

Case Study

Toronto, ON



Results

Launched to the public in September 2009, 311 Toronto is staffed by a team of 190 full time employees. The new contact center replaces the previous nine call centers and has achieved impressive results in the first six months including:

- First call resolution rate: Target 70%, Achieved 76%
- Service level commitments: Target 70% in 30 seconds, Achieved 75% in 30 seconds
- Average speed to answer: Target 30 seconds, Achieved 28 seconds
- Annual call volume: Targeted to reach 7,000 calls/day or approximately 2.6 million/year once fully complete

311 Toronto Answers the Call for World-class Service with End-to-End Integration and a Robust Knowledge Base

Challenge

In 2005 Toronto, the fourth largest city in North America, set a goal to deliver world-class service to its population of nearly 2.6 million residents. The city had a decentralized call center system with over 250 public-facing phone numbers and nine different call centers. It was unclear to residents what number to call for service, and callers were often transferred several times before being connected with the appropriate divisions. In addition, many operators were only available during standard business hours.

The Mayor of Toronto was committed to an open, accessible and transparent government but the array of disconnected systems made it next to impossible; there was no way to monitor and report key performance indicators to accurately track service. A general customer service survey across Canada, conducted in 2003, showed that Toronto ranked 59% in service reputation, about one percent below the average Canadian municipality. This percentage dropped in 2008 to 45%, 11 points below the average Canadian municipality. While call center effectiveness is just one factor in determining service reputation, it plays a critical role in service delivery and citizen satisfaction. In addition, according to research by Institute for Citizen Centric Studies, satisfaction rates drop dramatically when a caller is transferred more than once.

"It became clear we needed to enhance customer service," said Neil Evans, Director, 311 Toronto. "As a world-class city we needed a world-class solution."

Solution

To meet the Mayor's mandate and to raise citizen satisfaction levels, the City of Toronto needed a centralized, 'single window/no wrong door' contact center. The city needed to find a way to minimize the number of call transfers, make service transparent by offering tracking numbers for accountability, and set and manage expectations by setting service standards (i.e., a pothole will be filled within five days, garbage picked up in three days, etc.) With this in mind, in 2005 the city launched an extensive search for a call center solution.

The city spent close to one year developing technical and business requirements and engaged Gartner Group to validate that the RFP requirements were comprehensive and reasonable in getting responses from the vendor community and that technologies are available to meet those requirements. Once the city engaged with vendors a fairness monitor was involved to ensure a fair and open process. The city reengaged with Gartner at the end to assess the reasonableness of the RFP responses in respect to costs, schedule, and available technology, and also to identify project risks.

“The City of Toronto has one of the most extensive vendor selection processes I’ve ever seen anywhere and it was driven by our desire to maintain an open and transparent process every step of the way,” said Evans. “The entire process took three years culminating with Bearing Point being selected as the lead with Lagan as part of the overall solution.”

With the selection final, the city and its vendor partners began an extensive integration – the most integrated 311 system in North America to launch. By seamlessly integrating with six different systems (Cisco, Witness, Hansen, TMMS, IBMS and middleware) the city has eliminated the need for up-front routing by the customer service representative (CSR). Service requests are automatically routed to the appropriate backend system without any decision from the CSR.

The knowledge base that forms the foundation of 311 Toronto is also the largest developed to date and includes extensive indexing, classifications and updating processes. Rather than relying on information from other departments’ intranets which can be out of date and difficult to navigate, the knowledge base helps streamline service delivery. All 150 CSRs have access to accurate data at their fingertips presented in a consistent way. A four-person team maintains the information with up to 600 updates a day.

“Our most important 311 contact center tool is our robust knowledge base with over 27,000 solutions and growing,” said Evans. “With 77% of the anticipated 2.6 million calls relying directly on our knowledge base, it’s critical that it functions at the highest standard. We are pleased with our knowledge base performance with a first call resolution rate of 76% in our first six months of operation.”

In addition to the knowledge base, scripting is also a critical tool, guiding the CSR step-by-step through the call to resolution, be it a general inquiry or a service request. Thanks to a combination of integration, the knowledge base and scripting, CSRs require only three days of training on the system.

“Toronto is the largest 311 contact center to launch with end-to-end integration, a best practice recognized by the Harvard Kennedy School,” said Evans. “Through detailed scripting and a robust knowledge base, our back-end integration with our CRM system determines where the service request should be routed, ensuring consistency and accuracy with every call.”

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Currently 94% of service requests and requests for information come to 311 Toronto over the phone while email accounts for 5%. The city launched a self-service on-line channel in February, and began promoting it in March. Although only 1% of inquiries currently come through the web, by the end of 2010 311 Toronto expects at least 5% of all inquiries to come through that channel.

“Implementing 311 helps us to not only keep pace with other world-class cities, but sets the standard for a new way for local governments across North America to provide better customer service,” said Evans. “With measurement tools in place, our 311 contact center holds the city accountable with increased transparency and manages expectations with citizens for an overall improvement of customer service.”

What’s Next

With only six months under its belt, 311 Toronto has an aggressive plan to continue to expand. The self-service offering will grow to include 10 additional service request types by June 2010. Two other divisions, Forestry and Municipal Licensing and Standards, will be added to the Lagan system in June, and two more in 2011.

The knowledge base has been made available via the intranet to all city councillors and staff so that all 36,000 employees can access the information. By the end of 2010 the information will be available via the self-service offering to the public.

Soon, citizens will be able to email the city via mobile device. Based on the uptake the city may consider integrating an iPhone application with the Lagan system.

“The upfront work on the integration and knowledge base has paid off, allowing us to add more features and functionality extremely quickly and keep it easy to use,” said Evans. “Over time a new CSR should be able to sit down and the system will walk them through it. We built the system with this vision in mind and that’s what makes it different.”

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