

Towards a better citizen service future:

Five practical tips

THE PERSPECTIVE SERIES

New insights into the UK workplace

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The service challenge

You're telling us that the public who consume your services are more demanding than ever. They're armed with more information than they've ever had before. They communicate and share that information through rapidly expanding social media communities. They also have more options, more choice, and their expectations of the service you provide are rising all the time.

At the same time, we know it's probable that the budgets you have available to improve your customer service are dwindling. Or will at least stay the same. So if you do really want to improve, two major questions arise:

- on the one hand, how do you make best use of limited resources to deliver the best possible service today?
- on the other, how do you invest wisely adapt to rapidly changing citizen behaviour...while also making sure you keep a long term grip on the basics that really matter to them?

It's a conundrum that faces organisations of all sizes. But with planning, one that you can start to solve...

While there is no magic formula to create perfect customer service, the contributors to our latest Perspective series report recommend five broad areas that you can focus on to create a solid and sustainable platform for future progression.

Tip 1

Stay focused on the basics

A lot of the talk today is about 'connected' citizens. In the future, public sector organisations are likely to respond with more and more emphasis on social and digital channels. As the research shows, however, the vast majority of people still want to communicate by phone, email or in person. So make sure citizens are always able to contact you on their terms. For most organisations this will mean keeping these core elements – calls and emails – as the bedrock of a progressive multi-channel strategy.

Tip 2

It seems obvious, but ask your customer's for feedback

Above all citizens want their issues resolved satisfactorily. Public sector organisations that do this well understand their citizens inside out: they solve problems successfully because they know what people want and need at every single stage of their interaction with them. To help you achieve this goal, it's well worth considering investing more of your time gathering detailed citizen feedback. Mobile technology can help provide the solution in the form of digital pens or apps on smartphones. Social media can also help you make better use of budgets by providing a new mechanism for gathering feedback and intelligence.

Tip 3

Simplify processes, improve customer service onto the frontline

Budget cuts are forcing many organisations to streamline their processes and reduce admin. For many though, this is also proving to be an opportunity to improve the service delivered to the public on the frontline. Using mobile technology to eliminate paper based processes is definitely more efficient, for example. But this can also help you improve citizen perceptions of live interactions with your personnel in the field. Service becomes quicker, more responsive and more accurate.

Tip 4

Make the most of the Public Services Network

PSN is currently only mandated for central government and is discretionary for local government. Yet many believe the regional level could be the real driving force that makes PSN a success. There are already examples of police forces, councils and healthcare providers talking about sharing resources and infrastructure – not just to reduce property costs, but to improve the way services are co-ordinated and delivered. Now more than ever, this is the time to think differently, get round the table with other service providers and see how you can innovate in ways that have a truly positive impact on society.

Tip 5

Take it one step at a time, and set those expectations

Whether you are thinking about adding new channels like social media right now, or simply have them on the to-do list, the key thing to remember is to take it one step at a time. The social media world in particular is very accepting of experimentation. Make a small start, gather feedback along the way and refine your efforts as you move forward. And remember, just like your phone lines or offices, social media doesn't necessarily have to be 24/7. It's ok to set expectations. Some of the biggest companies in the world confine their social media customer service to office opening hours. It's ok for you to do so too.

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