

How Whangarei District Council built New Zealand's award-winning local government website

OVERVIEW

Whangarei District Council transformed a fragmented digital estate into one of New Zealand's highest-performing local government websites. The council used Granicus Websites & CMS (OpenCities) and Forms & Workflow (OpenForms) to consolidate multiple websites, reduce content complexity, improve accessibility, and digitise resident services. The experience is supported through integration with ArcGIS Online and TechnologyOne's Digital Experience Platform for Local Government (DxP LG). The result is a customer-focused experience that has earned the ALGIM "Supreme Website Award" for two consecutive years.



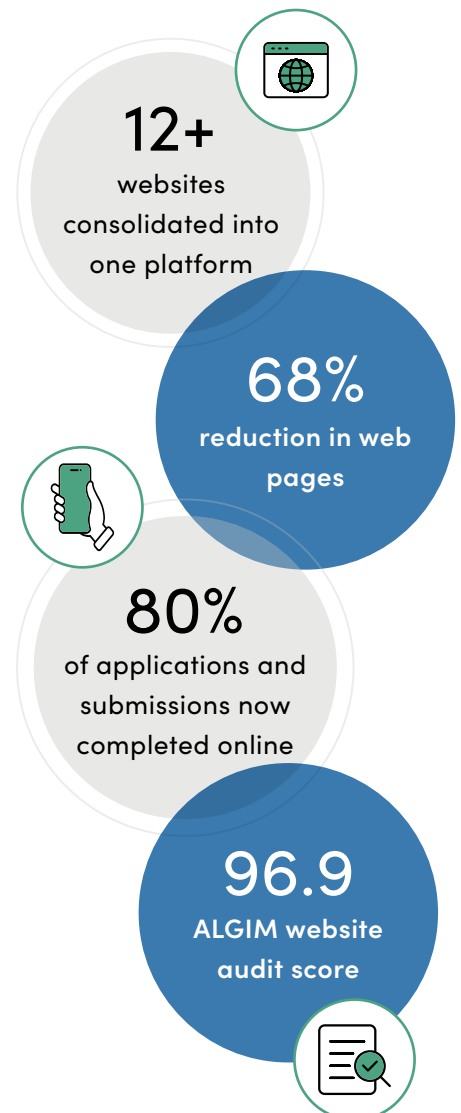
"We were excited to have our website receive the 'Supreme Website Award' at the Association for Local Government Information Management (ALGIM) Annual Awards two years in a row. We received this recognition by ranking first out of all 78 member councils across New Zealand. The rankings were based on things like accessibility, readability, search engine optimisation and customer focus across our online customer channels."

Leanne Clark, Systems Analyst, Digital Platforms,
Whangarei District Council

MUST HAVE SOLUTIONS

Websites & CMS

Forms & Workflow





SITUATION | CONSOLIDATING SYSTEMS TO SIMPLIFY EXPERIENCES

Whangarei District Council is responsible for managing content across multiple platforms and websites, which is no simple task. The council's website previously contained approximately 2,200 pages, much of it duplicated, difficult to maintain, and organised around internal structures rather than resident needs.

The team sought to create a simpler, customer-centred experience. The project's key objectives included:

- ✓ Consolidating 12+ websites into a single platform.
- ✓ Reducing content volume and focus.
- ✓ Improving digital accessibility standards.
- ✓ Reducing reliance on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) resources for ongoing management.

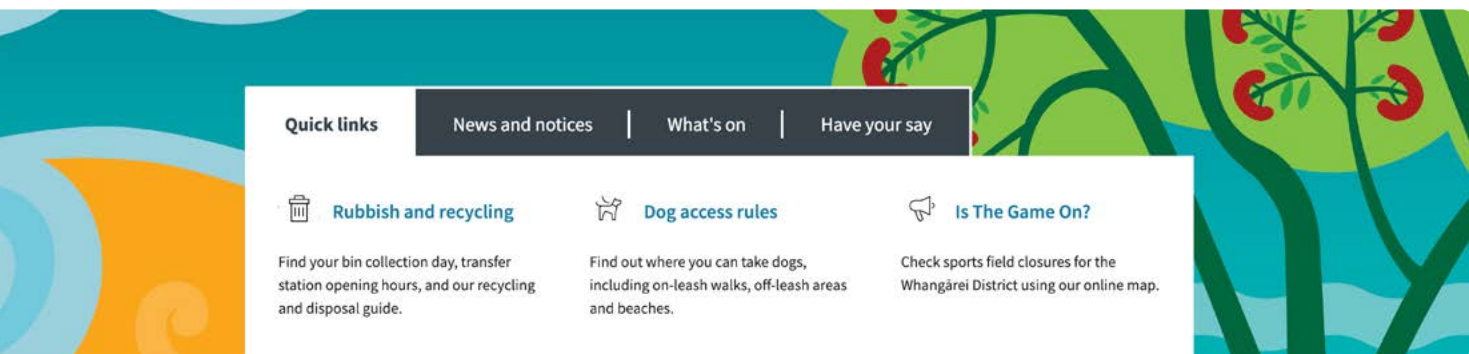
"We asked ourselves, 'What do our customers actually need?'" explained Leanne Clark, systems analyst, digital platforms for Whangarei District Council. "We recognised that our customers don't necessarily understand the council's structures, processes, and terminology. We wanted content to be written in customer speak, not council speak, and have a very strong focus on accessibility."

To achieve these goals, the council had to rethink how its online information was structured, written, and delivered. This required a shift in focus to the tasks residents are often trying to complete and the journeys they followed to find services online.

SOLUTION | BUILDING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC DIGITAL FOUNDATION

Whangarei District Council selected Granicus' Websites & CMS through a competitive procurement process after identifying the need for a purpose-built local government platform. The team was particularly drawn to the Granicus' out-of-the-box functionality, ease of use, customer focus, and accessibility capabilities.

A centralised publishing model was applied during implementation to give the team ownership of website governance, content creation, and quality assurance. The council redesigned the website around customer needs – rather than organising content around council departments and internal structures – with a focus on the tasks people are trying to complete and the information they need to find.



“We build our content around what customers are trying to achieve,” said Clark. “We put ourselves in the customer’s shoes, think like a customer, and continuously look for ways to simplify processes and improve the user experience.”

Every new service is now evaluated through a customer journey lens. The team maps how residents discover, access, and complete services online, then designs content and workflows to remove friction. This methodology, combined with a mobile-first approach and a strong commitment to accessibility, has created a digital experience that is intuitive for all and easy for the council to maintain.

In addition to this strong use of Websites & CMS, the council added Granicus’ Forms & Workflow to steadily digitise paper-based processes and increase access to online services. The team now builds online forms that rapidly respond to resident requests.

RESULTS | AWARD-WINNING AND FUTURE-FOCUSED

Whangarei District Council has reduced its website footprint from approximately 2,200 pages to 700 pages since launching the new Granicus platform. Digital adoption has increased substantially, with 75% to 80% of applications and submissions now completed online instead of in paper form.

The council also reported strengthened accessibility across its digital services. “I think accessibility is one of our biggest improvements,” said Clark. “[Forms & Workflow] is accessible by design. A separate web quality assurance tool has also helped us identify where we need to improve. We’re not having to put a heap of effort into accessibility because the product does the heavy lifting.” Consistent governance, customer-focused content, access to online resources, and ongoing optimisation have helped residents quickly find information and complete tasks regardless of device or ability.

These combined efforts have earned Whangarei District Council national recognition. The council was recognised with the ALGIM “Supreme Website Award” for two consecutive years and achieved an audit score of approximately 96.9 out of 100.

Whangarei District Council’s award-winning success is the result of sustained, incremental improvement rather than large-scale redesign projects. “It’s not often the big bang stuff,” explained Clark. “It’s about steadily chipping away, looking at the reports that we get annually, and working through little tweaks here and there to improve performance, content, and accessibility. We are very passionate about the website and want to provide really good service.”



BRIGHT IDEA: TURN PEER LEARNING INTO FASTER INNOVATION

Whangarei District Council has accelerated its digital progress by tapping into a collaborative community of Granicus customers. Whangarei, along with Horowhenua District Council and Palmerston North City Council – all recognised among the Top 10 finalists in the ALGIM Supreme Website Awards – have built an active working group focused on practical collaboration.

“One of the most valuable aspects of being part of the Granicus community has been the willingness of councils to share what they’ve built,” said Clark. “Instead of starting from scratch, we can learn from each other, adapt proven solutions, and deliver better outcomes faster.”

Whangarei has both benefited from and contributed to this peer-to-peer model, sharing as-built documentation, forms and workflows, and practical solutions with councils across New Zealand and Australia. The result is less duplication, faster problem-solving, and a stronger digital experience for the communities each council serves.

**Interested in finding out how Granicus can work
for your community?**

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