Telford & Wrekin – offline accessible reporting app

Summary

Telford & Wrekin is one of the councils in the UK with the fastest growing population. The council partnered with a specialist research and development company, Bronze Software Labs, to develop the 'Everyday Telford' cross-mobile application and integrate this with the associated back-office systems.

Together, they developed the concept of 'council agility': to maximise the opportunities for channel shift, greater operational efficiency, and improved public engagement at a speed that keeps up with customer's changing behaviours and expectations created by the technology and digital tools they have at their disposal which can also help the council meet challenging savings targets.

Unlike similar programmes, this app also works as well offline as it does online and integrates directly into the council's existing systems. So a report from a member of the public automatically generates a work order which is actioned with no need of council intervention. A feature of the system is when the council receives a report; the customer receives a tracking number sent back to their phone so that they are able to follow up their report. The public can submit photos taken from their smartphone/tablet of the issue they are reporting which also uses GPS notifications to pinpoint the exact location. All of this process is completed automatically through Everyday Telford, with no manual processing.

Objectives

The objective was to improve the customer's experience and help drive out efficiency savings. Alongside this, another goal was to increase public engagement by enabling the customer to directly report the most frequent local environmental issues such as fly tipping. This plays an important part in the public taking part in the council's Pride in Your Community initiative and help by reporting those environmental issues that matter most to residents, so that these can be tackled and the overall appearance of Telford and Wrekin improved.

Before the council created Everyday Telford, a member of the public would typically have to phone the council, or they could report through the website, which historically had poor uptake.

The council recognised that to offer an improved service it was not feasible to increase the size of their customer services team. An app was considered a good solution, and the council was clear that manual processing should not be required, so integration was critical.

Approach

The app was created for iPhone, Android and Windows Mobile devices — along with a set of reusable back-end enterprise system services for content management, customer accounts and real-time seamless integration with the councils Microsoft Dynamics CRM data management systems. The ability to update content and data within the application reduces maintenance costs and allows the council to respond quickly to issues as they occur in the borough.

The app was delivered by Bronze Labs on schedule, and developed in just fifteen weeks, in time for the busy winter period. With the new service layer and the internal knowledge gained from the

initial deployment, the authority plans to launch additional data driven services and has a high degree of confidence in the successful and timely implementation of future apps.

Outcomes

As a result of the Everyday Telford app, the council has seen a marked increase in reports from the public and have been able to process each job instantly, which has significantly improved customer response times. People can now report to the council 24/7 in a matter of minutes, free of charge. However, as there is no need for human intervention other than the actual service delivery, these improvements have been created without additional costs for handling an increased number of calls to the call centre. Also because the app is integrated into the necessary systems then there are no additional costs for processing these service requests.

The workforce out in the field have also benefitted from knowing exactly what to expect as they arrive for a job. Telford & Wrekin specified that Bronze Labs build native apps, (designed specifically for each platform), not web apps (which act as a link to an interactive website), so that the customer experience would be as good as it could be – the result is a significantly improved customer experience.

Benefits

The benefit of this app is wide-ranging. For the person reporting an issue, waiting times have been reduced, a prompt automated response and confirmation when the job is completed, results in an improved service. Council workers are better briefed for the job as they know what to expect and will therefore have the correct equipment necessary for the job. The systems also take locations into account when it allocates work, so workforce travel distances are reduced.

The benefits to the council have been many including, reductions in the need for customers to contact to the call centre, as well as savings from reduced in staff journey times and fuel usage and their time.

Because the council knows exactly where the reported issue is located and often has received a photograph as well, they know exactly what to expect when they arrive on site so unnecessary return trips are avoided as staff have the correct equipment. Also the public are encouraged to register rather than report anonymously therefore there have been very few bogus reports.

Customer quotes

"I reported an old sofa and some bin bags through the Everyday Telford app on my way to work. The spot is notorious locally for that sort of mess. On my way home that night it had gone! I was very impressed with the speed with which the council reacted – great service" Tom – local resident.

"Would like to say thank you because I used the Everyday Telford app on my phone yesterday due to a missed bin collection and didn't hear anything but when I arrived home I found all 3 bins were taken from behind my gate, emptied and put back behind my gate, really impressed, fantastic app, fantastic service" Dan – local resident

These comments have been echoed many times by members of the public: no more waiting on the phone, and the ability to report it there and then while the problem is fresh in the mind with an app that works both on and offline

Council benefits

As a result of soft launching this app, Telford and Wrekin received 2,311 reports directly from the general public that have not needed involvement of the customer service team – this has delivered a saving of around £5,000 in contact costs in the first quarter of 2013-14. It's important to note that this success has been purely through organic uptake of the app – people using it and telling others – and now the council intend to market this new service and expect a significant increase in those figures in a very short time.

Some of the reports include:

Abandoned Trolleys	131
Abandoned Vehicles	10
Drainage & Flooding	35
Feedback Form	84
Fly Tipping	354
Graffiti	38
Bins - Missed Collection	275
New & Additional Bins	807
Roads, Paths & Verges	238
Street Cleaning & Litter	114

For further information, please contact andrew.meredith@telford.gov.uk