



Baldwin County Serves Over 15% of its Citizens Monthly through its Consolidated Call Center

On the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and Mobile Bay, citizens and visitors of Baldwin County, AL obtain quick and easy access to government services and information by simply dialling the Baldwin County Commission's Call Center. Live and operational since July 2004, the county's call center receives calls to over 200 government offices, agencies and departments into its central switchboard. Callers can get their questions answered with a live agent or forwarded directly to an expert to meet their needs within a matter of minutes. With over 25,000 calls per month on average, this county of 167,000 people is challenging some of the country's most successful call centers with its efficiency, accessibility and data-driven momentum.

"Baldwin County has always worked toward being out in front with innovation and technology for our citizens compared to other counties. This is another example of how county leaders are striving to improve the public's perception of our service. I would describe this as a project for continuous improvement."

– Commissioner David E. Bishop, Baldwin County, AL

Of Alabama's 67 counties, Baldwin is one of the fastest growing as a result of its healthy economy, first class educational system, progressive healthcare facilities, art and cultural development, and broad diversity of available housing.¹ In step with the progressive nature and customer-service oriented culture in Baldwin County, exceeding citizens' expectations with access to government and remaining the State's leader in tourism-related spending² are important drivers for the county government.

Challenge

Formerly known as the Courthouse Switchboard, representing the Bay Minette Courthouse, Fairhope Courthouse and Foley Courthouse, a single operator in each of the three locations handled calls into their respective offices. If one of the operators stepped away from their desk, was helping a walk-up or was already on the phone, calls were often abandoned or answered by someone not cross-trained in all the various offices, leaving citizens frustrated with unanswered questions and without an alternative for direct access to government related information.

In 2003, the County Commission started seeking alternatives to their current system and began learning about the power of 311 at conferences and from neighboring communities faced with similar challenges. The more they learned about channeling all government related calls into a single switchboard, the more focused they became on a consolidation effort from not only a customer service and satisfaction perspective, but also for the reporting and information gathering capabilities that enable transparency across all calls into what would ultimately become the Baldwin County Commission's Call Center.

¹ Baldwin County Commission A to Z Guide, page 7

² Baldwin County Commission A to Z Guide, page 7

Solution

The County Commission's three main goals for its consolidated call center initiative were: 1). Establish a knowledge base in order to answer all incoming County Commission calls consistently, correctly and efficiently to improve First Call Resolution 2). Create service requests for County Commission related calls like Solid Waste, the County's first deployment, and the Highway Department 3). Expand the knowledge base to include a directory for all government agencies so calls could continue to be transferred or referred to the appropriate State, Court or other affiliated agency.

Lagan's 311 solution for non-emergency call centers was able to meet the county's goals and formed the foundation for the Baldwin County Commission's Call Center in October 2008. Established as a consolidated switchboard for the unincorporated areas of Baldwin County, Solid Waste, Transportation and Court phone numbers, as well as the numbers listed as the "Call Center," route into a single switchboard that is operated by seven full-time call center agents. Although these offices have unique numbers still listed in the Blue Pages to avoid confusion with established local citizens, all calls are routed to the consolidated call center instead of the government offices directly.

The call center is accessible from 8 – 4:30, Monday – Friday and is transitioning toward a full service customer contact center for certain County Commission offices, including Solid Waste and Transportation which are live and operational today. In many instances, like the county's public transit system, the call center serves as an advocate for government-run and sponsored programs offered by the county. For example, by supplying timely information about the Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System (BRATS) program, the call center is helping to promote a strong economy, protect the environment, conserve energy, and enhance lives.³

A self-service option for access to government information and service requests online 24/7, will also be available by the fall of 2009. With a consistently high call volume each month, self-service is a lower cost alternative to using the phone and in many cases, preferable for tech-savvy citizens with access to computers. The savings in cost per click vs. cost per call is significant for the county and with more and more citizens online today, web access to general information and city service requests is truly in everyone's best interest.

Results

With an average of over 25,000 calls per month and 20,000 of these calls consistently addressed with information in the Lagan knowledge base, the County has the intelligence necessary to continue to serve the public as efficiently as possible while at the same time ensuring that their tax dollars are being spent wisely. With state and local governments under extreme pressure to justify their technology investments, solutions that support performance management, like Lagan 311, have an extra advantage. The County's ability to generate reports on response rates, service requests and resolutions, and share this data with government officials encourages accountability and enhances the budgeting and planning process.

³ Baldwin County Commission A to Z Guide; page 15

Sample service request data from Baldwin County for January – May 2009 includes:

Activity Report by Community	Jan. 2009 Questions Asked	Feb. 2009 Questions Asked	March 2009 Questions Asked	April 2009 Questions Asked	May 2009 Questions Asked
Total Times Knowledge Communities were accessed	21,536	18,706	20,687	22,701	22,344
Total Cases Created	739	808	962	910	879
Total Cases Created and Knowledge Accessed	22,275	19,514	21,649	23,611	23,223
Total Calls Answered	27,107	24,745	25,459	26,501	25,438
% of calls that Lagan Service Request or Knowledge was used	82.17%	78.86%	85.03%	89.09%	91.29%

Shannon Spivey, Customer Relationship Manager of the Baldwin County Commission comments, “Initially, I had a rather unrealistic expectation that a CRM software solution would be used for EVERY call and would likely have a 1:1 ratio on calls taken and service requests/knowledge requests fulfilled. After touring some call centers and spending time taking calls myself, I realized that you often have situations where no real interaction takes place (dropped calls, people calling for information totally outside what we do, wrong numbers, telemarketers, etc.). Based on those situations, I believe that using Lagan’s CRM software solution, Lagan 311, for 91% of our calls is a remarkable statistic. The ability to track what information was given out to 91% of our callers and demonstrate that we gave consistently correct answers at least 91% of the time with the knowledge base is extremely powerful.”

With the real-time data that’s produced from call center reporting, the County’s Citizen Services web page is more accurate and timely than ever. For example, with frequently asked questions about jury duty and state holidays vs. county holidays, citizens can find quick links to county courts and a calendar with important holiday information. Driving citizens online to the Citizen Services page or to the call center’s self-service feature off-loads the number of calls being taken—a benefit to the busy call center agents, and to citizens who gain direct access to the information that they need in minutes.

What’s Next

The impressive response to the county’s call center has its leaders like Shannon Spivey excited about the future. Spivey adds, “Our citizens have proven with their overwhelming response to our consolidated call center that they are adept with technology and welcome the improvements that we are all working to achieve for improved access to government. In the future, informational kiosks in public places, like our courthouses, could be helpful tools for call center access when citizens are in and about town. Ultimately, the implementation of a single access number, like 311, would simplify citizen access to government even further and continue to provide better transparency into the types of questions that citizens across the county consistently ask.”

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