

# BEST PRACTICES



March 30, 2004

## Government CRM: Empowering Citizens With Outbound Alerts

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local, state, and federal government groups field high volumes of requests for information from citizens. Some information is static; other requests are critical and time sensitive. Government agencies should identify information captured or tracked in internal systems that would benefit citizens if delivered in real-time via phone, email, fax, text message, etc., solicit input from the community on which pieces of information would be most valuable, and enable constituents to self-register for proactive alerts, ideally via a Web site.

### IT'S ABOUT BUILDING COMMUNITIES, NOT CUTTING COSTS

Private enterprise companies use intelligent alerting to cut costs on outbound calls or to proactively alert customers in an effort to deflect inbound calls. Government agencies are beginning to enable outbound alerts to constituents, not to cut costs, but primarily in the interest of improving the quality of life of citizens and building a stronger community. ROI benefits are being realized for these initiatives and should be used to encourage other government entities to go forward with outbound citizen alert projects even in the current climate of tight budgets for technology purchases.

### What: Identify Alert-Worthy Data

The first step in an outbound alerting initiative is identifying the data to be delivered, including where it is housed, how it is updated, and why it is important. To identify data that has value to citizens and is collected or stored in such a way as to be used in alerts:

- **Identify FAQs from the citizen response center.** Understanding common questions to the government contact center concerning time-sensitive issues, from refuse collection to transportation schedules, will help pinpoint what the hot topics are for citizens.
- **Gather input from citizens via surveys.** Survey citizens with sets of information available to send as alerts, asking them to rate which data is valuable if delivered in real time, and soliciting suggestions of other information that could be included in the project.
- **Verify data is alert worthy.** Identify the source of the information and verify it is collected in real time so as to make alerting worthwhile. For example, if transportation systems are only given twice daily updates, citizens wanting to know if the No. 5 bus will be at a certain stop on schedule are likely not to receive useful information in an automated alert.

### How: Select An Alerting Mechanism And Channel

The number of channels available for alerting continues to grow, though costs related to certain channels are definitely higher than others. Ideally, citizens can be given an option of receiving alerts via several channels, although offering only one channel initially to gauge interest and reliability of the system is a good idea.

- **Email alerts.** Email may be the simplest channel for low-tech alerts. CRM and customer service software can generate a (somewhat) personalized email message to a list of citizens using a rule to pull in predefined text according to rule events, writing the outbound email into customer history for historical reference. However, there is no delivery guarantee with this method.
- **Voice alerts.** Delivering voice messages to a home, office, or cell phone is considered the most mission-critical channel, although more technically complex due to the requirements of a speech engine to process text messages into voice alerts. The specialists here, such as EnvoyWorldWide and PAR3 Communications, deliver rule-based, personalized voice messages with guaranteed delivery. Secondary phone numbers or other channels (email, fax, text pager) can be used as backup channels for delivery.
- **Text alerts.** Although SMS text messaging has become very popular in Europe, adoption in North America remains low. This method does offer less expensive message delivery than voice, but again, relying on a CRM vendor to generate the text message will not guarantee successful delivery of the message.

### Who: Define Alert Targets

Consumers today are more cautious about registering for any automated update for fear they will be inundated with spam email and telemarketing calls. This should be less of a concern when registering for government alerts. Just as with any self-service initiative, introducing proactive alerting requires a marketing launch to acquaint citizens with what options are available and educate them on how to enroll.

- **Aggressively market.** The best way to encourage adoption is to promote the alerting options in multiple ways to raise visibility. Include fliers in all citizen correspondence, put signs in government offices frequented by the public (including public transport stations and libraries), and send press releases to news outlets.
- **Promote online registration.** Although citizen enrollment may be supported through phone and direct mail requests, encourage self-service online enrollment, allowing customers to select exactly which alerts they wish to receive, and by what channel.

With online registration, users can continually adjust alerting preferences with no impact on government personnel.

- **Monitor use and solicit feedback.** Track the number of alerts and which data is most frequently subscribed to for alerts. Survey alert recipients to find out how effective the alerts are and what other information they would be interested in receiving via this system. Report publicly on adoption, including positive citizen feedback.

### Early Adopters Offer Creative Approaches To Alerting

All local governments in the UK have been mandated to introduce online services. This has been a catalyst for CRM adoption and the use of outbound messaging to constituents. Local governments use different approaches to provide critical, time-sensitive information to communities.

- **Alleviating parent's fears with proactive alerting.** The County Council of Bedfordshire, located 30 miles from London, provides services for a population of about 380,000. Bedfordshire went live with mySAP CRM in November 2002 with a primary goal not of cost cutting, but of providing faster, more efficient service to constituents, including easier access to ask questions, report problems, or lodge complaints. The 60-seat contact center acts as the front face of government, and with the new streamlined processes and easier access to information, first-call resolution rate is nearly 80%. Overall complaints received by the Council are down 15% since going live on CRM.

School transportation falls under the Council's domain, and a common source of phone calls to the contact center were parents concerned that their children had not arrived home from school at the expected time. Using SAP, parents can register their mobile phone numbers with the Council and receive automatic SMS text messages when their child's bus has been delayed due to traffic or mechanical problems. By proactively notifying parents of delays and updated schedule times, calls are eliminated and fears are alleviated.

- **Keeping citizens safe with alerting and messaging.** The Borough of Sutton in southwest London implemented Remedy's Citizen Response system in 2003 as part of an overall project to improve citizen access to information involving overhauling both front- and back-office processes, as well as introducing enterprise software to further streamline activities. Sutton is on its way to consolidating the 400-plus services offered and 77 published council phone numbers down to three phone numbers with centralized contact center agents. To empower citizens, Web access to council services has been introduced in libraries and self-service kiosks dot the streets of Sutton,

offering not only free email to citizens, but allowing constituents to report problems like abandoned cars, needed street repairs, and pay parking tickets and council tax.

The Remedy implementation tracks citizen reports of suspicious activities and crimes, received by calls to the contact center and reports filed from kiosks. Using SMS text messaging, security warnings are immediately sent to electronic signs at local transport stations and bus shelters, alerting citizens immediately of any possible safety issues in the area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### PROACTIVE ALERTING CUTS INBOUND INTERACTION VOLUME

Offering proactive alerts is a good way for government agencies to build stronger relationships with constituents. Streamlining access to information is critical; proactively sending the information before it is requested not only cuts inbound call and email volume, but increases constituent satisfaction.

- Start small. Pick a single area to pilot an alerting program until details can be worked out on how to register and how to send timely alerts.
- Work from contact center statistics on most common calls to identify obvious constituent needs for information.
- Use pilot programs to solicit input from citizens on what information they would like to see.
- Track outbound alerting volume; do follow-up surveys with alert recipients to fine tune content.
- Brag about your successes. Use media outlets and citizen forums to talk about successful alerting programs to further foster community involvement and raise visibility for these valuable citizen services.