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Eight Steps to Great Customer Experiences for Government Agencies

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Introduction

Government agencies face significant challenges today. A troubled economy is severely constraining tax revenues, forcing many agencies to operate on tighter budgets with smaller staffs. And many agencies are also seeing their most knowledgeable and experienced people retire—further undermining their ability to effectively serve customers. At the same time, agencies are under intense pressure to improve services and become more transparent to citizens and other stakeholders—pressure that stems in part from government mandates. Agencies at all levels of government are being called upon to provide more-responsive service, better collaboration with customers, increased transparency to the general public, and more-proactive efforts to improve customer satisfaction.

These pressures are also the result of a broader marketplace environment in which customer expectations continue to rise. Today's citizens and stakeholders demand fast, accurate, and consistent answers from government agencies—and they will clearly express their dissatisfaction if those expectations are not met. To make matters worse, customers now expect to be able to deal with agencies across a multitude of communications channels, including phone, e-mail, the Web, mobile devices, social media, and brick-and-mortar offices.

This white paper outlines how government agencies can rise to meet these challenges by adapting eight customer service best practices to their own situations—fulfilling customer expectations in the process and complying with internal mandates, improving staff morale, and gaining deeper insight into conditions that have an impact on the agency mission while increasing productivity and reducing costs.

Best Practices for Better Service

Fortunately for government agencies, there are proven best practices they can adopt to optimize the customer experience across all channels despite 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 that 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 multichannel choice.
5. Listen to your customers.
6. Design seamless experiences.
7. Engage customers proactively.
8. Measure and improve continuously.

Customer Experience Challenges for Government Agencies

Customer experience is more than just a buzzword. It 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 mission; agencies that deliver a substandard customer experience are not. The experience is important whether the customer is a citizen, employee, veteran, business, or other agency.

This is one of the reasons why, for example, the General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Communications launched its USA Services initiative. There is a growing awareness among government agencies of just how key customer experience is to fulfilling their missions. The bottom line: 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 be able to measure the quality of their customer experience so that they can 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, including the following:

- **Constrained budgets.** A problematic economy is reducing tax revenues, which is leading to tighter budgets for most agencies. And even when agencies receive significant additional funding, that money is often earmarked for purposes that do not include improving customer service. As a result,

agencies must come up with ways to improve the customer experience without hiring additional staff. In fact, they may even be expected to achieve such improvements in the face of staff cuts.

- **Retiring subject matter experts.** Many agencies are experiencing a generational shift as their aging baby boomer staff retires. When these employees depart, they take years of irreplaceable expertise and experience with them. Such losses can have a significant adverse impact on customer service if agencies do not take immediate action.
- **Ongoing legislative/regulatory change.** Agency mandates are not static, nor is the information that agencies provide to customers—both of which add to the difficulty (and potentially the cost) of delivering a standout customer experience.
- **Rising customer expectations.** Private sector companies such as Electronic Arts, Nikon, and Orbitz have made exceptional customer experience a core component of their business strategies. As a result, customers' expectations about every aspect of service—including speed, ease, and personalization—have risen. What's more, these heightened expectations apply not just to private industry but to government agencies as well—even though agencies often lack the resources of their private sector counterparts or have unique regulations guiding customer interaction.
- **Multiple communication channels.** Today's customers want to interact across multiple communications channels—including phone, e-mail, the Web, fax, interactive voice response (IVR), interactive chat, and visits to brick-and-mortar offices. This intensifies the customer experience workload. It also presents agencies with the additional challenge of providing a consistent level of service and consistent information across *all* channels.
- **Limited insight.** One of the biggest obstacles to improving customer experience is lack of insight into its current state. After all, you can't improve what you can't measure. Thus, government agencies need better means of tracking wait times, pinpointing inaccurate or irrelevant information, and discovering which shortcomings in the customer experience are especially disconcerting to customers. Agencies also need to be able to track which areas of the customer experience *are* working. Are they meeting service levels in one area that can be leveraged in another? Is one channel satisfying customers more than another?
- **Contact center realities.** Training new customer service representatives (CSRs) is expensive, so high CSR turnover rates mean higher agency costs. Thus agencies cannot afford to have their CSRs becoming frustrated by answering the same simple questions over and over. Nor can they afford to have those representatives overwhelmed with calls on some days and sitting idle on others.
- **Legacy systems integration.** Few agencies can afford the cost or the business disruption of a wholesale “rip and replace” of their existing information systems. Whatever measures agencies implement to improve their customer experience must be able to effectively integrate with existing resources whenever possible.

The bottom line: if government agencies are to optimally fulfill their missions, they must overcome the experience/cost dilemma and must become more adept at delivering exceptional customer experiences across all communication channels within their existing resource constraints. In other words, they have to do more with less—and they must get better and better at it 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. It's as simple as that. This means that any effective customer experience strategy will focus on facilitating the fast, consistent, and accurate delivery of knowledge where and when it is needed.

Just having a customer experience strategy is critically important. Getting people to perform ad hoc tasks more quickly or implementing new software won't accomplish efficient, effective knowledge delivery. A strategic approach requires an understanding of customers and their desires as well as how those needs can be met. Based on this understanding, government agencies can begin to modify their processes, policies, systems, organizations, and cultures 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 10 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 deliver knowledge only if they have knowledge. More precisely, they can deliver knowledge effectively and efficiently only if they are effective and efficient in the way they accumulate, manage, and provide access to knowledge. If knowledge exists only between the ears of subject matter experts, if it's scattered across disparate documents and databases, or if it's accumulated haphazardly, agencies will have a difficult—if not impossible—time delivering it wherever and whenever it's needed.

The alternative to this ad hoc approach is the establishment of a knowledge foundation. A knowledge foundation (or knowledgebase) can incorporate the various types of information that agency staff and customers need—including knowledge about the agency's services and customers. In this way, it serves as a common repository for everything anyone needs to know.

This doesn't mean that 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, the best way to create a knowledge foundation is to

- Seed the foundation with easily accessible institutional knowledge
- Capture knowledge over time during the course of daily interactions with customers
- Organize knowledge according to customer needs rather than internally driven schema

By adopting this ongoing dynamic approach to knowledge management, government 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—given that customers so often ask the same questions.

Case in Point: Pennsylvania Department of Revenue

With a knowledgebase that currently contains more than 2,500 question/answer pairs—and the powerful search capabilities that Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service provides—the odds are high that visitors to the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue's Website will find what they're looking for. In fact, only about 1 percent of 130,000 Web sessions result in a site visitor's actually submitting a question via the "Ask A Question" form for a personal response.

Step 2: Empower Your Customers

With a rich, continuously self-improving knowledge foundation in place, agencies can 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's especially helpful to maintain a Top Answers list of the 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.

In fact, when self-service is properly implemented in conjunction with the right kind of self-learning knowledgebase 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 e-mail. They find the answer they need within minutes of arriving at the agency's Website.
- **Around-the-clock availability.** Customers often need assistance outside 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 e-mail workloads of 30 to 50 percent and reductions in their contact center workloads of 10 to 30 percent.
- **Greater effectiveness.** Self-service content can include forms, diagrams, and other material that's clearer and more immediately helpful to customers than verbal interactions with agency staff.
- **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 numerous 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 e-mail—and resolving inquiries requires more than one e-mail in many cases. 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 with rich insight into their needs and issues. By tracking self-service data such as the most commonly used search terms and the most commonly retrieved content, agencies can learn more about their customers—which enables them to provide better service.

Agencies can do a variety of things to encourage customers to use self-service resources. These include featuring self-service links prominently on their Websites; promoting online self-service in “hold” messages and printed literature; and replying to e-mails with the URLs of existing self-service content, rather than simply replicating that content in the e-mail response itself.

It’s also important to note that effective self-service typically provides customers with an easy means of escalating problems to another channel if necessary—which, in turn, prevents them from perceiving self-service as a dead end.

Case In Point: New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) began implementing Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service’s e-mail capabilities in each of its business units. Because each unit had its own objectives and staffing structure, the business rules for routing e-mail were customized accordingly. 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, because 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 percent to 95 percent improvement over response times prior to the implementation of Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service.

Step 3: Empower Your Frontline Employees

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

Frontline employees need instant access to the knowledge foundation too. In fact, they typically need to access an even broader range of knowledge than customers do. This 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 consistent, accurate, and up-to-date answers regardless of how they contact the agency. Employees can also be provided with additional knowledge that may not be appropriate for online posting but is essential for serving customers effectively.
- **Customer knowledge.** Frontline employees should also have as much knowledge as possible about the customers they’re 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

helping customers. With this single view of the customer, employees can help customers more effectively in less time. Putting such customer-specific knowledge at employees' fingertips also increases first-call resolution and boosts employee morale.

- **Interaction context.** Frontline employees can also better serve customers if they're provided with knowledge about the context of customer interactions. This is achieved when employees can view any recent previous interactions with the customer. Thus, for example, if a customer has already spoken to other agency employees about the issue at hand, the employee can take that into account—and avoid asking the same questions. This shortens calls and saves customers the frustration of having to go over the same information again and again.

It's also important to empower frontline employees to create and modify knowledge. These employees are often the first to discover issues and situations that need to be incorporated into the knowledge foundation. By empowering these 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 Multichannel Choice

Customers today expect and demand service through whatever communication channel happens to be the most convenient for them at any given time. They may check an agency's Website for information, send an e-mail with a question about their particular situation, and then follow up by making a phone call or walking into an office. Agencies that don't have a good strategy in place for dealing with channel-bouncing customers won't be able to serve them effectively and will often wind up operating far less cost-effectively than they otherwise 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 another from the Website, they won't trust either source—and they definitely won't perceive the experience as 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 want to avoid sending out an e-mail in response to an issue that's already been resolved in 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.
- **Simplify appropriate escalation.** If a channel becomes a dead end for customers, they'll be less likely to use it again. That's why it's important to offer easy escalation where appropriate. For example, if a customer can't quickly find an answer via Web self-service, it should be easy to submit the question to the agency's contact center through a Web form. Ideally, the Web form 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 deemed helpful.

- **Use right-channeling.** Agencies don't have to be passive in their use of communication channels. Instead, they can direct customers to the channel that's most appropriate in terms of effectiveness and cost. It's possible to do this by, for example, playing a message while customers are on hold that lets them know about the agency's Web self-service resource. If a crisis or an emergency suddenly prompts a particularly high call volume, this message can be modified to let customers know that the agency has put fresh content on the Website specifically to respond to the current situation. By employing techniques such as these, agencies can reduce costs, provide better service, and ensure that contact center staff resources are allocated to issues that require personal attention—rather than to dealing with endless routine questions.

Agencies should also take care not to overextend themselves by offering more channels than they can adequately support. They should first make sure they're delivering quality customer experiences with their existing channels and then add more channels as appropriate. The right channels vary. Some agencies may support e-mail, Web self-service, and chat; others may add forums; and others may support phone, walk-ins, and Web self-service first. Many factors go into making these decisions, including the customers' channel preferences and what employees are available to support which channels.

Case In Point: U.S. Air Force Personnel Center

With Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service, 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, Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service helps power the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) Website with a self-learning knowledge foundation. With a consolidated single point of contact for system information, the agency is able to monitor constituent feedback, disseminate consistent information, and easily update content to ensure relevance. The AFPC greatly reduces inbound e-mail by guiding constituents to submit questions via the Web, where each question is converted into an incident the AFPC can track and respond to.

Step 5: Listen to Your Customers

Customers want to be heard—and they want agencies to act on their input. Agencies also have a big stake in listening to their customers, because they can improve the customer experience only 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. However, periodic surveys help agencies discover problems only *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.” You can do this by sending out short surveys immediately following customer interactions. These short, simple questionnaires enable agencies to find out exactly what customers think about the experience they've 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 individual customers know that the agency has responded to their specific input), targeted notifications (letting customers who have complained about a given problem

or used a particular service know about an improvement made in response to 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—for example, by holding regular meetings where frontline employees can discuss customer feedback or by rewarding employees who make good suggestions based on customer feedback, with appropriate recognition or incentives.

Case In Point: The Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) understands that constituents want their voices heard. By employing surveys, the EPA is able to act on constituent comments. In addition to getting constituent feedback via surveys, the EPA has been able to cut its approximately 90,000 monthly e-mails by 70 percent. Just as important, the reporting tools in Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service give the agency full visibility into the issues and concerns expressed by those who check the knowledgebase or send an e-mail. As a result, the agency has gained the necessary insight for responding 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 of finding continuity in dealing with that agency. For this reason, agencies must design and deliver seamless customer experiences that transcend internal boundaries. Such experiences do more than just ensure that the customer is effectively served at every point of contact. They also eliminate productivity-draining inefficiencies in the agency.

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

- **Event-driven modification of single customer records.** In an agency, the customer record is the primary tool for tracking 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 such changes in 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.** Workflow automation is also essential in ensuring seamless handoffs between agency domains. For example, personnel in a public information office can be automatically notified when certain tasks are completed by a regulatory affairs group. In this way, 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 enables them to track a variety of individualized information pertaining to 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 knowledgebases. This provides cross-agency information sharing and fast, 24/7 response to user questions. For example, if you are looking for information on Social Security benefit advantage plans on the USA.gov site, the system will return 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, government agencies must respond well when customers contact them. However, they also have to take the initiative and contact customers themselves. This type of proactive communication answers questions before they're raised and addresses problems before they occur. Agencies that are proactive about customer communications also reduce costs—because they're often able to pre-empt numerous separate phone calls and e-mails through a single, well-crafted outbound message.

Several aspects of proactive communications are particularly important for optimally enhancing the customer experience. These include

- **Segmentation.** Not all messages should go out to every customer every time. Agencies generally need to be selective—sending customers only information that's 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. However, it can also be extended to other aspects of the customer's relationship with the agency: types of services, account balances, upcoming deadlines, and so on. This kind of personalized content can increase the value of proactive communications to customers 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. Thus, agencies need to be smart about the frequency and timing of communications with customers. It doesn't help to tell a customer on the 24th of the month about a program that is available only until the end of the month.

Agencies need to acquire a variety of capabilities if they are to effectively manage proactive communications with their customers. Obviously, they need customer knowledge to segment and

personalize their communications. They also need collaboration tools for developing message content and a delivery management system to ensure that messages reach the intended recipients. When performing large-scale e-mail distributions, it's also important to implement appropriate opt-in/opt-out "permissioning" and to comply with the Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003 (CAN-SPAM).

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

Step 8: Measure and Improve Continuously

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

There are various 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 way to measure customer experience is by soliciting subjective evaluations from customers. Evaluations can also be performed with customer experience scorecards such as the one in the appendix to this paper.

The metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) an agency uses will depend on its mission and objectives. There are, however, some general principles that all agencies should apply as they pursue continuous customer experience improvement:

- **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 toward 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 and reward it. Competitions between internal teams also provide a fun and effective way to motivate employees to meet concrete, achievable goals.
- **Set new goals.** Goals should be periodically reviewed and adjusted as new performance levels are reached and 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.

Summing Up

These eight steps provide a powerful, proven model for improving 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 can solve their biggest problems first. Then, building on that foundation, they can continue improving performance over time to provide standout customer experiences—despite limited resources and competing organizational priorities.

Tangible Benefits for Tangible Improvements

With resources constrained and many departments competing for them, agency decision-makers can implement strategies for improving customer experience only if they're certain the strategies 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. As a result, 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 improve the customer experience or address other urgent agency priorities.
- **More-effective fulfillment of agency mission.** An agency's ability 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 required to fulfill federal or state mandates for government, e-government, 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 a real impact on agency performance—and by making that impact measurable and rewardable—these eight steps consistently result in noticeable improvements in staff morale.
- **Deeper insight into customer needs and marketplace conditions.** Agencies must keep pace with the changing needs of their customers—as well as broader changes in the economy, society, technology, and so on. By implementing these eight steps, agencies can better capture and act upon knowledge about customers and the world in which they live and work.

Conclusion

The benefits of the eight-step approach to improving the customer experience are available to any agency. The key to achieving them is to start at the beginning. After all, a standout customer experience isn't something that happens overnight. Instead, it is the result of a methodical, ongoing strategy—one that begins to extend benefits immediately as agencies become intentional about building their knowledge foundation and providing customers with great self-service. From this starting point, government agencies can go on to achieve the kind of operational excellence to which every agency leader aspires.

Appendix 1: Customer Experience Assessment

Use this short survey to baseline your company’s experience delivery and quickly assess how easy it is for your customers to communicate with you.

	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 (voice, e-mail, 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 e-mail from us.						
Customers have access to track and view their interactions (order history, service incidents, support community post, 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 (such as first call resolution rate and service level agreements).						
We help connect our customers with each other (for example with communities and forums).						
TOTAL						

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

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



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Hardware and Software, Engineered to Work Together