SIX KEY STRATEGIES

MULTI-CHANNEL CONTACT CENTERS

*Achieving Success
through Integrated
Communications*

1. Use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System

A frequent source of government hesitancy for using CRMs is the belief that the focus of the public sector is more on providing information and service delivery than on private sector marketing, product sales, and detailed customer profiles. However, CRMs support key functions for government contact centers:

▶ **Citizen Interaction Management:** The ability to organize and manage a wide variety of citizen contacts, inquiries, and service requests

▶ **Case Management:** The ability to track, manage, and resolve applications, inquiries, and internal tasks

▶ **Seamless Service:** The ability, with an integrated CRM/work management system, to integrate access and delivery channels and improve data and measurement systems.

▶ **Web 2.0 Tools:** Many CRMs have built-in functionality for new media.

All nine of the 2010 Citizen-Engaged Communities—Buffalo, New York; Corpus Christi, Texas; Greensboro, North Carolina; Hampton, Virginia; Miami-Dade, Florida; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; San Francisco, California; and Winston-Salem, North Carolina—have CRMs. Three use a Lagan system, two use a Motorola CRM, two have customized programs integrated with their work order system; one uses Siebel/Oracle; and one a NOVO CRM system.

2. Have a Centralized Knowledge Base and Integrated Systems

Citizens want the information and responses they receive from local government to be current, accurate and consistent. A centralized knowledge base facilitates this goal across channels and, at the same time, increases efficiencies in communications, operations, and service delivery.

Considerations when implementing knowledge base technology:

▶ It must be possible to integrate the knowledge base system with other tools of citizen service. This has a significant impact on the adoption of the technology.

▶ The same knowledge base should be used across all interaction channels. Citizens' satisfaction will decrease if they receive different information on the same subject from different channels.

▶ The system should be designed and implemented to match the needs and profile of citizens. Providing the right search capability (e.g., keyword, natural language query) and using a taxonomy appropriate to citizens are just as important as capturing the right information.

Integrated Communications

Citizen Self-Service
▶ Web Portals
▶ IVR
▶ e-Mail
▶ FAQs
▶ Mobile Apps

Assisted Service
▶ Solutions
▶ Case Management
▶ Online Chat
▶ Service Requests
▶ Expert Connections

Knowledge Base

Data Analysis and Workflow

A robust CRM solution provides access to the organization's knowledge base, allowing contact center staff to quickly answer inquiries such as what time, how, where, and why.

Multi-Channel Contact Centers have many systems and functions to integrate, including voice, email, web, IVR, how agents issue work orders for field crews, and being able to use a single knowledge database. Integrated systems will make a substantial difference in how efficiently and stress-reduced a contact center is able to operate, eliminating separate or duplicate work orders, FAQs, service updates, and status and performance reports.

All nine designated communities have centralized knowledge bases, integrated with the CRM; service department work order systems; online FAQs and service requests; or other self-service channels.

3. Offer Self-Service Channels

According to a 2008 PEW study, most Americans expect their government to make information and services available online. Seven in ten (70 percent) say they expect to be able to get information or services from the government agency website when they need it. Approximately 60 percent of the calls received by contact centers are informational and can be offloaded to other communication channels, including the government website, Web 2.0 tools such as social networks, and IVR.

For governments, there are several factors driving the development of Web 2.0 services:

- There were 1,000 Internet devices in 1984, 1,000,000 in 1992, and 1,000,000,000 in 2008.
- A 2010 Nielsen Report indicates that Americans are spending 82 percent more time on social networking sites than a year ago.
- The simultaneous expansion of instant, online and mobile communications which connect vast and varied networks of social communities has created new pressures for cities and counties in their efforts toward responsive service. Citizens expect local government to utilize today's new social media tools to elicit their opinions and priorities, to provide immediate information and reporting, and to facilitate business processes and service delivery.
- Web 2.0 tools can streamline city and county operations by saving time, staffing requirements and gas mileage through mobile access, and their customers can have instant access to results. Workers and citizens are provided with applications that are flexible to the device in use, whether it is a desktop, notebook, PDA or wireless smartphone.
- According to a Gartner study, the average estimated cost of customer service, by contact channel, is Web self-service at $0.65; phone self service at $1.85; email at $2.50; phone (with live agent) at $4.50; and Web chat at $7.50.

The 2010 Citizen-Engaged Communities use a variety of self-service applications. Eight of the designees utilize Web interactive comment forms; seven use Web FAQs; six provide online service requests; five provide information and FAQs through IVRs and respond to walk-in customers; three have online chat functions and three have an interactive IVR for faxing, payments, account status, etc.; two have kiosks and one provides an auxiliary station. None currently are using a Web Click 2 Call Back service. Many of these applications are integrated with the call system. Many of the communities are in the process of expanding citizen options with additional self-service channels.

4. Coordinate with Service Departments

Though not limited to the public sector, governments often are not well coordinated across departments and geographies. The concept of contact center service level agreements is to establish a joint agreement between the contact center and the service departments they support to define service levels for mutual support of business processes and customer service. The goals should be a clear definition of procedures and responsibilities, joint accountability, cost effective use of resources, identification of relevant metrics for both citizen calls and service delivery, compatibility with organizational performance management systems, and an assessment and improvement process.

Eight of the nine Citizen-Engaged Communities have written service level agreements with the departments/ agencies they support.

5. Effectively Train Call Agents

All contact centers should have a formal, comprehensive agent training program that covers customer service, active listening, call procedures, technology systems, supported services, and performance expectations. Training should include onsite visits to service departments, shadowing and progressive hands-on coaching. Contact center staff should understand the day-to-day functions of different local government departments, as well as the channel options available to citizens.

Effective skill development is a result of both formal training and regular coaching, and a balance of theme-based with targeted focus. Call reviews are an excellent tool for coaching agents. Coaching should focus on providing positive feedback, highlighting good calls along with bad ones and pinpointing areas for improvement. Call agents should have opportunities for self-evaluation. Coaches and agents should work together on individual training plans.

All designated communities have established, comprehensive call agent training programs ranging from four to 12 weeks. Training includes classroom instruction and testing, onsite visits to service departments, skill group focuses both in service area and language, observation and monitored practice sessions, and ongoing mentoring, coaching and evaluations. Training is conducted by a senior call agent, designated training representative or supervisor. Most communities have ongoing quality assurance and incentive and recognition programs to encourage performance improvements.

6. Address Accessibility

Accessibility is another critical concern when considering multi-channel contact center technology, both for phone systems and self-service options, such as the Web and IVR. Citizens with disabilities should be provided the same access to all information and services. Although Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, amended in 1998, sets regulations for the federal government, local government multi-channel contact centers should strive to comply with these requirements to ensure access to government for citizens with hearing, visual and other disabilities.

Seven of the nine Citizen-Engaged Communities offer TTY /TDD Relay services in their contact centers. With a TTY (teletypewriter), the conversation is typed rather than spoken and direct communication is possible with anyone who has a similar device. Calls placed to or from a non-TTY user can be placed through the Telecommunications Relay Service. TDD, a telecommunications device for the deaf, is an electronic device for text communication via a telephone line. In addition, all designated communities use web standards and regular testing of websites to be Section 508 compatible.

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