



## San Francisco Saves Time and Money with 311 Call Center and Self-Service Portal

On March 29, 2007, the City and County of San Francisco unveiled its new 311 Customer Service Center. With 44 customer service representatives (CSRs) available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, the state-of-the-art center was designed to make it easier for residents to navigate the maze of over 2,300 telephone numbers that existed previously to access city services. Additionally, by offering residents a 311 number, the City expected to relieve call volumes in its 911 center, where over 50% of calls received were for non-emergency services. The center was also equipped with a Language Line service, providing the ability to serve customers in over 145 languages, an important feature given the diversity of San Francisco's residents, 45% of whom speak a language other than English at home.

Mayor Gavin Newsom, who initially proposed the service as a Supervisor in 1999 and called for the center's creation in his 2004 State of the City address, at the time of the launch said, "San Francisco residents, businesses, and visitors have a right to the best possible customer service from their City. 311 is a powerful tool for holding government accountable to the people we serve, while making life a lot easier for every resident."

The City selected the Lagan 311 solution as the foundation for its customer service center based on the following:

- scalability to expand to support additional services over time
- a flexible knowledge base so that CSRs could provide consistent and accurate answers
- the ability to track service requests and monitor response times

"Officials from other cities often ask me, 'is it worthwhile in these challenging economic times to worry about customer service?' My answer is a resounding 'yes'. Every wrong number is a call that at some point has to be answered and a customer that is becoming increasingly frustrated. A 311 call center not only saves time for the customer but also saves time for the city which, in turn, saves money," stated Andy Maimoni, Deputy Director, San Francisco 311.

### Stats at a Glance

#### Customer Service Center

- Monthly call volume: 350,000
- Calls answered in first two years: 5.5 million
- Languages supported: 175+
- Percent of Departments supported: 88%

#### Self-Service

- ROI: Less than 7 months
- Requests for service: 2,000/month in first two months
- Deployment time: 8 months
- Page views: 180,000 in first 2 months

San Francisco's one-stop customer service center quickly became an invaluable part of city life for residents, with calls reaching 2 million after the first year and escalating to 3 million after the first 15 months. As of March 2009, the call center had answered 5.5 million calls, had a monthly volume of approximately 350,000 calls and served callers in more than 175 languages. Supporting the City's increasingly popular call center are 76 full-time CSRs, 10 part-time CSRs, 7 supervisors and 13 other executives, trainers, business and quality assurance analysts, and IT administrators. As administrators looked for ways to maintain service quality while meeting rising demand within budget, another capability of the Lagan 311 solution captured their attention—self service capabilities via the web.

"We were seeing an increase of about 25,000 calls each month with no limit in sight—we couldn't simply keep adding CSRs," said Maimoni. "We needed to find a way to increase our capacity for taking public requests without adding additional staff and started looking at an online or self-service option. Plus, residents were requesting online access so offering web access to general information and city service requests was truly a win-win."

The City launched an aggressive plan to deploy a self-service version of the call center within a year. In April 2008 the City piloted self service on the 311 web site with a single agency – the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA). Residents could file complaints, compliments and requests for lost and found items. The City added links to complementary websites such as public transportation trip planners.

As the website team began to add other services, it realized that many City agencies had websites separate from "sfgov.org" and it would need to include the ability for users to seamlessly search across these sites for answers. The team took the information that had been collected from the agency websites, combined it with the City web pages, and made it accessible to the public as well.

The project called for an ambitious rollout, ensuring that forms for the most common service requests and those that were easiest to complete were put online. One of the forms added was a general purpose form, allowing the public to reach almost any office in the City and receive a tracking number for follow up. This form is replacing email as the contact method for the City agencies and nearly 90% of the agencies are using the form. A customer satisfaction survey was also included so users could provide feedback on their experience with the 311 self-service portal.

"With each step along the way, we learned some important lessons," said Alissa Black, Business Analyst Supervisor, City/County of San Francisco. "From making sure forms were ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant, to allowing residents to include attachments, and leveraging the full power of the Lagan solution to provide answers and track and manage service requests."

Today the San Francisco 311 web site has an easy-to-navigate directory with both high-level and detailed information. Residents can search for information in a variety of ways and can also submit and track service requests online. The new web site also includes links to offerings of other departments such as paying for parking tickets, business taxes and permits.

"The key to our swift and successful implementation is that it has been a collaborative effort. By working closely with our 311 customer service center team, our technology group, our content experts and the Lagan professional services team, we were able to accomplish our main goals and Mayor Newsom was able to launch the service within eight months, on December 11, 2008," added Black.

Since December, 2008 call volume has dropped by 10% and the customer service center has received approximately 2000 requests per month via the portal. The City is targeting a drop in call rate of 15-20% as more services are available online and the public becomes more aware of the website.

"The project has been extremely successful. Our goal was never to eliminate the 311 phone number. This is simply an alternate way to provide excellent service through an online channel for residents who prefer to interact that way. Some pages are just informational and others let you request a service. The key is making it seamless for the user and leverage the bulk of the work that was done when we created the center. With the self service aspect we are simply making more information publicly available," stated Maimoni.

Now more than ever, state and local governments are under extreme pressure to justify their technology investments. Solutions that support performance management have an extra advantage. The Lagan 311 solution provides the 311 customer service center with the ability to generate reports on response rates, service requests and resolutions. The reports are shared with agencies to encourage accountability and for budgeting and planning.

The ability to demonstrate a swift payback is also extremely important. Most local governments are asked to meet a 12 month return on investment (ROI). For the City and County of San Francisco the ROI was less than 7 months.

Maimoni explains, "We leveraged existing infrastructure and the knowledge base already created for our 311 customer service center. The 6-8 week development time was the main cost for the project which would have been less had we not focused as much on the user experience which we felt was important for uptake. Ongoing maintenance costs are very low. We believe the website will offload at least 3,000 calls per month, which translates into one full-time CSR not having to process a request. Conservatively, the 311 self-service portal will pay for itself in 6 to 7 months."

As the City continues to expand its self-service offering, plans are underway to make it easier for users to submit another service request by pre-populating forms, to include the ability to link cases and to streamline the duplicate-checking process.

There's no doubt, San Francisco's commitment to 311 is profound and the results have been significant time and cost savings. As Mayor Newsom stated at the self-service launch in December, "311 is now the official site for obtaining information, reporting problems or submitting service requests to the City and County of San Francisco."

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