

The New Contact Center: Enhanced Citizen Interaction

When a citizen or employee calls your government agency, how long does it take to reach a person who can help? The answer indicates how well the agency can meet missions ranging from entitlement programs to healthcare delivery. New contact center solutions help to enhance interactions between agents and citizens, empower agents to be more productive, and reduce government costs.

What Does Success Look Like?

Following are typical goals for government contact centers, according to Pete Gastelle, a Cisco consulting systems engineer who specializes in contact centers:

- Reduce the time required to reach the best resource
- Provide the agent with information about the caller to speed up call handling and provide a better caller experience
- Increase the first-contact resolution rate
- Reduce costs

A model for effective call centers is the Dayton VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Dayton, Ohio, which serves thousands of veterans each year in its own medical center as well as four community outpatient clinics.

Veterans call the nurse triage number with healthcare questions or when they are ill. An interactive voice response (IVR) system from Cisco prompts callers to enter their case number. The system retrieves the caller's profile and uses the information to route the call to the appropriate nurse, perhaps one with a particular specialty or who has spoken with the patient before. The caller's profile is pushed to the agent's desktop at the same time the call is sent.

"Pushing the caller profile enables government to provide more personalized service and also saves time," says Gastelle. "The agent can say, 'Mr. Jones? I see you're calling about your medication question. We're expecting an answer by tomorrow morning.'"

The new system even considers variable conditions, like time of day, day of week, caller's location, current call volumes, and agent availability, to decide how to treat the call for the fastest response.

New Capabilities that Help the Mission

Following are other contact center capabilities that can help agencies enhance citizen interactions and reduce costs:

- *Transferring the caller's profile information along with the call:* At the Dayton VAMC, for example, if a patient calls about a heart condition and then mentions a new skin rash, the nurse can transfer the patient's profile along with the call, saving time for both the new nurse and the patient, who would otherwise need to repeat the same information.
- *Reporting real-time and historical contact center metrics:* "Contact center reporting can help government agencies continually evaluate their contact center operations to provide a better experience or reduce costs," Gastelle says.
- *Offering web visitors a callback option:* If citizens who are browsing an agency website want to speak with an agent, they can click a Call Me button that asks for their phone number. The agency can set up the system to call immediately and place the person in a queue, or wait until the person's turn and then call.

Improving the Face of Government

Effective contact centers can transform citizen perception of government. "Once you give someone an effective path to a government service, that person tells others," Gastelle says.

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