

Web-Based Administration of Surplus Property

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Abstract

The University of Virginia's Procurement Services Department manages the disposition of all of the University's surplus property through its Surplus Property System. The Procurement Services staff recently completed a comprehensive redesign of the Surplus Property System so most of its functions can be administered through the web. The web-administered Surplus Property System has been beneficial to University departments because they can now surplus items more quickly and maintain records and documentation more easily. The new system is also beneficial to the Surplus Property Program because the time, resources, and administrative costs required to manage the system have been significantly reduced. The redesign of the University's Surplus Property System is an important contribution to the overall goal of saving money for the University by streamlining administrative processes.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, is one of the best universities in the United States. *US News & World Report* has ranked the University of Virginia as the best public university for four of the seven years since they began ranking public universities. Among all colleges and universities, the University has always ranked within the top 25 in the nation. The University of Virginia is noted for the architectural beauty of the historic Rotunda and Lawn, the heart of the “academical village” designed by Thomas Jefferson, and for a tradition of academic excellence. Many of the University’s programs such as Law, Business, Medicine, Architecture, and English have ranked among the top ten in the country over the past decade or so. The 19,000 students attending the University work within a true meritocracy and live by an Honor Code unique among American universities. Each student is exposed to the widest spectrum of disciplines – from arts and athletics to humanities and technology.

Statement of the Problem

The Procurement Services Department manages the disposition of all of the University of Virginia’s surplus property through its Surplus Property System. The demands on the Surplus Property System have significantly increased in recent years. In part, this is due to the University of Virginia’s commitment to keeping its general computer equipment and its sophisticated research equipment as current as possible. Computer and other high tech equipment, of course, rapidly becomes obsolete and so University departments have been sending an ever larger volume of materials to Surplus Property. The traditional

processes by which the Surplus Property System operated were labor intensive and no longer adequate to the growing level of demand on the system. Under the old system, departmental users submitted paper requests to Surplus Property through University Messenger Mail or through the US Postal Service. Inventory records were also kept on paper. The entire auction inventory, often as long as 50-60 pages, would have to be mailed at considerable expense to anyone requesting a copy. Sales and accounting records from the auctions were also kept in paper files.

Design

The basic redesign of Surplus Property system was made by Procurement Services' Information Technology manager working with the Surplus Property staff and in consultation with departmental users throughout the University of Virginia. One member of the IT staff was given primary responsibility for creating the new Surplus Property website and for creating most of the database functionality. In general terms, the Surplus Property website was designed so items submitted to Surplus could be more easily tracked and sales and accounting records could be more easily maintained. The overall goal was to design a system that would move a higher volume of inventory through the system while reducing the amount of time departmental users and Surplus Property staff would have to spend on cataloging and record keeping.

In the new system, departmental users submit items using a web form which is automatically loaded into the Surplus Property database. The Surplus manager compares the electronically submitted item record to the actual physical delivery of property and approves, rejects, or makes corrections to the item record as necessary. The submitting

department is automatically notified once this review process is complete. The Surplus Property forms were coded to alert users to common mistakes such as neglecting to fill in required information or providing information in the wrong format. The forms were also coded so the department submitting the items to Surplus Property would automatically receive a copy of the form for departmental records. The Surplus manager enters information on planned auctions into the web-based system and flags the auction that new goods should be associated with it when they are automatically added to the system. When he is ready to set up for an auction, the Surplus manager simply goes to his website and flags that auction as “active.” Items received after that point are automatically associated with the next auction.

Following the auction, the Surplus manager assigns lot sale prices on his website and individual item sale prices are automatically calculated. Reports are generated of sale amounts to be credited to the various owning departments. General ledger transactions are automatically generated from the database when approval has been obtained to transfer the funds back to the selling department. Departments can use the website to track the items they have sent to Surplus as well as their earnings from the auctions for the previous six months.

The Surplus website was also designed to be helpful to potential buyers. The auction schedule and inventory can be searched on this site at all times by anyone with Internet access. The Surplus website also provides maps, weather links, and payment information.

Implementation

The new Surplus Property system has been implemented in stages as the features and components have been developed. The new Surplus Property website can be found at <http://www.procurement.virginia.edu/Surplus/>. Procurement Services staff makes every effort to ensure departmental users, University staff in general, and the general public are aware of this resource. The Surplus Property staff easily adapted to the new procedures so the transition from the old system to the new went smoothly.

Benefits

There are numerous lasting benefits to the web-administered Surplus Property system. Web transmission of Surplus forms and records saves the time and money of using the US Postal Service and is much faster than using the University's on campus mailing service. Aside from the back-office savings of the web-based system, Procurement Services now saves approximately one week per month of the Surplus manager's time. Keeping track of surplus items is much faster and easier than before. Sales records and accounting information is much more easily maintained and can be searched and retrieved electronically. The new system makes it possible to move inventory much more quickly, so Procurement Services now holds more auctions per year and has closed one of its two warehouses because less storage space is required.

Retrospect

