Chromebook Becomes Key to Promoting DX of Government Services, Providing Both High Security and Mobility

Hamamatsu City Hall

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Located in Shizuoka, Hamamatsu City is the second largest city in the Chubu region, boasting an area of 1,558.06 km2. As social problems like population decline, low birthrate, and aging of society become increasingly dire, the city is taking advantage of AI, ICT, and other cutting-edge technologies, as well as data utilization and other digital strategies as it promotes sustainable urban development based on a digital first approach. Its proactive efforts include the establishment of the Digital Smart City HAMAMATSU public private partnership platform and provision of support to venture businesses.

Hamamatsu City boasts the largest city area among ordinance-designated cities in Japan. In October 2019, the city announced its Digital First Declaration and has since been working to promote DX in the three areas of urban development, citizen services, and municipal operations.One of the challenges for taking administrative procedures online, introducing electronic payments, and allowing city workers to change desks freely is building an efficient, cross-network system of operations.We talked to Mr. Takatoshi Naruse of the Information Policy Division about how Chromebook was introduced as the key device for addressing that challenge.

▌Interview participants

・Takatoshi Naruse, Information Policy Division

▌Chrome Enterprise services used

Chrome Enterprise、Chromebook

Substantially Improving the Environment with Operations in Which Information Is Not Stored on Devices

In the past few years, municipal DX has been taking place at an increasingly rapid pace.City halls and ward offices nationwide have come to a major turning point. Among these is Hamamatsu City, which has been promoting DX in earnest since 2019. It established a new specialized Digital Smart City Promotion Division and is working on implementing a digital first strategy in municipal operations, including the active introduction of AI, ICT, and other cutting-edge technologies and data utilization.

Up to now, because some operations involve dealing with important information of citizens, the city has been conducting its main operations in a closed network environment completely separated from the outside. However, the number of operations requiring the internet and web conferences has increased rapidly, and the number of operations that involve use of the internet has gradually been increasing.

Mr. Takatoshi Naruse of the Information Policy Division, which handles operations equivalent to the Information Systems Departments of private companies, says, "Next year, we plan to change the network configuration, and we are looking into how to build the system environment within each network.As a part of those efforts, expectations are high for the effects of introducing Chromebooks in an internet environment."

Mr. Naruse

Posing a particular challenge is having to change the current working environment in response to changes in the surrounding environment.

"Up to now, there were only a few devices in the division that were connected to the internet, so during times when there was a lot of communication with outside parties, these devices would get tied up. Problems like this were occurring all over the place.The necessary measures have to be taken to protect information, but we hope to actively

make changes where we can while implementing the necessary measures in order to make things more convenient."

There were also some issues the city wanted to resolve when dealing with device problems.

"Hamamatsu City is the second largest municipality in Japan in terms of city area. It's not uncommon to have to drive more than two hours from city hall to handle problems on site. The time required to deal with device problems not only puts work on hold at the worksite but also places a considerable burden on the systems division in terms of operational efficiency."

What the city needed were devices that were easy to set up, could be carried around, and would allow a method of operations in which information is not stored on the devices themselves. Mr. Naruse says Chromebook was the first device put forward as a potential solution to make that a reality.

"It was particularly important that information not be stored on the devices, so we discussed things with the Google rep on that basis

several times as we looked into it. I can't say that there weren't any challenges when it came to introducing (Chromebook). At first we were looking into operations using guest session mode, but we were unable to store the minimum required information on the device, such as security certificates. After consulting with the Google rep, we went with the new managed guest session mode, which completely eliminated the problem and allowed us to introduce the devices without a hitch."

The city began its research in the summer of 2018, introducing 30 Chromebooks, and later introduced 140 more in December 2020. Currently, Chromebooks have mainly been deployed in departments that frequently interact with outside parties. They have also proven useful for remote work performed at outside worksites or at home. They were also deployed at outside agencies located far away from the city hall, significantly reducing the burden of handling problems there, which had been a challenge.

Highly Portable Chromebooks Bring About Change in Awareness

Hamamatsu City is looking to substantially change its system environment to promote DX. With particularly high interest in reforming the working environment, it is also promoting an office system where employees are free to change desks. For that reason, Chromebook, which can be taken anywhere, quickly became an indispensable tool. However, as more and more people leave the city hall to communicate with outside parties or take their devices with them to work off-premises, what worries system administrators is users losing devices and other such problems.

"We have to keep the risk of information leaks down to a minimum. That's precisely why we have to have operations where information is not stored on devices. We have taken the steps of logging out devices after a certain period of time has passed and deleting all data stored on the device. What has made this possible is the speed at which Chromebooks boot up. Devices that take several minutes to boot up not only decrease work efficiency but also foment user frustration. Moreover, by using the managed guest session mode available with Google Workspace, we were able to simplify account management while also improving convenience for users. Being certain that information is not left on devices gives administrators peace of mind."

Still, he says that there were some difficulties when it came to gaining the understanding of city workers, who are the actual users, because of the significant changes to the existing work environment.

"Most of the workers had never touched a Chromebook before, so the only way to move forward is to properly highlight the advantages. We've only just begun introducing Chromebook, but more and more we're hearing from workers who are still doing things the old way that they want to use Chromebook. I feel that awareness is spreading little by little."

Mr. Naruse says that up to now, each department has been sharing internet access via several devices, but the amount of online work has increased rapidly under the COVID-19 pandemic, so there is more demand for internet access. This, too, has created favorable conditions for the efforts.

"We're working on establishing an office system where workers are free to change desks in order to promote DX at City Hall, but we have to change the mindset of workers to get them to reconsider the way of doing things. I feel that Chromebook is a tool that can do just that since it can be carried around anywhere and allows the necessary team members to be gathered together to work on each task."

He says that the introduction of Chromebook is still limited to certain departments on a trial basis. It will still take time for understanding to catch up, but Mr. Naruse says that the actual examples of how Chromebook has helped improve operations will help.

"Going forward, we have plans to introduce several hundred Chromebooks over several years in order to promote a new office system where workers can change desks freely. I hope to continue working on various reforms to achieve further digital transformation."

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