# Company Profile: SustaiNet Software International

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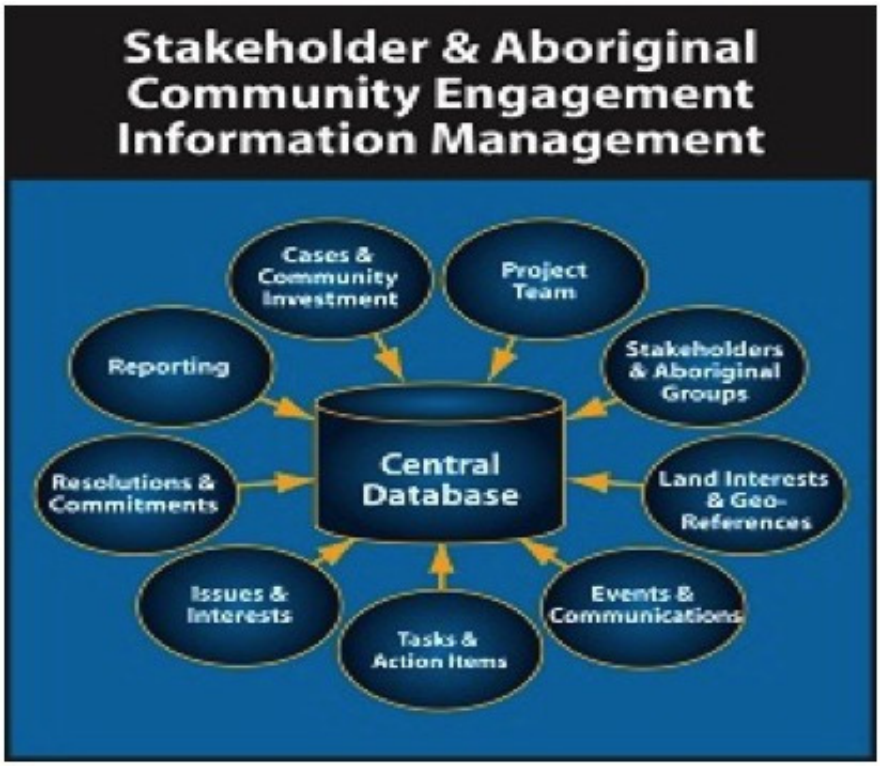
**Colin Ellis** is SustaiNet's Enterprise Accounts Manager for their database product known as StakeTracker. SustaiNet Software is Canada's premier supplier of software specifically designed to support the engagement work of public, stakeholder and Aboriginal community engagement professionals. Through his relationships with government, industry, and Aboriginal communities, Colin has become a trusted advisor for the communication management needs of their work. He has been involved in some of the country's highest profile energy and resource development projects, and helps organizations manage risk, reduce application delays and surprises and demonstrate transparency through implementing effective communication records management strategies.




**Records Management Made Easy**

When a proposed development project impacts Traditional Territories, keeping track of the ensuing three way communication – Aboriginal community/industry/government – can be daunting for all three parties. Recording and documenting of all communications and interactions should be responsibly managed, maintained, and readily accessible in a format that is clear to those who ultimately need to use them. A project can sometimes take years to go from concept to production which means each group generates an "info-mountain", and when there is more than one project in play, the need and challenge of keeping track multiplies exponentially. How do industry, governments and Aboriginal groups, that may not have adequate staff dedicated to records management, stay on top of it all? Well, there's an app for that!

**Transparency of Process**

**SustaiNet Software** has developed a purpose-built, web-based database application that is offered over the internet as-a-service (a hosted solution) that centrally stores, manages, sorts, and analyzes input from all parties. Colin Ellis from SustaiNet says "When different groups are discussing an issue, a commitment, or simply developing a relationship, it is helpful to all concerned that an accurate record of communications and interactions be maintained, and made accessible to those who need it. It is all about building trust, addressing concerns and being accountable. Clear and concise record keeping helps demonstrate transparency of processes, and is respectful to relationships."

Organizations engaged in development projects often keep records in multiple formats – be it little black books, binders or spreadsheets – and these may be kept in the field, at the office, or at home. Problems arise when it comes time to collate that information and present it in a clear and logical manner that demonstrates transparency; or when the need arises to quickly refer back to a conversation regarding a particular topic, land interest, commitment or concern. SustaiNet's software addresses these issues by ensuring that all the information is stored in a single data repository, in a consistent format that can be easily accessed by those who need it from wherever they are. Ellis says "One of the biggest concerns for organizations is not the lack of record keeping, but that these records can't be easily accessed and mined to effectively tell the story of what has transpired. Inconsistency, coupled with human resource turnover and lost records creates problems."

During the engagement process, many of those involved wear 'many hats. It is critical that everyone working on developing the relationship be aware of an individual's different roles and responsibilities within a community, as well as how this landscape may change over time. SustaiNet's software ensures that this complexity is properly captured and managed. It ensures that data integrity is maintained over time by storing all communication and commitment records against the correct entity being consulted. "The ability to effectively track roles, responsibilities and authority within an Aboriginal community is often a challenge for an organization. In light of relationship building, it is imperative that this complexity be captured so that it can be clearly shared and understood. It is helpful in terms of bringing new employees up to speed in understanding the profile and concerns of a community, and it is respectful to the community being consulted," says Ellis.

**Security of Sensitive Information**

Another communications management challenge that can arise during the engagement process is "marrying" communication and commitment records to points of interest associated to land, for instance areas that are of cultural significance. People need to know where these areas are and why they are important. Additionally, this information can be very sensitive and may need to be kept confidential. Having it all stored in a secure database that locks down records to only those that have the permissions to access them respects the trust that is implicit when sensitive information is shared.

Consistent, accurate and comprehensive documentation of the engagement process helps demonstrate transparency. If a proponent has done a really good job with the engagement process, then why not have documentation that demonstrates this effort? From the perspective of the Aboriginal community, it can help track their communications with proponents, governments and help effectively manage associated agreements and commitments. The software can be set up to use terminology that is appropriate and respectful to Aboriginal communities.

Ellis says "At the end of the day, it is important that an organization can effectively demonstrate the effort that went into building a relationship, identifying and mitigating interests and concerns, and managing agreements and commitments made. Responsible communications records management is just good business."

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