



Newcastle City Council trusts eGain

Newcastle's cityworks discovers a 'best value' bounty

“We found that k-Commerce™ Support was a complimentary tool which gave us the flexibility we needed to accommodate our forward looking strategies.”

John Lee
Newcastle City Council



Company

The City of Newcastle is the Northeast cultural capital of the United Kingdom with a population of 280,000. Newcastle City Council is one of the most progressive local authorities involved in the UK's Best Value initiative to modernise local government. Launched in 1997, this initiative requires councils to secure the “best value” for taxpayers' money.

Newcastle City Council provides a wide range of public services to residents through six major directorates. The Cityworks Directorate departments include Building, Environment, Engineering, Leisure, Architects and Support. Envirocall is the customer response service within the environment department. It handles all resident queries on environmental issues—including rubbish bins, skips, highway construction, street furniture, parks, pest control, trees, traffic problems and toxic waste.

Challenge

Because of the wide array of responsibilities that fall under the domain of the environment section, effective solutions require knowledge of a large number of diverse issues. Customer service agents needed extended training on how to research issues and when to escalate calls.

“We had no way of cross-referencing the experiences of other agents, technical experts or previous cases,” claims John Lee, Newcastle best value project officer. “Agents were repeatedly recreating case histories and duplicating work.”

The extra work and lack of integration contributed to a cumbersome process that was hampered further by a heavy reliance on technical consultants. Residents were frustrated by response times that measured in weeks. Callers checking the status of an issue frequently had to make repeated calls and reiterate the same information with every contact. Lee recalls, “The cost of agent training, expert consultants and the time spent on each case was devouring our budget, and residents were dissatisfied with the level of service they were receiving.”

Solution

A key criterion the Newcastle City Council sought was a comprehensive solution. According to Lee, “In choosing a solution, the council considered long-term growth, as well as immediate improvements to call center services.” In addition to upgrading services for the environment section, Newcastle City Council was looking ahead to future expansion into other areas of council activity.

It realized k-Commerce Support's fully integrated suite of customer service solutions—Web, interactive chat, e-mail, IVR and desktop help—would give it the flexibility it needed.

Not only would each department be able to choose the type of services it needed, but the k-Commerce Knowledge Base would enable sharing of information throughout the organisation. In other words, every call center agent could access the knowledge of the best technical specialists and past resolutions.

In December 1998 Newcastle City Council purchased k-Commerce Web for its 12-seat call center and, with the help of Inference professional services, integrated it with their data collection tool, G.I.S. (Graphical Information System). Professional services worked in partnership with the City Council to build the k-Commerce Knowledge Base initially with two categories: highways and street lighting and gave call center agents access to the k-Commerce Knowledge Base through the council's Intranet. Inference had everything up and running within Newcastle City Council's tight time frame—the call center was ready to operate by April 1st.

Positive results soon followed. The Inference solution improved customer satisfaction, empowered staff, shortened training times, provided faster response to callers and increased resolutions per agent. It also reduced call escalation rates and improved follow-ups. "Overall we're extremely pleased. k-Commerce Support

raised the quality of our customer service significantly. We're planning to add more domains to the knowledge base, such as trading standards, grounds maintenance, tree management and pest control," Lee summarises.

Future

Thanks to the success of the Envirocall pilot project, the Newcastle City Council is already considering a centralized customer contact center for general council issues. IT staff will use k-Commerce authoring tools to upgrade the council Intranet and prepare for future Inference additions.

John Lee is interested in the role of customer relationship management in government operations. "There is a great opportunity here for other councils seeking to achieve best value. I would like to organise a consortium of metropolitan councils to discuss customer relations issues and integrated service solutions," continues Lee.

Newcastle City Council recognizes the importance of implementing a customer centered approach. And it is clearly sold on how k-Commerce Support empowers this strategy with bottom-line savings in time, money and headaches. Equally important, it has discovered how using an Inference powered Web server can help Newcastle City Council employees better serve its residents.



World Headquarters

345 East Middlefield Road
Mountain View, CA 94043, USA
Tel: 650-230-7500, ext 9
Tel (toll free): 1-888-60-eGain, ext 9
Fax: 650-230-7600
Email: info@egain.com
Web: www.egain.com

