

Winning Practices in Government Customer Support - 2006 -

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Nominations from internal and external customer touch points at all levels of Government for the fifth annual Government Customer Support Excellence Awards reflect increasingly creative and impressive applications of teamwork, technical excellence, and customer focus to serving customers in the unique context of our public sector.

Although only a few of them could be recognized formally with awards, the wealth of progressive customer support practices and perspectives below which was gleaned from these nominations illustrates clearly how our entire community can win by sharing ideas and approaches to serving Government's customers.

Our sincere appreciation and best wishes as a community are due to everyone who took the time to document practices and experiences.

Teamwork

Internal Partners

1. Support performance data used to improve managerial decision making
2. Providing information critical to planning, forecasting, and improving systems
3. "Customer service advocates" serving as liaisons to departments and municipalities
4. Rotating staff through desk side and field support services to cover breaks and vacations
5. Negotiating 22 operating level agreements to support service level agreements
6. Gathering input from contract employees and management for improvements

Internal Customers

1. "Account managers" designated to ensure that internal customer expectations are met
2. Identifying opportunities for partnerships and collaboration with internal customers
3. Partnering with customer senior management to anticipate business needs
4. Semi-monthly user forums

Front Line Support Staff

1. Monthly bonus pay for exceeding service parameter standards
2. Providing certification training
3. Cross-functional training sessions

4. Scheduled knowledge transfer and technical exchange meetings
5. Carefully staffing to acquire targeted skills
6. Well defined work plans
7. Overlapping shifts for exchange of information and continuity
8. Support team helping to determine policies, procedures, and work practices
9. Team members working together to develop their own schedules
10. Open cubicles and stand-up problem meetings.
11. Special training sessions in advance of releases

Interagency

1. Collaborative state/federal/local/non-profit web data repository
2. Offices working together to ensure consistency of unified knowledge base
3. Special voice access for community based organizations
4. Facilitating horizontal and vertical information sharing to gauge public responses
5. Answering calls and emails on behalf of other agencies
6. Free misdirect service for other agencies
7. Sharing information on citizen questions for web site improvements

Technical Excellence

Processes

1. Support staff involvement in testing of fixes and enhancements prior to release
2. Internal customers participating in testing and validation of enhancements
3. Placing frequently requested information on the web
4. Consulting with developers to ensure that a fix does not adversely affect another area
5. Identifying restrictions which keep the organization from performing to full potential
6. Converging data and reports
7. Use of Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI)
8. Applying trend and root cause analysis
9. Individual training programs which track progress relative to team goals
10. Tracking both inbound and outbound calls
11. Monitoring workload by time of day to ensure adequate staffing.
12. Monitoring problems by type and customer for appropriate action

Support Systems

1. Monitoring new and emerging technologies in context of current systems
2. Dedicating a person to implement tracking and reporting software
3. Multiple communication channels to disseminate critical information to the public
4. Ability to record and disseminate a message by phone to any portion of the population
5. Non-commercial AM radio for dissemination of public notifications and warnings.
6. Official web site converts to a "Red Alert" site during emergencies
7. Live chat for citizen assistance

8. Integrating touch points for consistency and accuracy across channels
9. Capturing IVR data on user navigation difficulties for improvement purposes
10. Implementing public-key infrastructure
11. Configuring laptop dial-in scripts for specific countries to be visited
12. Making data bases used for customer assistance available on line
13. On line service request submission via web site
14. Over 100 online services, including searches, filings, payments, renewals, etc.
15. Use of XML and RSS
16. Web portal built from extensive usability study with customer-centered design

Support Expertise

1. Ongoing assessment of training needs
2. Monitoring and sharing effectiveness of roll out programs
3. Responding to requests for ad-hoc reports from internal users
5. Identifying and helping to prevent fraud and abuse issues
6. International inquiries due to being considered the “gold standard”
7. Communicating complex concepts related to human drug products
8. Considering circumstances which could skew performance statistics.
9. Supporting more than one hundred software titles and applications.
10. Newsletter as a communication tool to reach customers and increase online activity

Customer Focus

Convenience

1. Make doing business an easy, efficient, responsive, and quality experience
2. Single phone number for IT-related help
3. One-stop support for resources needed to do business in the state
4. Increasing hours and staff to handle influx of calls associated with special events
5. Customer capability to reach answering service operator or supervisor after hours
6. Font size adjustment for senior population served
7. Telephone messages and postings to alert users to major problems & resolution time

Rollouts and upgrades

1. Pre-consolidation focus groups of customer departments to identify potential barriers
2. Customer relationship management as a way of doing business
3. Weekly calls where customer departments discuss upcoming events
4. User forums to inform customers of coming enhancements

Customer experience

1. Measuring customer satisfaction relative to service level agreements
2. Planning and implementation of outreach to the Hispanic population
3. Employing the state ombudsman who also serves as legislative liaison

4. Ability to bypass legacy systems for customers previously affected by poor service
5. Providing outbound call training for callbacks
6. Mining beneficiary data to improve the customer experience
7. Success defined by ability to provide users with needed information when needed
8. Gathering information to better understand the customers served
9. Multilingual services
10. Not measuring technicians based on speed of calls.
11. "Customers are under the pressure of time, legislation, money, and personal stress."

Satisfaction

1. Manager follow-up with customer on any survey with less than "good" rating
2. Use of customer feedback for measuring staff performance
3. Focusing on metrics which mean the most to customers
4. Training provided directly to agents involved with customer complaints.

Winning Culture

Teamwork

1. Identifying opportunities to integrate data, systems, and processes across departments
2. Focusing on relationship building
3. People with different skill sets sharing their knowledge for customers
4. Communicating clearly with both internal and external stakeholders
5. Achieving ongoing customer satisfaction through teamwork
6. Customer-driven expansion of the scope of work
7. Transforming customer experiences from cynicism to partnership
8. Customer service for both internal and external customers is a priority
9. Extended 24x7 operations from a remote COOP site with no negative customer impacts
10. Team members express a profound sense of fulfillment.

Technical Excellence

1. Ensuring that processes meet challenges of collecting and disseminating information
2. A call center's success can only be achieved through employee contributions
3. No errors in disclosure of confidential information
4. How well goals are accomplished is a sign of how well the team works together
5. Using front line staff suggestions for scripting and process improvements
6. Success due to technicians' ability to put themselves in the customer's shoes
7. Participation in American Customer Satisfaction Index
8. Practicing total contact ownership
9. Providing seamless services to the public
10. Use of 311 information for real-time assessment of community needs
11. Using maps of service requests for allocation of relief resources
12. Call takers provide reassurance during disaster situations

Customer Focus

1. Serving as backup to the emergency operations center.
2. Resolving the problem without escalating it.
3. Increasing calls as confidence grows.
4. Web portal involvement and commitment of entire state government enterprise
5. Outreach to inform loan customers of deadlines and help with compliance
6. Staff are in a unique position to learn of trends and relay the information to management.
7. Serving on internal task groups to ensure customer feedback is considered in planning
8. Programmers rely upon support staff to test and give feedback on new applications.
9. Employee power user group supports software applications via group email

Winning Perspectives

Internal

1. "Our philosophy is to let our customers do the talking."
2. "We live together, work together, and share the load together."
3. "Our customers find us from around the world."
4. "There is a live, friendly person to help them."
5. "As receptionist to the public, we build and enhance relationships."
6. "With the right teamwork, a small center can achieve big results."
7. "Citizens can interact with their government *online* instead of *in line*."
8. "Their objective is always to turn potential complaints into compliments."

Customers

1. "You're great at what you do, and fun to work with over the phone."
2. "I wouldn't want to live anyplace else but right here."
3. "Because of their hard work, they make my job easier."

Favorite this year ...

"Every happy ending is our reward."