

# Nebraska Toasts Online Liquor License Renewals

The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission modernized a tedious paper-based process.

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By Sarah Rich

**T**ake one part government communication, one part online capability and one part liquor license, then blend well and serve to the state of Nebraska.

The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission is serving this metaphorical cocktail as a new option for liquor license renewals; the process now can be done online.

Since February, the state's nearly 5,000 liquor licensees (including its out-of-state licensees) have been able to choose online renewal of forms and Web-based fee payment.

Before, customers were only able to renew licenses by filling out paper forms and either mailing them in or by physically taking them to city clerk offices, said Hobert Rupe, executive director of the state's Liquor Control Commission.

"We were able to work with Nebraska.gov to come up with a way to do basically as much as we can to do one-stop shopping," Rupe said.

Like most states, establishments in Nebraska that serve alcohol must acquire a liquor license to comply with the state's Liquor Control Act. Liquor licenses must be renewed annually. Nearly half of licensees in Nebraska renew in October via Class C

licenses that permit sales of beer, wine and spirits. All other license classifications are renewed in April.

Rupe said for the April renewal deadline, more than 1,000 of its 2,500 renewals were done with the new online capability. The commission is expecting 1,800 of the other 2,500 renewals to be done online. Rupe hopes that within the next two years 90 percent of licensees will be renewed online.

Historically the renewal process has been lengthy, Rupe said.

Once a license was renewed by the state, a notice was sent to the city to ensure that it didn't object to the establishment's renewal information. From there, the licensees finished the process by paying a mandatory "occupation tax," which was received by the city clerk's offices. (This manual renewal process is still available in Nebraska.)

Rupe said as renewal deadlines approached, this process wasn't ideal due to the increased demand and workload to complete the process on time. So to streamline the process and reduce potential human errors, renewals were made available online. Rupe said because the online process can be accessed anytime from

anywhere, the capability is creating needed flexibility for licensees.

"Unfortunately with bar owners, their hours — they don't go to bed until 3 in the morning and then don't wake up until 2 the next day," Rupe said. "So they [are now] able to renew at any time."

Nebraska partnered with NIC for implementation of the new service on Nebraska.gov. No additional costs were incurred for the online capability since its development occurred through Nebraska's existing e-government partnership with NIC, said Nebraska.gov General Manager Brent Hoffman.

Hoffman said because Nebraska is a "license state," it could build an online system and connect with the lower levels of government without mandates creating roadblocks.

Since Nebraska is a license state, it can license alcohol to sell at all three tiers: producers, distributors and retailers. By contrast, 19 states are identified as "control states," which gives those states total control of wholesaling and retailing.

Alabama, which also partnered with NIC, is categorized as a control state, but provides online renewal of liquor licenses.

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