

CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES COST-EFFICIENTLY CONQUERS MASSIVE INFORMATION DELIVERY CHALLENGE

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) faces a massive information delivery challenge on a daily basis. The agency has to provide fast answers to more than 80 million program beneficiaries, healthcare service providers and CMS staff. It has to keep that information accurate and up-to-date, despite the scale and complexity of government healthcare programs. And it has to quickly respond to change whenever it occurs—from cataclysmic events like Hurricane Katrina to the smallest modification in an agency policy.

Fortunately, with the help of RightNow's on demand solutions, CMS has been able to succeed on all counts. The agency has done an extraordinary job of leveraging the web as an information delivery channel, answering more than 99 percent of www.Medicare.gov visitor's questions automatically—even with traffic reaching in excess of 1.75 million page views per week. CMS has also leveraged RightNow's sophisticated knowledge management technology to streamline the process by which information is captured and maintained across its large, diverse organization. In addition, RightNow has proven to be invaluable for accelerating and bringing accountability to the agency's internal communications.

“RightNow provides a complete and highly adaptable set of tools for ensuring that CMS can quickly get information wherever it's needed,” says CMS manager, Jennifer Johnson. “As a result, we are better able to meet the healthcare needs of American citizens while at the same time controlling our cost of operations.”

Fast, Accurate Answers on the Web

The centerpiece of CMS's information delivery strategy is comprised of two websites, CMS.gov and Medicare.gov. Using RightNow, CMS makes it easy for site visitors to quickly pinpoint the specific information they need. The “Questions” link in the site's main navigation bar takes visitors to a page that enables them to search the agency's knowledge base with phrases and keywords. This page also features a dynamically generated list of the 20 topics that are currently most popular—enabling a substantial percentage of visitors to locate the information they need with just one more click of the mouse.

CMS has also integrated RightNow with several of its databases to help site visitors compare and find their way to local facilities. Visitors can search for hospitals, doctors and nursing homes by state, city, county or proximity to a given zip code, as well as by specific criteria. Once they find the best facility for their individual need, the RightNow-based resource provides them with a map and/or driving directions.

Site visitors to Medicare.gov take advantage of these resources on average more than 670,000 times every month. Only about 4,000 of these sessions result in an issue being escalated to the CMS contact center—an impressive self-service rate of 99.4 percent.

This high self-service rate benefits both the agency and the constituencies it serves. For citizens and providers, this online success means that they can find immediate answers to their most pressing questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For the agency, it means reduced phone, email and “snail mail” workloads. The site is also useful for agency staff and other government employees who need to quickly access healthcare policy information.

Online self-service can be particularly beneficial when there is suddenly a huge demand for information relating to an event such as Hurricane Katrina or a major reform in Medicare prescription plans. Such events can potentially overwhelm CMS's contact center resources. But, with RightNow, the necessary information can quickly and easily be posted on the site where it's easy to find—and where links to other related site content can readily be provided.

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— Jennifer Johnson, CMS Manager,
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid
Services

Industry: Government

Goals

- Fulfill OMB mandates for quality of constituent experience
- Manage massive, complex and continually changing agency information
- Respond quickly to external events and internal issues

Achievements

- Truly citizen-centric www.medicare.gov website answers 99% of visitors' questions
- Accurate, version-controlled information available to all constituencies
- Greater speed and accountability built into agency communications

CASE STUDY: CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES



For example, as a recent the deadline for choosing a prescription plan approached, as many as 5,269,300 visitors accessed the Medicare.gov site every day. That volume would have overwhelmed the agency's contact center if its RightNow-based system wasn't there to handle the workload.

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Managing Knowledge Across a Giant Agency

Of course, the effectiveness of CMS's online strategy is largely dependent on its ability to collect, validate and update information across the organization. That can be a major challenge with such diverse subject-matter to manage and so many people in a number of different departments involved in the process.

But RightNow provides the automation and rules-based workflow necessary to ensure that this process always runs smoothly. As soon as someone in the agency recognizes that a new standardized "answer" needs to be created—or that an existing one needs to be updated—he or she can initiate the process. The answer is then appropriately reviewed and approved by authorized content managers. The system tracks the process and provides complete version control capabilities. Answers can also be flagged for re-evaluation at a pre-set time in the future to ensure it doesn't become "stale" as the result of neglect.

Citizens and providers can also "subscribe" to specific answers, so that they're automatically notified if and when any updates are made. This ensures that relevant news is immediately "pushed" out to whoever needs it.

CMS has even gone a step further and adapted RightNow functions originally designed for private-sector marketing needs in order to facilitate communications with its own staff and allied government agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Prior to using RightNow, CMS distributed information to these multiple internal groups using conventional listserv tools. But managing multiple lists with those tools was problematic, and there was no way to account for distribution. With RightNow, on the other hand, CMS staff can segment and combine lists as required for each distribution. They can also track message delivery to ensure that everyone who needs to get a particular piece of information receives it—and that no information is sent to unauthorized parties.

At the same time as it facilitates this kind of "top-down" distribution, RightNow also supports "bottom-up" communications. In this case, CMS has adapted RightNow's incident management functions to empower all of its employees to bring attention to issues ranging from IT problems to suggestions

for service improvements. Once initiated in the RightNow systems, these issues are tracked and escalated as required until they're resolved.

According to Johnson, this application of RightNow has become "a way of life" at CMS. "With RightNow, we've virtually eliminated the kind of communication breakdowns that typically occur in large organizations," she explains. "The discipline and accountability it brings to our internal processes have significantly improved the level of service we are able to provide to the American public."

A Strong Partner for Implementing High-Impact Technology

Johnson notes that there are several factors that have made RightNow a particularly helpful partner for CMS—above and beyond the great technology it has provided over the years.

One of those factors is RightNow's on demand delivery model. By taking advantage of this model, CMS has been able to avoid significant IT lifecycle costs. It has also been able to allocate IT staff resources to other important projects, rather than assigning them to the care and feeding of its multiple RightNow applications.

Another factor is RightNow's professional services team, which has helped CMS customize and integrate the software in order to meet various operational challenges.

A third factor is the ongoing responsiveness of RightNow's support team. "RightNow really practices what it preaches when it comes to the customer experience," says Johnson. "Their online resources are excellent, and they always get back to us very quickly if we need to have a personal conversation about a technical issue."

Johnson adds that as the healthcare environment becomes more complex—and as the internet becomes that information channel-of-choice for an increasingly wired population—RightNow's strategic importance to CMS is positioned to grow. "As the Baby Boomers age, we are going to have to get more information about more things to more people," she observes. "RightNow is playing a critical role in enabling us to fulfill that mission."

ABOUT CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) supports more than 80 million eligible program beneficiaries and providers. It is the federal agency responsible for administering Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance), HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments), and several other health-related programs.