

## **Reduce Call Volumes By 30%**

### **Whilst Improving**

### **Customer & Staff Satisfaction**

In line with most modern service organisations, the vast majority of local government councils have established call centres in a bid to provide efficient and quality first contact service to their communities.

However, as community expectations increase and the number of local government services continue to grow, it is often a struggle for customer service management to secure funding for additional staff in order to cope with the seemingly ever increasing workload.

This can result in under resourced call centres, with customers having to wait in long queues to have their calls answered. Poor customer satisfaction, abandoned calls and customer complaints can be the undesirable results.

Remedies, such as restricting the duration that staff can spend on calls, are sometimes used by managers in an attempt to address the imbalance between call volumes and available staff numbers. However, too often these strategies can result in poor customer service and satisfaction as staff hurry to complete each call in the time specified by management.

A recent study undertaken by Customer Service Benchmarking Australia, (CSBA), suggests that the answer to this dilemma may not always be found in adding more staff to the call centre, but instead, the solution may be for management to focus more on reducing the need for some customers to call council in the first place.

CSBA's involvement with one Victorian metropolitan council has resulted in the council's annual calls being reduced by 20% so far, with service levels being improved significantly over the same time period. Both the council and CSBA believe that there is still further opportunity to continue this positive trend.

An associate of CSBA, Mr. Noel Dobson, believes that there are many reasons why customers are often obliged to unnecessarily call some councils, resulting in inconvenience for customers and higher operational costs for local government.

Some of the reasons identified by CSBA include:

- Poor response or service delivery following a request by a resident/customer

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

### BENCHMARKING

#### AUSTRALIA

- Inefficient processes (eg. unnecessary process steps or over bureaucratic procedures)
- Failure to deliver on promises or expectations
- Insufficient community education or communication on specific issues
- Poorly worded or incomplete customer correspondence, notices, etc.
- Poor internal communication between council departments
- Inaccurate reporting of customer requests
- Poorly trained or informed staff

CSBA found that between 20-30% of total calls received by the council in question could be avoided if appropriate internal strategies and improvements were implemented across council departments.

However, Noel says that the “catch 22” for many councils is that their customer service managers and staff are so busy coping with the demands of the day to day operation, that they often have little time to collect and analyse the relevant data, prioritise the results, and then implement appropriate processes and strategies in partnership with other council departments.

Noel believes that CSBA’s expertise and local government experience can assist councils to effectively address these important customer and organisational issues. “We have shown that by working closely with council management and staff, it is possible to improve customer service whilst simultaneously reducing call volumes, operational costs and the pressure on front line customer service staff” says Noel.

For further information, contact Paul van Veenendaal at CSBA on 1800 358 081.