



Aberdeen Group

OnSite

CRM for the Community: City of Des Moines Implements FrontRange's HEAT for 'Customer Care'

Executive Overview

When one thinks of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and high-quality customer care, government is not usually the first type of organization that springs to mind. Unlike for-profit organizations in which timely, efficient customer service translates to bottom-line results, governments — sometimes unfairly — are considered relatively slow to respond to the needs of their constituents. The reality is that while many government organizations do strive to provide high-quality services, many are hampered by budget constraints, outdated or unwieldy processes and IT (Information Technology) systems, and the sheer magnitude of the number of “customers” — i.e., constituents — they need to support.

The City of Des Moines, IA, has worked hard to build efficiencies into its systems. Striving to be known as one of the best-run cities in the country, the City of Des Moines identified one particularly large and complex area that needed to be addressed. The city wanted to automate the way in which it received, managed, and responded to — and, ultimately, resolved — requests from its 200,000 citizens. The variety of requests from residents represented a fairly broad range of issues — incorporating trash pickup, potholes, fallen branches, snow removal, and animal issues such as barking dogs and cats stuck in trees.

The city's process improvement team examined a range of possible solutions and finally settled on HEAT, a product from FrontRange Solutions. The city was already using the HEAT technology for its internal IT help desk to manage calls and provide problem resolution for users of its computer and networking systems.

In order to automate the external calls, the city implemented a “Citizen Response System” (CRS) based on HEAT that would track calls coming into 20 different departments throughout the city. The CRS system has been operational since May 2001 and has successfully addressed the way in which issues are handled. Processes that were previously managed manually through sticky notes and multiple phone calls are now automated, and the city is also able to more efficiently manage the volume of calls — almost 9,000 in one recent month — that come in. Perhaps most important, the city is providing better levels of service for its citizens and is enhancing the quality of life and the level of comfort and safety of its residents while reducing the costs associated with managing these issues.

This Aberdeen *OnSite Profile* examines the problems and issues faced by the city in managing “citizen response” and discusses the solution — and some of the unforeseen benefits of implementing that solution — that ultimately resulted in success for the City of Des Moines.

The City of Des Moines

The City of Des Moines had a problem, one that was in all likelihood similar to the problems of hundreds of other U.S. municipalities. The city handled thousands of calls from its residents each month on a wide range of problems, requests, and inquiries. These calls would come into each of the more than 20 individual departments around the city.

Aside from the magnitude of the volume of calls coming in to individual departments, the problem was exacerbated by the fact that each of the city departments had its own process for managing the calls. Departments involved with public safety, such as police, fire, and emergency medical service had their own well-established systems and procedures. The rest of the departments had, up to this point, provided their own systems — with sometimes mixed results. Some departments had their own databases that they had created for logging, tracking, and resolving the issues while others relied on sticky notes, handwritten logs, and a flurry of individual phone calls.

The ability of each department to respond to a request was hampered both by the lack of an automated system within the department and by the lack of consistent processes among departments. Not only did each department have its own way of logging and tracking a request, but target response times and the way in which issues were communicated to other departments or escalated also varied. That meant response times and service levels were erratic, and there was no way to capture this valuable data regarding overall, city-wide issues — possibly the largest obstacle to making improvements and cost reductions to existing systems.

The city concluded that a solution for dealing with these issues would provide the following:

- An automated way to handle the thousands of calls coming each month that would ensure that each call was dispatched to the right organization, that would record and track the calls, and that would provide a high level of customer satisfaction;
- A system and a set of processes that would ensure that calls were handled in a consistent manner, particularly when passed between departments, and that resolution of issues would be timely and within the objectives set by each department;
- A system that could be easily learned and used by its staff, many of whom were nearing retirement age; and

- A system that would provide early warnings on any degradations in service levels and that would allow the city to measure and monitor its performance.

The Solution: FrontRange Solutions' HEAT

The City of Des Moines was already using the HEAT service and support product as an internal help desk tool for the city's IT department and was pleased to learn that it could use HEAT software both in an internal capacity and as an externally facing customer service CRM solution. The city had also had a successful history and an established relationship with FrontRange, which also made HEAT a logical answer to their issues.

The city had an obligation to consider tools from several vendors, of course, and spent a considerable amount of time examining other potential vendors' solutions before coming back to the HEAT product. Once the vendor selection was made, the project took approximately one year to complete. During this implementation and deployment period, the City of Des Moines had a number of tasks to complete that were not directly related to the software per se, but rather to the processes that existed behind the software.

One of the major challenges was the complexity of dealing with multiple city departments, most of which had never documented their processes or procedures. More often, knowledge of how a particular issue was managed was handed down between employees, and a major part of the implementation process was understanding, documenting, and then codifying the city departments' processes into the HEAT application software. As an example, the CRS application had to integrate with the city's Pavement and Sewer Management software and with a geographic information system (GIS) used to map the location of the civil infrastructure within the city. An SQL Server database was used as the repository of information for the CRS application, which enabled the access and sharing of data by other departments and applications.

The system went live in May 2001, and the city currently has 450 employees trained on the CRS system. The Public Works Department is using the system to record every single call that comes into the department, while other departments such as the Parks Department are only recording calls that result in a service or repair request. The system is accessed by employees in more than 60 buildings over a city-wide Ethernet-based local area network (LAN) and manages as many as 9,000 separate calls in a single month — until the snow falls, when the call volume is expected to increase considerably.

Aberdeen Conclusions

CRM is often associated with early adopter industries such as financial services, high technology, and telecommunications. The value and applicability of CRM are relevant to any organization that deals with “customers” — even if those customers happen to be tax-paying members of a community.

In the not-for-profit sector, as in the business community, success is often measured in customer satisfaction, as well as in the reduction of costs and the automating of processes. The city’s CIO (chief information officer), Mike Armstrong, notes, “The word partnership is used a lot. This usually means we write a check and we get something but, in this case, we shared the risks of doing something new and very innovative [with FrontRange Solutions] ... our rewards are self-evident.”

One of the unanticipated benefits of the solution came when the city found that more than 80% of the calls it received were requests for information or status. To that end, the city plans to provide a self-service component that will enable residents to access information from the CRS/HEAT application directly, which should serve to further reduce costs and increase system payback. The city also benefited from the business process review that was used to identify and document internal procedures — with more than 1,250 different types of calls, inquiries, and service requests being identified. The city was also able to pinpoint areas where the departments could improve performance. The CRS/HEAT system gives the city staff not only the ability to see where they need improvements but also the ability to see where they shine.

To provide us with your feedback on this research, please go to www.aberdeen.com/feedback.

*Aberdeen Group, Inc.
One Boston Place
Boston, Massachusetts
02108
USA*

*Telephone: 617 723 7890
Fax: 617 723 7897
www.aberdeen.com*

*© 2002 Aberdeen Group, Inc.
All rights reserved
March 2002*

Aberdeen Group is a computer and communications research and consulting organization closely monitoring enterprise-user needs, technological changes and market developments.

Based on a comprehensive analytical framework, Aberdeen provides fresh insights into the future of computing and networking and the implications for users and the industry.

Aberdeen Group performs specific projects for a select group of domestic and international clients requiring strategic and tactical advice and hard answers on how to manage computer and communications technology.