance received is also provided.
- **Easier and less costly.** User friendly website designs make it easier to understand and comply with requirements, and to understand what to do in order to apply for a licence, permit or registration. Consistent processes for businesses dealing with multiple councils and state agencies.

## Why are councils participating?

- **A clear message to business.** Shows small and home-based businesses the council is committed to assisting them in setting up and operating in their council area.
- **Resource benefits.** Less time following up applications for corrections and further information. Less manual data entry into council IT systems. More time on assessing applications and higher value activities. A central, independently managed facility to run the infrastructure and processes means less cost to councils.
- **Flexibility.** A service delivery platform that uses any web portal including an EasyBiz portal, council's website, and State and Federal Government. Councils can work together to extend the service to include other licences, permits and registrations in the future.
- **Connect with other councils/government.** Participating councils learn from each other, develop standards and benchmarks, and collaborate in best practice. Councils interconnect with other services via the use of data standards consistent with State and Federal Government. Councils can work together to extend the service to include other licences, permits and registrations in the future.

## Need more information?

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## Frequently asked Questions

### What is a Smartform?

Smartforms are electronic forms that can be printed to look like council's own application form, but allow the business applicant to complete the application online, and then submit it either electronically (if council has the technology in place to receive it), or to print and post, fax or email.

The added benefit of Smartforms is the applicant can be guided through a personalised application process. This means they're only asked to complete fields relevant to them, are able to attach relevant documents and save time through pre-population from their Business Victoria account details.

### What is the EasyBiz project scope?

The EasyBiz project is made up of three components: 1) Compliance Information; 2) Permit, licence and registration application forms; and 3) Council Integration and Data exchange between EasyBiz and council.

- 1) Compliance Information – ALL EasyBiz councils will have tailored compliance information for all transactions, including planning, building, food/health, and roads transactions. These will help small business owners operating in your council area to determine whether they need to apply for a licence/permit/registration to conduct an activity. All compliance information will contain council-specific information about the licence/permit/registration in question, and/or links to council websites where relevant information can be accessed.
- 2) Permit, licence or registration application forms – These forms are designed for ALL councils participating in EasyBiz to use. These forms feature:
  - The capability to be completed and submitted online. In submitting the forms online via email, the user can also attach any required supporting information.
  - The ability to be downloaded from either Business Victoria or council's own website and completed without needing to be connected to the Internet. The applicant may choose to connect to lodge the application having reconnected to the Internet, email it to the council as an attachment, fax it to the council, or lodge it in person.
  - The application form has a number of "smarts", such as providing answers for the applicant to choose from, informing the applicant if they have not completed all required fields, and informing the applicant if they have completed certain fields incorrectly.
  - Even if councils do not use the permit, licence or registration application forms, users and councils will benefit, as the user will be informed about what steps they need to take to apply for a licence/permit/registration, and what information they must provide council as part of their licence/permit/registration application.
- 3) Council integration and Data exchange between EasyBiz and Council – Your council has selected certain permits, licences and registration application forms to be "integrated". Integration refers to EasyBiz sending a data file to council via email which can immediately be populated into council back-end IT systems, avoiding the need for council staff to re-key data contained in permit, licence

or registration application forms. The council is also required to implement and provide a link to the council form on the council website, whether the form delivery is via email or print and post.

## What are the Project Drivers?

The aim is to make doing business easier for small business and home-based businesses in Victoria and to make permit, licence and registration application processes more efficient and effective for Victorian councils. For small business owners this enables them to go online to a council website or through the Business Victoria portal (managed by Victorian State Government) and use a consistent electronic 'smart' form permit, licence and registration application to complete applications for required council permits, licences or registrations.

## What areas within Council does the Easybiz project cover?

Easybiz Transactions cover the following areas:

- Planning
- Building
- Health
- Land Management
- Local Laws

## Before Easybiz what problems did businesses have in interacting with local councils?

Before the EasyBiz Project and its implementation of online forms, businesses may have had the following problems interacting with council:

- Could only contact during business hours.
- Could only get information in person, by phone, and via website (no application submission)
- Processing of forms and permits would take longer as there was no online submission.
- Businesses may receive inconsistent information, requirements, processes and forms as there was no standardisation across local council.
- Businesses dealing with more than one council were required to duplicate information.

## What are the benefits for small businesses after EasyBiz?

EasyBiz will have the following benefits for small businesses:

- EasyBiz will provide an online channel for small business to apply for council permits
  - Flexibility for the customer. They can discover the permits they need, prepare and submit applications 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- EasyBiz will make the application process more efficient, by
  - Reducing re-work on forms through instant error notification
  - Re-using data across forms
- More time to run the business

- The vision is EasyBiz will eventually allow small businesses to complete, save, pay and submit all their local government compliance forms online.

## What are the benefits for councils?

EasyBiz will have the following benefits for councils:

- The use of data standards consistent with other State and Federal Government transactions to allow the interconnection of government services.
- Aligning electronic service delivery infrastructure with a central, independently managed hub for compliance transactions.
- Flexible service delivery by offering customers the option of online, email, fax or post.
- Provide greater value added customer service and improve reputation by helping councils improve their delivery of service. For instance the verification of data forms prior to submission will all but remove the need for councils to contact applicants regarding data errors and missing information in their application. Council officers will then be able to concentrate on the substance of assessing the application. Application processing time from lodgement of the application to decision would be expected to fall and service by council will be perceived to have improved.
- Reduce form development and printing. EasyBiz offers the opportunity for councils to remove the need for printing applications forms and information. This will save money and again improve the council's reputation, this time by being seen as committed to creating an environmentally friendly environment.
- Council websites look and feel to be retained while presenting joined-up-Government information

## What are the key features?

EasyBiz Phase II has the following key features:

- Online solution
- Users can complete and submit applications forms either online or via traditional means (fax, post or in person)
- Forms will be pre-filled with user's information entered automatically. Users will not be required to enter basic information more than once, thus reducing time and effort.
- Users can save partially complete forms and return to complete forms later.
- Council centric
  - All forms are tailored to each council
  - Data submitted by council only viewable by that council
  - Councils can author and modify their own transactions through a simple to use template system
- Hide/Show functionality
  - Display fields that are only relevant to a response to a question (based upon council's own business rules)

## What are the software requirements?

The following software requirements are needed for the smart forms to allow all features of the form to be used.

- Version 7.05 Acrobat Reader to use all features of form
- Recommend version 8 Acrobat Reader
- Form will detect version Acrobat Reader being used and advise user if doesn't have required version
- User can choose to download free Acrobat Reader from the Internet or continue
- If user chooses to continue in versions lower than 7.05, will be unable to save draft of form to PC – still able to complete and print form

## What will my council need to do?

To ensure the success of the project over the next 6 weeks, councils will need to:

- Sign-up to involvement in **EasyBiz Phase II**.
- Select the forms and transactions that are relevant to you.
- Appoint project champion and individuals in each of the following areas: Information, Technology, Building, Planning, Health, Local Laws and Land Management/Sustainability.
- Provide Council IP address and transaction information (forms sent via email or print and post)
- Provide details of project champion and business unit representatives, along with IP details and transaction information to Melissa Ritchie at Small Business Victoria, [Melissa.Ritchie@diird.vic.gov.au](mailto:Melissa.Ritchie@diird.vic.gov.au).
- Conduct internal marketing of the EasyBiz project to show the organisation the benefits of EasyBiz for business and council staff.

For the life of the project the council will need to:

- Attend workshops run by the EasyBiz project team
- Review material and provide feedback
- Sign-off deliverables at different stages throughout the project
- Work with council IT provider to integrate forms (if email delivery option is council's choice of delivery)
- Integrate EasyBiz forms onto council website