



# CASE STUDY: METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

## NEW YORK MTA DELIVERS FAST, ACCURATE ANSWERS TO MILLIONS WITH RIGHTNOW

Sometimes it takes more than great technology to address an organization's customer service challenges. Sometimes it also takes a professional services team that can drive adoption of that technology and best practices across the organization.

In its engagement with New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), RightNow has augmented the benefits of great technology with great professional services. As a result, the MTA has achieved significant gains in the quality and efficiency of its multiple customer service operations.

This was no simple task. The MTA is comprised of five independent business units, each of which is a major transportation company in itself. Altogether, these units move about eight million people every day. Such a large organization serving so many customers gets a lot of questions. So the MTA invested heavily in the internet, creating a 4,500-page website that enables New Yorkers to check schedules, buy tickets, and get other useful information.

However, the MTA had yet to exploit the full potential of the internet. Call volume remained high, even though much of the information callers were seeking was on the website. And no email address was available on the site, because there was no effective way to manage the deluge of messages that would certainly come in if one had been posted.

After an extensive review process, the MTA selected RightNow to address this situation. RightNow's proven knowledge base technology, sophisticated email management tools, and robust analytics were all factors in its selection—as was its web-based hosted delivery model, which offered an ideal way to implement the technology across the MTA's multiple locations. Just as important, RightNow was able to present the MTA with more satisfied reference accounts than any of its competitors.

"It's very reassuring when you hear nothing but praise from a vendor's customers," says MTA director of community affairs Douglas Sussman. "That definitely gives you a greater comfort level when you make an important decision like this."

Because the MTA's business units were once independent companies, each had its own way of providing service. Each had different workflows and escalation policies. Each took a distinctive approach to answering questions and managing knowledge. MTA's RightNow professional services representative took the lead in building cross-organizational consensus and engaging people from throughout the MTA's diverse groups. RightNow visited the various business units, interviewed managers and scrutinized procedures, and performed the first cross-agency analysis ever done of the MTA's customer service practices.

After this fact-finding, RightNow recommended that a single instance of the software and a common knowledge base be deployed across the MTA, but that incident-handling policies be adapted to each unit. This would enable the MTA to reap the benefits of commonality, while avoiding the logistical and political problems that would inevitably result from trying to force the units to change entrenched processes.

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— Douglas Sussman, Director of Community Affairs, MTA

### Industry: Government

#### Goals

- Fully leverage the internet as a customer service channel
- Reduce operational costs to address budget deficit of nearly \$3 billion
- Bring email response times down from a peak of 15 days
- Increase constituent use of online resources

#### Achievements

- Broad range of accurate answers available to customers 24 hours a day
- Call volume reduced
- Email response times reduced by 80-95%
- Analytics tools provide managers with valuable feedback about customer service issues

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The strategy proved extremely effective. With RightNow taking the lead in communicating with unit managers, consensus was successfully built.

“RightNow did an incredible job of keeping people with divergent interests on track,” says Sussman. “We didn’t just build consensus. We actually got everyone excited about the plan.”

The MTA initially posted a knowledge base of about 25 question/answer pairs. Deployment went smoothly and didn’t place any additional burdens on the MTA’s already overloaded IT department. RightNow’s content management tools made it easy for the MTA to add to its knowledge base over time, while its search functions made it easy for customers to quickly locate the answers they were looking for—even as the number of question/answer pairs grew to over 150.

Almost immediately, the knowledge base began drawing about 10,000 customer visits per month. The impact on call volume was noticeable, and feedback from the public was positive. A subsequent re-design of the site drove traffic up to around 30,000 visits per month.

Next came email—which experienced a trial by fire. With a budget crisis looming, communication with the riding public became an urgent priority. The question before the MTA and its customers was whether a deficit that had grown to \$1 billion should be addressed by service reductions, fare increases, or some combination of the two. It was critical that public input be actively solicited and incorporated into the MTA’s ultimate decision. But public hearings and written correspondence offered limited ways of receiving that input. The internet was clearly an important channel to activate for this purpose.

RightNow proved a superb solution. A special webform was designed and posted on the site. Within 12 weeks, nearly 4,000 public comments were received. The webform included a survey question, so customers could simply check off their preference. This made it easy to tabulate results. These results, along with customers’ written comments, were reviewed by the MTA’s board of directors—ensuring the views of the riding public were fully considered.

The MTA then began implementing RightNow’s email capabilities at each of its business units. Because each unit had its own objectives and staffing structure, the business rules for routing email were customized accordingly. Having already fully documented each unit’s approach, it was a fairly simple matter to define the associated rules in the software.

Customers quickly embraced the new communication channel, and thousands of messages started pouring in. These online messages could easily be routed and tracked without the clumsiness of postal mail or the real-time pressures of a phone call. The new channel was also highly convenient for customers, since they could dash off a note to any MTA unit upon arriving at their office in the morning. In many cases, they would have their answer by the afternoon. This represented an 80-95 percent improvement over response times prior to the RightNow implementation.

RightNow’s unique combination of technology and expertise has clearly enabled the MTA to deliver better service and operate far more efficiently—since answering a question with a web answer is so inexpensive. RightNow has also helped the MTA gain greater insight into its customers’ needs. By acting on these insights, the MTA can improve the quality of the critical transportation services it is delivering to the people of the New York metropolitan area.

“Our relationship with RightNow has turned out to be about a lot more than just buying software,” declares Sussman. “RightNow has proven its ability to work closely with our headquarters team and each of our individual subsidiaries to drive continuous improvements in customer service practices and processes. So, in addition to being very satisfied with what we’ve already accomplished in such a short amount of time, we are quite optimistic about what we can achieve in the future.”

## ABOUT METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority serves the needs of millions of users in the New York City area through five wholly-owned, but operationally independent subsidiaries: NYC Transit (which operates the city’s subways and buses), the Long Island Railroad and Metro North (respectively the first and second largest commuter rail services in the Western Hemisphere), Long Island Bus, and its Bridges and Tunnels. About eight million people a day use the MTA’s resources.