Information technology

Call 311
Simplifying customer service
by Britt Oldenburg

Editor's note

Because many governments in Canada are actively seeking Citizen Relationship Management (CRM) solutions, *Summit* invited Motorola Canada, celebrating its 75th anniversary, to share its experience in that marketplace. The company has a long history of providing communications solutions to municipalities, the level of government with the most direct citizen interaction. As a supplier of public safety and utility communications equipment, Motorola differs from most other CRM vendors, who approach the challenge with a marketing software focus.

Motorola Canada

The latest trend in public service may soon be crossing the border. Recently, officials from various Canadian cities have been making trips to specific US cities to see first-hand their new 311 call centers. What 911 did for public safety and 411 did for information, 311 is doing for public service.

Several US cities have been consolidating the myriad of phone numbers citizens can call for non-emergency service – which can run into the thousands – into one number. Miami-Dade County, Florida, is one example. Up until now, it has had more than 1,600 listings in the blue pages of the local phone directory. "I'll be the first to admit that connecting to the county is far from easy," said Steve Shiver, former county manager, Miami-Dade County, Florida. "All this is about to change. We are developing an enterprise-wide 311 Answer Center."

Other US city governments with 311 call centers include: Austin, Dallas, and Houston, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; San Jose, California; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Chicago, Illinois.

The backbone of most of these 311 systems is a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. CRM is the term for strategies, software, and other Web-based capabilities that help an enterprise organize and manage customer relationships. Commercial CRM software packages were originally designed to help companies drive sales through direct contact and via a call center or the Internet. While commercial CRM focuses on increasing revenue from existing customers, these concepts don't apply in the public sector world. Commercial enterprises know their customers, whereas the public sector may know little until there is a problem or government assistance is needed. Unlike the commercial model where multiple complaints from the same customer are rare, public service often gets multiple inquiries, requests or complaints about the same issue from many customers – whether that is a traffic signal malfunctioning, fallen trees or public concerns about West Nile Virus or SARS. The public sector requires a system that focuses on location – "where to" deliver the service is more important than "to whom."

To help public sector entities deliver high quality non-emergency services, municipalities should seek out CRM systems that are designed specifically to fit the unique needs of government. The system should mirror the government's approach to managing service requests, identifying the type and location of the problem so that the appropriate agency/department can respond.

Functionally, the system should provide a single source for citizens to interact with their municipal departments, report problems, and check the status of issues around the clock. Citizens should be able to make service requests in person, through the Internet, mail, fax or phone using an easy-to-remember telephone number, such as 311. Ideally, the system should also allow for the dispatch of field crews via various wireless devices including mobile computers, PDAs and pagers.

The system should be flexible, offer the departments/agencies complete control over their processes, and be easy and quick to deploy. It should offer the combination of information management capabilities, systems integration skills, and advanced communications technologies needed to provide the public sector market with the advantage of end-to-end enterprise man-

agement. The public sector model of customer service and service delivery is different and unique – and requires a solution tailor made for the public sector market.

Motorola designed its CRM solution specifically for the public sector market. A recognized leader in public safety commu-

Baltimore and Dallas, to learn about their CRM systems and to determine how these local governments achieved a positive impact on their bottom line.

After the city of Chicago implemented its system in 1999, the Department of Sewers reduced its response time by 59 per-

In Chattanooga, the ambitious "One Call to City Hall" initiative was developed to solve those same problems. "The system will help Chattanooga improve the quality of service delivery, increase efficiency and make it easier for policymakers to hold agencies accountable," said David Eichenthal, director of the city's Office of Performance Review.

Chattanooga's mayor, Bob Corker, sees CRM technology as an example of democracy in action. "Chattanooga's one-call center will enable us to provide a much higher level of customer service to the citizens of our community. This democratizes local government and gives every citizen, no matter what walk of life, an equal voice."

In Calgary, Mayor Dave Bronconnier said, "A consolidated customer contact system is a cornerstone for delivering value to taxpayers in the 21st century. Citizens expect a reasonably quick response to their inquiries and more importantly, verified follow-up on their concerns."

"In Chicago, Mayor Daley championed a citizen response system that can track an individual citizen inquiry, its status and city response at any point in the process. Offering that level of service to citizens in

"…how well we perform after we hang up the phone…"

nications, Motorola built on its experience in emergency call dispatch and tracking to develop its Customer Service Request (CSR) system, a single point of contact for citizens to request non-emergency services and information.

A call taker routes all calls, faxes and emails to the appropriate department where the activity is tracked, escalated if more immediate attention is necessary, and entered into a central database. Agency officials are able to track data that includes the nature of the request, location, caller, time of day, which department responded and length of response time. Most important, all requests are tracked through resolution and saved for statistical reporting so that cities or municipalities can improve the service to their constituents.

This type of system provides "one stop shopping" for all non-emergency services and helps reduce overburdened 911 call loads by providing an alternative for service calls. A more manageable call load helps improve the response time of emergency services.

Multi-departmental responses are enhanced through use of a CSR system – even simple tasks like clearing a fallen tree may require a first response from public safety agencies to redirect traffic and clear the debris from a roadway, then a follow-up by the city works department to haul the wood away. The system alerts each department when one phase of the work ends and another is ready to begin, reducing costly and inconvenient delays.

The proof of a good CRM system is in the numbers. And that is why officials from communities such as Calgary, Toronto, Quebec and Winnipeg have visited Chicago,

cent, from 17 days to just seven days in 2001; the Bureau of Electricity saved hundreds of worker hours by eliminating duplication of efforts; and, the Auto Pound inventory was reduced from 120 to 80 percent of capacity.

During the first 12 months of use, Baltimore, Maryland's Bureau of Solid Waste, decreased overtime hours for missed mixed refuse pickup by 10,700 hours. This resulted in a savings of USD$250,000 and another USD$56,000 in overtime for bulk trash pickup. In addition, USD$850,000 in revenues was realized from an increase in illegal dumping citations over a 36-month period.

"…a much higher level of customer service to the citizens…"

"Our mayor is concerned about how well we perform after we hang up the phone and the service request is initiated," said Elliot Schlanger, Baltimore's chief information officer. "CSR has created a dashboard by which we can optimally manage the city's operations. The city is acting like a well-run customer service organization."

Mid-sized cities benefit equally from CRM technology. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where a CRM system was installed in 2002, chief information officer Dennis Newman said, "Our IT infrastructure and support organization is now at the point where we can deploy enterprise applications that solve many of the business problems historically inherent to local governments."

a city the size of Chicago is remarkable and we hope to mirror that success with our own 311 system in Calgary," added Bronconnier.

CRM programs for the public sector are being used successfully in many major cities throughout the US. Canadian cities will soon follow suit and engage CRM as a tool to improve the ability of local government to respond to citizens' commonly requested services and provide information to its constituents. ⋙

Britt Oldenburg is Manager of Business Development for Motorola's Public Service Solutions in Canada, with responsibility for Motorola's 311 solution.