



Case Study: The City of Aurora, IL

Busy Customer Service Call Center Uses Automated Technology to Adapt to Budget Cuts

Background

The City of Aurora, Illinois is home to approximately 170,000 people. Seven years ago, the City instituted a Customer Service Call Center to make it easier and more convenient for the public to access municipal services. The City of Aurora's Customer Service Call Center provides professional, courteous, and quality customer service by gathering accurate and complete information from customers during the initial contact. The Call Center is the best way to get general information about the City and to make service requests regarding almost any non-emergency business. All City departments work in cooperation with the Customer Service Call Center to make sure questions and requests get responses in a timely manner.

Challenge

The City of Aurora Customer Service Call Center is a busy operation. Open from 7am-7pm Monday-Friday, the Call Center provides information and fields requests for four counties in Aurora. Due to the recession, in 2009 the City was forced to cut budgets and institute layoffs. Cities nationwide were enduring similar cutbacks and Aurora knew it would need to be creative to continue offering citizens a high level of support without as many resources. The City of Aurora had been using a legacy citizen request software solution to organize its operations online for seven years, during which time Active Network, Government acquired Aurora's software vendor. In the midst of city cutbacks the Call Center was now facing a new software company at a time when budgets were strict and employees were being shuffled in and out of roles. "We already had the right technology in place," noted Cecilia Soto, Manager of Customer Relations for the City of Aurora. "Our objectives were to migrate smoothly over to Active and get our new team members trained thoroughly and quickly so our Center wouldn't miss a beat."

Solution

The City of Aurora requested a great trainer to be onsite at the Call Center for two weeks and Active happily complied. An expert trainer visited Aurora for two weeks, guiding new staff through the basics of the system and updating veteran staff on recent product developments. Additionally, Active team members accompanied Soto to other call center sites, such as Markham and Battle Creek, to view operations and learn from their best practices. There was a concerted effort by all parties involved to make training a priority and thoroughly educate employees.

Customer at a Glance

Customer: City of Aurora, IL

Solution: Citizen Request Management

URL: www.Aurora-IL.org

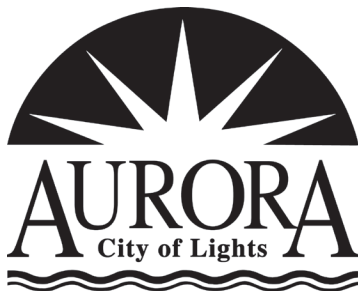
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– Cecilia Soto
Manager of Customer Relations
for the City of Aurora

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Words of Wisdom – Advice from the City of Aurora Customer Service Call Center

1. Do your research. Thoroughly investigate all of the software and IT you need to run your center efficiently. Visit other cities to learn from them. (Be sure to bring an IT expert with you.)
2. Advertise the city phone number as much as possible. Post it on flyers, include it in welcome packets, and list it repeatedly on your website homepage.
3. Insist on good training—the software can be the best in the industry, but you need to know how to use it.



“When Active acquired our old software vendor and converted our system,” Soto mentions. “The system fit our needs perfectly and we knew Active would be a strong partner.” As part of Active’s offerings, upgrades and service are provided as ‘maintenance’, and don’t incur additional cost. Not only is the system flexible, but new features can be added in over time with simple modifications to Aurora’s account.

There are several features within Active Citizen Response that Soto and her team use on a daily basis. For one, the Center receives quite a few calls regarding similar issues. The software allows users to “Create a Similar Case,” copying the data from the original case and eliminating the need to manually re-type duplicative information. This saves the staff quite a bit of time. The system can also pull detailed reports on any combination of data, from the number of trees trimmed to maps of graffiti hot spots. With an overriding city-wide goal of promoting public safety, the information from these reports proves invaluable.

Overall, the software system used by the City of Aurora allows the staff to input, track and report on every single interaction they have with the public. All information is stored in a centralized database that can be accessed online at any time. With budget cuts and revolving roles, the flexibility and ease-of-use of the system has been a great asset to the Call Center.

Results

The City of Aurora’s Customer Service Call Center has pushed on through the recession with remarkable success, despite budgetary and staffing limitations. The Center is glad to report that the transition over to Active was seamless and citizen requests continue to be processed in an organized, efficient manner. Also, the Call Center team can now benefit from Active’s large staff of developers who are dedicated to technology upgrades and support. “Other municipalities we visited required constant on-site support from their software company,” said Soto. “We have not, the software works well.” The system is built to be self-maintained and lives up to its reputation.

Notably, the Center is part of a city-wide initiative to achieve Franklin Covey Wildly Important Goals (WIGs). For 2009, these goals centered on Customer Service, Public Safety and Economic Development. The Call Center hit high marks in all three areas in 2009 and is currently undergoing a two-year study on its customer service quality to further drive excellence. Soto credits their dedication to doing it the “right way” from Day One as the leading factor to meeting the goals in trying times. There was an initial commitment to invest in software and marketing, which has progressively cut down on costs and increased staff efficiency. Active’s software is one part of that commitment and the system has proven to streamline operations within a friendly user interface that is easy to learn quickly. The City of Aurora continues to progress and provide entertainment, albeit scaled back in some cases, despite the challenges of the economy.

Exceed Citizen Expectations™