18th Annual
Government Contact Centre Summit 2018

DRIVING CUSTOMER-FOCUSED CONTACT CENTRE TRANSFORMATION:

HOW ONE LOCAL COUNCIL IS TAKING A CUSTOMER-FIRST APPROACH TO IMPROVE FIRST CALL RESOLUTION

The past few years has seen a massive shift in the government contact centre industry. Digitalisation and the rapid pace of change is driving contact centre to become savvier in the way they connect and communicate with customers.

Cloud communications, virtual agents and chatbots are just some of the many new tech platforms revolutionising contact centre service delivery. Not only do these innovative platforms provide opportunities to improve customer experience; when implemented correctly, they can also reduce costs, drive internal efficiencies and improve staff engagement.

But despite the hype, how many government contact centres are actually utilising these new digital platforms effectively? What's more, how can contact centre leaders develop the necessary people capabilities and internal processes to ensure these new contact channels can reach their full potential?

To answer this question, we recently caught up with Brandon Davis, Customer Service Manager at Kingston City Council ahead of the **18th Annual Government Contact Centre Summit 2018** – the original and largest contact centre summit for Government services.

Since Brandon took up the role of Customer Service Manager mid 2016, the council has been on a journey to transform their contact centre to become more customer centric through the roll-out of digital channels, as well as become more strategic in the way they connect with other departments and functions throughout the broader organisation.

Below, Brandon shares the strategies Kingston City Council is using to transform processes and systems to not only increase first call resolution, but also boost customer satisfaction.

THE TWO CORE ELEMENTS OF CONTACT CENTRE TRANSFORMATION: IMPROVING CAPABILITIES AND UPDATING SYSTEMS

"There are two elements to Kingston City Council's contact centre transformation journey to date. The first, is improving the capability of the contact centre itself from a customer service point of view.

The second, is appropriately deploying the telephony technology more effectively to the broader organisation to help our contact centre be more connected with different parts of the council that we interact with on a regular basis.

From a technology point of view, we are setting up our agents with a new telephony platform to drive efficiency. We also have a lot of work scheduled for implementation that will involve setting up a 'phone-in' system so we can better manage calls and queue visibility from one desktop. We are also in the beginning stages of implementing a new workforce management system.

At present, we have 18 seats in the contact centre. As a local council we have 40 different businesses under one umbrella that we call a council. The challenge is that these different businesses sometimes don't connect, interact or work as closely as then could with other parts of the organisation.

Our aim is to ensure our contact centre is equipped with the tools, capabilities and telephony to ensure collaboration and communication between these business areas.

For example, we have rolled-out a live-chat message capability which has been integrated into telephony. There is also a mobile phone version that sits on each of our agent's desktop so they can interact and communicate through live messaging rather than just through the phone. The aim is to deploy two different channels to find the way to connect and find the right answer to customer queries.

In the future we will also be looking at automating the roster process and call forecasting to manage resources according to what our load is. Having worked in the private sector for a long time, my aim is to bring some of the methodology, processes and tools used in the private sector to ensure our council is offering a consistent service. This means providing contact centre agents with the right technology o be able to do their job."

HAPPY EMPLOYEES = HAPPY CUSTOMERS

"If we want to set ourselves a target of being world-class in what we do, we can't do things the way they have always been done. Customer demands are changing and the way our customers view local government is changing. Customers are now viewing Government agencies the same way they view companies within the private sector. As such, they are demanding a better level; of service.

Our call centre agents are the master of first impressions in customer service. It is up to our call centre to set the benchmark for the quality of customer interaction. If our people are not engaged in this process, they are not going to deliver the best quality of service.

At Kingston City Council, we have rolled-out a big engagement project on developing a new 'Customer Charter.' To create this charter, we had 45 customers come into our organisation for two and a half days to share their expectations around communication and engagement.

While our agents are proud of what they do, it's also important to take it up another step. We have set some new standards around customer service and we are rolling-out call coaching sessions that happen every month to train and engage our employees in this area.

It is important to note that these call coaching sessions are not us telling our agents what they need to do better. It is about listening to their calls and indicating improvements that can be made. The aim of the process is to engage our staff in our objective of delivering world-class customer service and providing them with the tools to be successful."

THE CHALLENGES OF TAKING A CUSTOMER-FIRST APPROACH IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

"First and foremost, Government agencies need to have the right data before they roll-out customer centric strategies. Most local councils have a central record for customer information which can be used as a basis for this.

While information is important, Government agencies sometimes struggle because they have processes that are inefficient and difficult to use from a staff and customer point of view.

There also has to be a collective responsibility for the customer. A cultural change is required to get staff to take ownership and responsibility to provide the best service for customers.

It comes down to giving staff permission to take this approach, which is often the biggest challenge. We can collect the data and we can update the telephony. But if we don't give our people permission to solve problems for the customers and provide the right answers, then it will take longer to change the outcome."

THE FUTURE CONTACT CENTRE AGENT

"The future of the contact centre industry is going to continue to transform from a technology and people perspective. More people are going to be able to work from home and the workforce will be increasingly part-time.

In the past, call centre systems and technology did not lend the opportunity for staff to work from home. However the future will see a decentralised capability for the workforce.

The role of the contact centre agent will also evolve. The future contact centre agent will need to be able to problem-solve, deliver consistent services and take accountability for the customer. In a local government context, customers call about anything – from complaining about a next door neighbour's cat walking on their car and leaving footprints; to complaining about the fact that it's raining and their house is flooding.

A call centre agent needs to deal with these complaints by showing empathy for the customer and directing them to the next step (or business unit) that can help them solve their issue. In the future, contact centres will become more synchronised. There will be more automation to improve the back-end which will mean the traditional administration teams that sit in other parts of the organisation might not be required as much as they are currently."

RESULTS TO DATE

"At Kingston City Council we run a customer satisfaction survey each month. We analyse the data to identify where the service experience wasn't what it needed to be. We then work with the organisation to ensure this service is improved.

Since taking a customer-first approach in our contact centre to date, there has definitely been a step-up in the level of service we are delivering. In the future, there needs to be another step-up in terms of ownership of the customer journey."

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INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Join Brandon at the **18th Government Contact Centre Summit 2018** where he will further explore:

• Developing systems like the knowledge bank and chat bots internally in order to save costs, and then hiring a script writer to ensure customer usability

• Investing in innovation, such as AI and digital forms, to improve council capabilities outside opening hours

• Equipping all council workers with mobile devices in order to assist with queries while in the community

For more information visit **https://govcc.iqpc.com.au** or call **+ 61 2 9229 1000** or email **enquire@iqpc.com.au**