EIGHT STEPS TO GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 1

Customer Experience Challenges for Government Agencies 2

Eight Steps to Great Customer Experiences 4

Step 1: Establish a Knowledge Foundation 4

Step 2: Empower Your Customers 5

Step 3: Empower Your Frontline Employees 7

Step 4: Offer Multi-Channel Choice 7

Step 5: Listen to Your Customers 9

Step 6: Design Seamless Experiences 10

Step 7: Engage Customers Proactively 11

Step 8: Measure and Improve Continuously 12

Tangible Benefits for Tangible Improvements 13

About RightNow Technologies 14

Customer Experience Scorecard 15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Government agencies face significant challenges. A troubled economy is severely constraining tax revenues, forcing many agencies to operate on tighter budgets with smaller staffs. Many agencies are also seeing their most knowledgeable and experienced people retire, which may further impact their ability to effectively service their customers.

At the same time, agencies are under intense pressure to improve the quality of those services and deliver greater transparency to citizens and other stakeholders. Those pressures come, in part, from government mandates to do so. Agencies at all levels of government are being called upon to provide more responsive service, to better collaborate with customers, to increase their transparency to the general public, and to become more proactive about improving customer satisfaction.

These pressures are also the result of a broader marketplace environment where customer expectations continue to rise. People simply demand that they be able to get fast, accurate, and consistent answers from government agencies. And they will clearly express their dissatisfaction if their expectations aren't met.

To make matters worse, customers now expect to be able to deal with agencies across many different communications channels—including phone, email, the web, and walk-in visits to bricks-and-mortar offices.

Fortunately, there are proven best practices that agencies can adopt to optimize the quality of the customer experience across all channels in spite of their limited resources. A great customer experience, after all, is primarily about delivering the right knowledge to the right place at the right time. By getting better at delivering knowledge, agencies can significantly improve services while driving down costs.

These best practices can be summed up in eight simple steps:

1. Establish a knowledge foundation
2. Empower your customers
3. Empower your frontline employees
4. Offer multi-channel choice
5. Listen to your customers
6. Design seamless experiences
7. Engage customers proactively
8. Measure and improve continuously

This white paper outlines the eight steps and explains how they are being applied by government agencies to meet today's difficult customer experience challenges. By adapting these best practices to their own specific situations, agencies can fulfill rising customer expectations, comply with internal mandates, improve staff morale, and gain deeper insight into conditions that impact the agency mission—as they increase productivity and reduce costs.

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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

"Customer experience" is not a mere buzzword or theory. It is a concrete term that refers to the real, everyday interactions between agencies and their constituencies. Agencies that deliver a superior customer experience are fulfilling a key aspect of their organizational mission. Agencies that deliver a substandard customer experience are not. The experience is important whether the customer is a citizen, employee, warfighter, business, or another agency.

This is one of the reasons why, for example, the GSA's Office of Citizen Services and Communications launched its USA Services initiative. There is growing awareness of the centrality of the customer experience to the fulfillment of mission. Agencies must be able to provide customers with the information they need, when they need it. They must do everything possible to ensure that customers know about the services they offer. And they must have some way of measuring the quality of their customer experience so that they take appropriate steps to improve it as necessary.

Unfortunately, agencies seeking to deliver a consistently excellent customer experience currently face a wide range of challenges. These challenges include:

Constrained budgets. A problematic economy is reducing tax revenues, resulting in tighter budgets for most agencies. Even in cases where agencies receive significant additional funding, that funding may be earmarked for specific purposes other than improvements in customer service. As a result, agencies must typically come up with strategies for improving their customer experience without hiring additional staff. In fact, they may even have to achieve such improvements despite staff cuts.

Retiring subject-matter experts. Many agencies are experiencing a generational shift as their aging Baby Boomer staff retires. They take years of irreplaceable expertise and experience with them when they go. Such losses can have a significant adverse impact on customer service—unless agencies take immediate action.

Ongoing legislative/regulatory change. Agency mandates are not static. Neither is the information they have to provide to their customers. This ongoing change adds to the difficulty—and, potentially, the cost—of delivering a standout customer experience.

Rising customer expectations. Private-sector companies like Electronic Arts, Nikon, and Orbitz have made exceptional customer experiences a core component of their business strategies. Customers' interactions with these companies significantly raise their expectations about all aspects of service—including speed, ease, and personalization. These expectations are projected onto government agencies as well, even though those agencies may lack the resources of their counterparts in the private sector or have unique regulations guiding how they interact with customers.

Multiple communication channels. Today's customers want to interact across multiple communication channels—including phone, email, the web, fax, interactive voice response (IVR), interactive chat, and/or walk-in visits to brick-and-mortar offices. This intensifies the customer experience workload. It also presents agencies with the new, additional challenge of providing customers with a consistent level of service and consistent information regardless of channel.

Limited insight. One of the biggest obstacles to the improvement of the customer experience is lack of insight into its current state. After all, you can't improve what you can't measure. So agencies need better means of tracking wait-times, pinpointing where the information being given to customers is inaccurate or insufficiently relevant, and discovering which shortcomings in the customer experience are especially disconcerting to customers themselves. Agencies also need to be able to track what is going well. Are they meeting service levels in one area that can be leveraged in another area? Is one channel satisfying customers more than another?

Contact center realities. According to the 2008 Government Call Center Benchmark study, customer service representative (CSR) turnover at government agencies averages more than 17%. At the same time, training a new CSR typically costs around $6,000 and takes 188 days. So agencies can't afford to have their CSRs become frustrated because they have to answer the same simple questions over and over. They also have to avoid having their CSRs overwhelmed with calls on some days and sitting idle on others.

Legacy systems integration. Few agencies can afford the cost or business disruption of a wholesale "rip and replace" of their existing information systems. Whatever measures agencies implement to improve their customer experience, must be capable of effectively integrating with existing resources whenever possible.

The bottom line is that government agencies must somehow overcome the experience/cost dilemma if they are to optimally fulfill their missions. They must become more adept at delivering exceptional customer experiences across all communication channels within their existing resource constraints. They have to do more with less. And, to really succeed, they have to keep getting better at doing more with less over time.

EIGHT STEPS TO GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Before embarking on any attempt to overcome the experience/cost dilemma, it's important to understand exactly what constitutes a positive customer experience.

At the core of any good customer experience is knowledge. Agencies that can deliver the right knowledge to the right customer at the right time via the right channel will achieve consistent customer satisfaction. Those that can't, won't. So any effective customer experience strategy will focus on facilitating the fast, consistent, and accurate delivery of knowledge where and when it is needed.

The idea of a customer experience strategy is critically important. Efficient, effective knowledge delivery isn't something agencies accomplish by just trying to get people to perform ad hoc tasks more quickly or by just implementing a piece of software. They have to have a strategy. A strategic approach requires them to understand who their customers are, what their customers want, and how those needs can best be met. Based on this understanding, the agency can begin to modify its processes, policies, systems, organization, and culture to optimize the customer experience—regardless of resource or budget limitations.

There are eight proven steps that government agencies can take to implement these modifications. The eight steps are based on more than ten years of experience with thousands of clients and have repeatedly enabled agencies to break the lockstep relationship between service quality and service cost. They also provide a practical methodology for making the transition to more effective customer experience management without disrupting agency operations.

Step 1: Establish a knowledge foundation

Obviously, agencies can only deliver knowledge if they have knowledge. More precisely, they can only deliver knowledge effectively and efficiently if they are effective and efficient in the way they accumulate, manage, and provide access to knowledge. If knowledge only exists between the ears of their most experienced subject-matter experts, if it is scattered across a bunch of entirely disparate documents and databases, and/or if it is accumulated in a haphazard way, then it will be difficult—if not impossible—for the agency to deliver it wherever and whenever it is needed.

The alternative to such ad hoc approaches to the accumulation, management, and accessibility of knowledge is the establishment of a knowledge foundation. A knowledge foundation (or knowledge base) can incorporate the various types of knowledge that agency staff and agency customers need—including knowledge about the agency's services and customers. It thus provides a common repository for everything that anyone needs to know.

This doesn't mean agencies have to engage in a massive, costly overhaul of their information systems to create an all-encompassing knowledge foundation. On the contrary, with today's self-learning technologies, a knowledge foundation is best created by:

1. Seeding the foundation with institutional knowledge that is already easily accessible
2. Capturing knowledge over time during the course of daily interactions with customers
3. Organizing knowledge based on customer needs—rather than internally driven schema

By adopting this ongoing, dynamic approach to knowledge management, agencies can ensure that their knowledge foundation remains accurate, up-to-date, and closely aligned with customers' needs. In fact, most agencies discover that a relatively large percentage of customers' needs can be met with a relatively small amount of knowledge—since customers so often ask the same questions.

CASE IN POINT: ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

A central, dynamic knowledge base of 500 questions and answers has enabled Illinois Department of Revenue to cut inbound email volume by 83 percent in one year. Content changes based on the latest inquiries ensure that they're always in step with constituent needs. As new issues arise or policies change, knowledge base answers can be added or modified by staff without assistance from its internal IT resources. Just as important, by letting taxpayers' day-to-day questions drive the creation of this content, they have achieved very tight alignment between the information it provides online and the real needs of the state's customers.

Step 2: Empower your customers

With a rich, continuously self-improving knowledge foundation in place, agencies can then take the critical step of providing customers with highly effective self-service. This is typically done via the web, but can also include voice self-service.

With web self-service, customers can quickly and easily pinpoint the information they need in the knowledge foundation without assistance. Ideally, they should be provided with a variety of ways to do this—including keyword searches, plain language queries, and category-based browsing. Most agencies have discovered that it is especially helpful to maintain a "Top Answers" list of most popular current topics. This approach enables the largest possible number of customers to find the most accessed up-to-date knowledge they need without actually having to search at all.

In fact, when self-service is properly implemented in conjunction with the right kind of self-learning knowledge base technology, agencies can achieve self-service rates of 90 percent and higher.

Effective self-service delivers many significant advantages to agencies seeking to optimize their customer experience within their existing resource constraints. These advantages include:

Immediacy of service. With self-service, customers don't have to wait for someone to pick up the phone or reply to an email. They find the answer they need within minutes of arriving at the agency's website.

Around-the-clock availability. Customers often need assistance outside of conventional business hours. Self-service meets this need by being available every hour of every day.

Relief for other channels. As customers start using self-service more and more, they use other channels less. Agencies that implement self-service have experienced reductions in their email workloads of 30-50 percent and reductions in their contact center workloads of 10-30 percent.

Greater effectiveness. Self-service content can include forms, diagrams, and other material that is clearer and more immediately helpful to customers than verbal instructions from an agency staff member.

Massive scalability. A single, easy-to-find self-service answer can meet the needs of thousands of customers simultaneously. This kind of scalability is especially valuable during crises and peak seasons, when phone lines can be overwhelmed by large numbers of identical queries.

Substantial cost reductions. It can cost an agency between $2 and $15 to answer a phone call. It can cost between $1 and $10 to answer an email—and many inquiries require more than one email to get resolved. Self-service interactions, on the other hand, can cost just fractions of a cent. As a result, some agencies save millions of dollars every year.

Actionable customer insight. Customers using self-service provide agencies rich insight into their needs and issues. By tracking self-service data such as most commonly used search terms and most commonly retrieved content, agencies can learn more about their customers to service them even more effectively.

Agencies can implement a variety of measures to encourage customers to use self-service resources. These measures include featuring self-service links prominently on their websites, promoting online self-service on “hold” messages and in printed literature, and replying to emails with the URLs of existing self-service content—rather than simply replicating that content in the email response itself.

It’s also important to note that effective self-service typically provides customers with an easy means of escalating their problem to another channel if necessary. This keeps them from perceiving self-service as a “dead end,” which tends to discourage them from trying to use it again in the future.

CASE IN POINT: STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

The State of New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (NYDMV) supports New York State’s 11 million motorists with a complete range of services including driver licensing and vehicle registration. Government agencies like the NYDMV are challenged to deliver essential services to large numbers of constituents and businesses with limited resources. These agencies therefore have to optimize the resource-efficiency with which they deliver their mandated services. And do so across all communication channels—especially the web, which continues to grow as the channel-of-choice for many constituents.

After implementing web self-service and email management, NYDMV now answers 97 percent users’ questions automatically via web self-service—and, as a result, has reduced email workloads by 75 percent. In addition to enabling the agency to serve more motorists at less cost, these volume reductions allow agency staff to devote more time to situations that truly require their personal attention.

Step 3: Empower your frontline employees

An agency’s frontline employees need to be knowledge-empowered as well. That way, even relatively inexperienced staff will be able to assist customers who call, email, or walk into a local office as if they were veteran subject-matter experts.

Frontline employees need instant access to the knowledge foundation as well. In fact, they typically need to access to an even broader range of knowledge than customers. This knowledge includes:

Extended subject-matter knowledge. Agency employees need to be able to access the same knowledge that an agency makes available to its customers via online self-service. This ensures that customers get the same consistent, accurate, and up-to-date answers regardless of how they choose to contact the agency. In addition, employees can be provided with additional knowledge that may not be appropriate for online posting—but which is essential for them to have in order to service customers effectively.

Customer knowledge. It is very helpful for frontline employees to have as much knowledge as possible about the customer whom they are assisting. This knowledge—which can include information such as the benefits the customer is currently receiving or the status of an active application—is usually available in one or more databases, which can be readily integrated into whatever screen employees view while they are helping customers. With this single view of the customer, employees help customers more effectively in less time. Putting such customer-specific knowledge at the employee's fingertips also increases first-call resolution and boosts employee morale.

Interaction context. Frontline employees can also better serve customers if they are provided with knowledge about the context of the specific interaction they are having with the customers. This is achieved by enabling employees to view any recent previous interactions with the customer. So, for example, if the customer has already spoken to other agency employees about the issue at hand, the employee can take that into account—and avoid asking the customer the same questions as the other employees did. This shortens the call and keeps the customers from getting frustrated about having to go over the same information over and over.

It's also important to empower frontline employees to create and modify knowledge. They are often the first to discover issues and situations that need to be incorporated into the knowledge foundation. So, by empowering those frontline employees to initiate knowledge, agencies can help ensure that their knowledge foundation stays complete, up-to-date, and well-aligned with customers' actual needs.

Step 4: Offer multi-channel choice

Customers today expect and demand service through whatever communication channel happens to be most convenient for them at any given time. They may check an agency's website for information, send an email with a question about their particular situation, and then follow up with a phone call or walk into an office. Agencies that don't have a good strategy in place for dealing with these channel-bouncing customers won't be able to service them effectively—and will often wind up operating far less cost-efficiently than they could.

To successfully serve customers across multiple channels, agencies must:

Apply a common knowledge foundation across all channels. If customers get one answer over the phone and a different one from the website, they won't trust either one—and they definitely won't perceive their experience as being positive. Agencies need to leverage a single knowledge foundation across all of their communication channels.

Manage all channels in a common manner. As noted in Step 3, frontline employees need to be able to see whether the customer they're helping has recently interacted with the agency about the same issue through another channel. Also, frontline staff will probably want to avoid sending out an email in response to an issue that has already been resolved with a previous phone call. These examples highlight the importance of not treating each channel as a fragmented "silo" of communication—but instead managing all channels in a common manner.

Ease appropriate escalation. If any single channel becomes a "dead end" for customers, they will be less likely to use it again. That's why it is important to offer easy escalation where appropriate. For example, if a customer can't quickly find what he or she needs via web self-service, it should be easy to submit the question to the agency's contact center through a webform. Ideally, the webform should automatically let the agency's contact center know what self-service knowledge the customer looked at before submitting the help request—so that the customer isn't given information already perused and not found helpful.

“Use Right-Channeling.” Agencies don’t have to be passive in how they use their various communication channels. They can take steps to direct customers to the channel that is most appropriate in terms of effectiveness and cost. This can be done, for example, by playing a message while customers are on hold that lets them know about the agency’s web self-service resource. If a crisis or emergency suddenly drives particularly high call volume, this message can be modified to let customers know that the agency has put fresh content on the website specifically for that purpose. By employing techniques like these, agencies can reduce costs, provide better service, and ensure that contact center staff resources are allocated to issues that really require personal attention—rather than on endless routine questions.

Agencies also want to be careful about over-extending themselves by offering too many channel choices before they are ready to adequately support them. They should make sure that they are delivering quality customers experiences with their existing channels and then add additional channels as appropriate. The right channels vary. Some agencies may support email, web self-service, and chat; others may add on forums; while others may support phone, walk-ins, and web self-service first. There are many factors in making these decisions, including the customer’s channel preferences and what employees are available to support channels.

CASE IN POINT: U.S. AIR FORCE PERSONNEL CENTER

With RightNow CX, the customer experience suite, more than 100 agents provide accurate, up-to-date information across multiple touchpoints to military and civilian employees of the U.S. Air Force. In addition, RightNow helps power the AFPC website with a self-learning knowledge foundation. With a consolidated single point of contact for system information, they are able to monitor constituent feedback, disseminate consistent information, and easily update content to ensure relevancy. AFPC greatly reduces inbound email by guiding constituents to submit questions via the web, where it is converted into an incident that AFPC can track and respond to.

Step 5: Listen to your customers

Customers want their voices heard—and they want agencies to act on their input. Agencies also have a big stake in listening to their customers, because they can only improve the customer experience if they know where it falls short.

There are several ways to capture customer input. One is to do “batch” surveys on a periodic basis. This approach can be useful when considering potential changes to services or for performing broad evaluations of agency performance. But periodic surveys only help agencies discover problems long after they’ve occurred. They also tend to be relatively generalized and unfocused.

That’s why it’s essential to also capture feedback at “the moment of truth.” This is done by sending out short surveys immediately following some interaction with the customer. These short, simple surveys allow agencies to find out exactly what customers think about the experience they just had with the contact center or in a local office. The agency can then immediately react to any problem that may have occurred—thereby rescuing the customer experience, while also gaining valuable insight into potential shortcomings in work processes.

Agencies should also let customers know that they are responding to their input. This is done through individual notifications (letting specific customers know that the agency has responded to their specific input), targeted notifications (letting the customers who have complained about a given problem or who use a particular service know about an improvement made based on their input), and general notifications (letting all customers know about various improvements that have been made as a result of customer input).

Real responsiveness to the customer's voice is the result of a mindset that has to pervade the culture of the agency. This "listening culture" can be promoted in various ways—such as holding regular meetings where frontline employees can discuss the kind of feedback they're getting from customers, or rewarding employees who make good suggestions based on customer feedback with appropriate recognition or incentives.

CASE IN POINT: THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)

The EPA understands that constituents want their voices heard. By using surveys, the EPA is able to use their feedback and take action on their comments. In addition to getting constituent feedback via surveys and with approximately 90,000 emails coming in a month, the EPA was able to cut their emails by 70%.

Just as important, RightNow's reporting tools give the agency full visibility into the issues and concerns expressed by those who check the knowledge base or send an email—so it has gained the necessary insight to respond to the changing needs of the American people.

Step 6: Design seamless experiences

One of the most frustrating experiences a customer can have is dealing with one part of an agency that doesn't know what another part of the agency is doing. This can happen when the department that qualifies individuals for the distribution of a benefit has inadequate communication with the department that subsequently manages the distribution of that benefit—or when the personnel who process a customer's application are unable to answer questions about associated fees and surcharges.

Customers don't think of themselves as dealing with multiple different departments or offices within an agency. To them, the agency is the agency—and they have a reasonable expectation that there will be some continuity in their experience with that agency.

To prevent these frustrations from becoming commonplace, agencies must design and deliver seamless customer experiences that transcend internal boundaries. Such experiences do more than just ensure that the customer is effectively serviced at every point of contact. It also eliminates productivity-draining inefficiencies for the agency.

There are several things that agencies need to do to enable seamless customer experiences across organizational boundaries. These include:

Event-driven modification of a single customer record. The customer record is the primary tool by which an agency tracks the status of the customer during any given process. This is where it can be noted that the customer has paid a fee, fulfilled a program requirement, or requested a service. Frontline employees need to be empowered to make these changes on the record—and a single record must be used across all areas of the agency, pulling in the necessary information from other systems as needed.

Flexible workflow design and automation. Another important capability for ensuring seamless hand-offs between agency domains is workflow automation. For example, personnel in a Public Information office can be automatically notified when certain tasks are completed by a Regulatory Affairs group, so that they can decide if any new or modified regulations should be incorporated into that agency's newsletter.

General and personalized self-service. Web self-service provides another effective means of supporting a seamless customer experience. Self-service delivers a seamless view of the agency to the customer by providing a common resource for information across all functional areas. Agencies can further enhance the online experience by providing customers with a secure, personalized "My Stuff" self-service area that allows them to track a variety of individualized information pertaining to different agency functions—such as requested forms or documents, account balance, application status, and due dates—in a single location.

CASE IN POINT: USA.GOV

As the U.S. government's official web portal, USA.gov makes it easy for the public to get U.S. government information and services on the web. USA.gov has collaborated with other government agencies to improve service for citizens by linking agency knowledge bases together. This provides cross-agency information sharing and citizens get answers faster 24 x 7.

For example, if you are looking for information on social security benefits advantage plans from the USA.gov site, the system returns answers for social security benefits from several sites including Medicare.gov, Census Bureau, Social Security, Customs and Border Protection, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Step 7: Engage customers proactively

To deliver a truly exceptional customer experience, agencies have to respond well when customers contact them. They also have to take the initiative and contact their customers. Proactive communication answers questions before they are asked and solves problems before they occur. Agencies that get proactive about customer communications also reduce costs—because they are often able to preempt large numbers of separate phone calls and emails through a single, well-crafted outbound message.

Several aspects of proactive communications are particularly important for optimally enhancing the customer experience:

Segmentation. Not all messages should go out to every customer every time. Agencies generally need to be selective about only sending customers information that is relevant to their particular needs. They do this by using their customer data to segment communications by relevant attributes such as demographics, geography, current and historical activity, or explicitly expressed preferences.

Personalization. Communication with customers should always be as personalized as possible. This personalization can be as simple as using the recipient's name in a greeting. But it can also be extended to other aspects of the customer's relationship with the agency: types of services, account balances, upcoming deadlines, etc. This kind of personalized content can increase the value of proactive communications to the customer and enhance their overall experience by giving them the sense that they are more than "just a number" to the agency.

Timing and frequency. Customers do not want to be inundated with communications. So agencies have to be careful about the frequency with which they communicate with their customers. It doesn't help to tell a customer on the 24th of the month about a program that is only available until the end of the month. So agencies also have to be smart about the timing of their communications.

Agencies need to acquire a variety of capabilities to be able to effectively manage proactive communications with their customers. Obviously, they need customer knowledge to segment and personalize it. They also need collaboration tools for developing message content, and a delivery management system to ensure that messages get to the intended recipients. When performing large-scale email distributions, it is also important to implement appropriate opt-in/opt-out permissioning and to comply with the CAN-SPAM regulations.

Proactive engagement is especially useful for informing customers about available services. After all, agencies can't serve customers well if customers aren't even aware of the agency's services.

Step 8: Measure and improve continuously

A superlative customer experience isn't achieved just by putting better service mechanisms in place. It's also achieved by continuously measuring and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of those mechanisms. That means that agencies have to have ways of measuring the quality of the customer experiences they deliver—and set specific objectives for process improvement.

There are a variety of ways to measure customer experience. One is to use traditional objective metrics such as first contact resolution rates (FCR), average call times, average time to resolve an inquiry, and transfer/escalation rates. Another is to get subjective evaluations from customers. Evaluations can also be performed using customer experience "scorecards" such as the one at the end of this paper.

The specific metrics or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that an agency uses will depend on their particular mission and objectives. However, there are some general principles that all agencies should apply as they pursue continuous improvement in customer experience:

Clearly communicate performance goals. People are more likely to achieve performance goals if they understand exactly what those goals are. Metrics and KPIs should therefore be clearly explained.

Make metrics visible. Desktop dashboards and whiteboard displays can help frontline employees track their own progress towards agency goals by creating an immediate feedback loop connecting behavior with results.

Reward achievement. Agencies may be limited in their ability to provide bonuses or other financial incentives for performance—but they can still recognize it and reward it. Competitions between internal teams also provide a fun and effective way to motivate employees towards concrete, achievable goals.

Set new goals. Goals should be periodically reviewed and adjusted as new performance levels are reached and as customer expectations continue to rise. The performance of other agencies may also be a factor, as emerging best practices reveal just how well agencies are able to perform.

These eight steps provide a powerful, proven model for improving the customer experience. The best thing about them may be that they can be approached incrementally. Agencies don't have to overhaul all of their processes and policies overnight. Instead, they solve their biggest problems first. Then, building on that foundation, they can keep improving their performance over time until they, too—despite resource constraints and competing organizational priorities—achieve the same kind of standout customer experience that the agencies profiled here have achieved.

TANGIBLE BENEFITS FOR TANGIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

With resources constrained—and with so many other demands competing for those constrained resources—agency decision-makers can only move forward with a strategy for an improved customer experience if they can be sure that it will yield tangible benefits for both the agency and its customers.

The results achieved by other agencies that have adopted this eight-step approach provide demonstrable proof that such results can be quickly and cost-effectively achieved. These results include:

Significantly improved customer satisfaction. Agencies that implement these eight steps are better able to answer customer questions, respond to customer problems, and develop positive customer relationships. The result is that customers are more satisfied in the short term—and they remain more satisfied in the long term.

Better allocation of limited budget dollars. Many of the best practices associated with these eight steps—especially those that support effective self-service and streamline contact center operations—enable agencies to achieve substantial cost savings. These savings can be allocated to further improvement of the customer experience or to other urgent agency priorities.

More effective fulfillment of agency mission. The ability of an agency to fulfill its stated mission is contingent on its ability to inform customers about available services and support. By enhancing the customer experience, execution of an eight-step strategy ensures that this information delivery and support are performed with excellence.

Compliance with open government mandates. Most agencies are being required to fulfill federal or state mandates for government, eGovernment, customer service, and/or organizational transparency. The eight steps facilitate that compliance within time, resource, and budget constraints.

Improved staff morale. Agencies can't perform well if their frontline employees are discouraged and unmotivated. By empowering these employees to have real impact on agency performance—and by making that impact measurable and rewardable—these eight steps consistently result in noticeable improvement in staff morale.

Deeper insight into customer needs and marketplace conditions. Agencies have to keep up with the changing needs of their customers—as well as broader changes in the economy, society, technology, etc. Implementation of these eight steps promote this insight by enabling agencies to better capture and act upon knowledge about customers and the world in which they live and work.

These benefits are available to any agency. The key to achieving them is to start with the first step. A standout customer experience isn't something that happens overnight. It is the result of a methodical, ongoing strategy. But such a strategy typically starts yielding its initial benefits right away, as agencies become intentional about building their knowledge foundation and providing customers with great self-service. And it is from this starting point that they go on to achieve the kind of operational excellence to which every agency leader aspires.

ABOUT RIGHTNOW

RightNow has pioneered the SaaS delivery model for government agencies and has successfully served the U.S. government for more than ten years. Over 155 public sector clients, including nearly every U.S. cabinet level agency, Army, Marines, Air Force, members of the Intelligence Community, and DoD, rely on RightNow to deliver real-time information, when and where it's needed.

RightNow is helping rid the world of bad experiences one consumer interaction at a time, eight million times a day. RightNow CX, the customer experience suite, helps organizations deliver exceptional customer experiences across the web, social networks, and contact centers, all delivered via the cloud. With more than eight billion customer interactions delivered, RightNow is the customer experience fabric for nearly 2,000 organizations around the globe. To learn more about RightNow, go to www.rightnow.com.

Contact us today to find out how we can help you create the best possible customer experience for your customers.

BASELINE YOUR EXPERIENCE DELIVERY

Quickly assess how easy it is for your customers to communicate with you

Customer Experience Assessment	Strongly Agree 5 points	Agree 4 points	Neutral 3 points	Disagree 2 points	Strongly Disagree 1 point	SCORE
Our customers are empowered to help themselves when they need information from us.						
Customers can conveniently contact us via the channel of their choice (e.g. voice, email, chat, social web, communities).						
Regardless of how customers contact us, they will receive the same answer to the same question.						
When a customer calls, we know they also just received a promotional email from us.						
Customers have access to track and view their interactions (e.g. order history, service incidents, support community posts, account status).						
Our employees have a single view of all customer interactions regardless of type.						
When we engage our customers, we provide them relevant, personalized information.						
We capture the voice of the customer by proactively seeking traditional and social web feedback and follow up by taking immediate action						
We continually exceed our service goals (e.g. first call resolution rate, SLAs).						
We help connect our customers with each other (e.g. communities and forums).						

Summary statement: From our customer's viewpoint, it is easy, efficient, and convenient to do business with us.

Total

Score assessment: 40-50 Superstar 30-39 Targeted improvements required 0-29 Broad improvements required

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