President Obama’s Executive Order Raises the Bar for Customer Service Experiences
Introduction

When President Barack Obama issued the executive order “Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service,” on April 27, 2011, he created a far-reaching directive that better customer service will be a priority for every agency in the U.S. government.¹

The order recognizes that citizens’ experiences in the private sector create heightened levels of expectation about how they will be treated in their interactions with the public sector. The president identifies “advances in technology and service delivery systems” as the forces driving the rising standards.

President Obama’s executive order effectively raises the bar on customer service experiences with his commitment that “the Government must keep pace with and even exceed those [rising] expectations.”

Public Perception of Government Performance

Research confirms the chief executive’s assessment of customer service experiences. In one 2011 study, 79 percent of the respondents stated that they still believed that the federal government could improve customer service.²

Even federal executives recognize citizens’ dissatisfaction with government in this regard. In the 2011 “Citizen Engagement with the Federal Government Survey,” conducted by the Government Business Council, nearly 60 percent of the respondents described citizens’ attitude toward government as “frustrated.”³ The same survey strongly hints why this is the case. Although 97 percent of the federal executives surveyed believe that government should be “very” or “somewhat” responsive to citizens, only 45 percent actually view the government as responsive today.

Executive Order Conveys Sense of Urgency for Each Agency

President Obama’s order established the requirement for each agency to develop a customer service plan within 180 days from the date the order was issued. The new technology-based plans were required to address “how the agency will provide services in a manner that seeks to streamline service delivery and improve the experience of its customers.”

In explaining why agencies must comply with this order, President Obama called it the federal government’s responsibility. He recommended serving the public with

- Improved processes to reduce customer inquiries as well as complaints
- Better, faster, and lower-cost delivery of services
- Solutions that entail self-service options accessible via the internet or mobile devices

The order may potentially affect nearly everyone, with the intended audience identified as individuals, private entities, and governmental entities that will receive better service. Among citizens, then, customers are defined as businesses; tribal, state, or local governments; and even other agencies within the federal government.

To develop their customer service plan, agencies worked with guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget.

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² The “2011 Federal Customer Experience Survey” by MeriTalk is based on an online survey of 1,000 Americans in July 2011. To download the full study, visit meritalk.com/customerservice2011.
³ The “Citizen Engagement with the Federal Government Survey,” conducted in February 2011 by the Government Business Council, included responses from 204 federal employees representing civilian and defense agencies.
Identify One Major Initiative Using Technology

First, agencies were required to establish one “signature” initiative that used technology to improve the customer experience.

This requirement wasn’t asking agencies to reinvent the wheel. Rather, the order suggested that agencies learn from best practices in the private sector and apply those successful solutions to their own work. Because the technology already exists to advance customer service, agencies could build on the experiences of other organizations, both outside and inside the government.

Best-Practice Breakthroughs: U.S. Government

Improving customer experiences is an ongoing challenge and effort for the U.S. government. Several agencies are early adopters of technology that is already having a dramatic impact on customer satisfaction as well as the agencies’ workflow.

More than 170 government agencies rely on Oracle’s cloud-based solutions to answer the call for better citizen service. The following examples of government use of Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service give an idea of expected outcomes:

Answer Inquiries Faster

It takes only two minutes at the Air Force Personnel Center to answer customers’ inquiries, compared to the 20 minutes it took before an Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service solution was deployed. At the same time, a Web knowledgebase receives two million hits each week—up from 180,000 before the change. At the Navy Federal Credit Union, 50 percent of e-messages are answered immediately with automatic responses.

Reducing the E-Mail Burden

E-mail volume dropped 50 percent at the Veterans Benefits Administration after 24/7 access to 95 percent of the self-service information veterans need on the Web was provided. For Customs and Border Protection, a 98 percent self-service rate has drastically reduced the number of inbound e-mails.

Online Solutions for High-Volume Needs

Now no Social Security agent is needed on 99 percent of 25 million Web self-service sessions for the Social Security Administration. For Medicare.gov, a truly citizen-centric Website, 99 percent of visitors’ questions are answered online, even with traffic of more than 1.75 million views each week. This is a boon for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.
Integrating Chat, Keeping Track

Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service helps integrate and track chat capabilities, a feat especially crucial for agencies that need to communicate effectively with younger citizens. With Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service, the Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) can now manage more than 8,000 chat sessions per month and can maintain a complete record of online transactions that are shared with 1,640 local recruiters across 1,200 offices.

Best-Practice Breakthroughs: Private Sector

What has worked for the U.S. government is also a 24/7 solution for major national and international corporations that use Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service’s multichannel integration to improve their customers’ experiences. Organizations are receiving countless benefits from millions of interactions Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service facilitates each day in the private sector. Several examples are highlighted here:

An Incident Management System Reduces E-Mails

At Black & Decker, an incident management system addresses customer issues instantaneously. The system also enables customers of the power tool company to access self-help immediately, reducing e-mail volume by 25 percent and returning an annual savings of US$250,000 to the company.

A Better-Organized Knowledgebase Helps Customers, Boosts Savings

For Overstock.com, Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service improved Web self-service with a keyword search and an analysis of customer navigation behaviors that resulted in an intelligent reorganization of site content. The impact is happier customers, 72 percent fewer inbound e-mails, and a savings of US$1 million per month. When Overstock.com customers use Web self-service instead of calling or e-mailing the contact center, the online shopping business saves $6.38 per interaction.

Delivering Superior Customer Experiences While Controlling Operational Costs

Through the implementation of a central knowledgebase, Travelocity answers customers’ questions 24 hours a day from any location and significantly reduces phone- and e-mail-related contact center costs. Travelocity is able to add knowledgebase content without depending on IT, which improves responsiveness. When Hurricane Katrina struck, the Wall Street Journal directed its readers to Travelocity’s site as an authoritative reference and Travelocity saw more than 400,000 hits on the site’s Katrina-related content alone.
Fewer E-Mails, More Paying Customers

Keeping customers happy couldn’t be more important for any organization than it is for eHarmony, the online matchmaking service. By working with Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service, the company saw its retention rate after a trial subscription triple and its e-mail workloads decline 30 percent.

Soaring Customer Satisfaction Scores

Nikon, the camera manufacturer, effectively reduced its e-mail response times by 70 percent and increased customer satisfaction scores to more than 95 percent with its Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service solution.

Identifying Signature Initiatives

Each of these public- and private-sector breakthroughs originated from identification of a singular course of action. That’s where the president’s mandate begins too. The executive order required each agency, in general, to

1. Establish one major (signature) initiative that will use technology to improve the customer experience
2. Establish mechanisms for soliciting customer feedback on government services
3. Set clear customer service standards and expectations
4. Improve the customer experience by adopting proven customer service best practices, and coordinate across service channels (such as online, phone, in-person, and mail services)
5. Streamline agency processes to reduce costs and accelerate delivery while reducing the need for customer calls and inquiries
6. Identify ways to use innovative technologies to accomplish these customer activities to lower costs, decrease service delivery times, and improve the customer experience

Signature initiatives that would qualify for this program include

- Creating a Web self-service option for citizen inquiries
- Adding an online chat capability, integrated with existing communications
- Providing customer response via mobile devices
- Reducing e-mail volumes by improving Website functionality
- Surveying customers to get information for service improvements
The following table shows how one of these options matches the directives in this executive order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIATIVE: CREATE A WEB SELF-SERVICE OPTION</th>
<th>EXECUTIVE ORDER REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>AGENCY’S APPROACH</th>
<th>INTENDED BENEFITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback mechanism</td>
<td>Conduct an online survey</td>
<td>Instant response about helpfulness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service standards/performance goals</td>
<td>Reduce e-mails 50% to 70% and increase self-service rates to 98%</td>
<td>Lower cost; free employee time for other work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of process to be streamlined</td>
<td>Handle inquiries from citizens</td>
<td>Higher citizen satisfaction scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of innovative technology</td>
<td>Deploy Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service</td>
<td>Mirroring of proven experience from this technology in public/private sectors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Guide for Government Customer Service Reform

President Obama’s step-by-step roadmap for ramping up customer service mirrors elements of “Eight Steps to Superior Customer Experiences,” including best practices Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service captured from 11 years of experience in consulting with nearly 2,000 customers across a variety of industry verticals, geographies, and sizes.

In fact, several steps in the guide directly address components of the executive order:

- Empower customers
- Offer multichannel choices
- Listen to your customers
- Design seamless customer experiences
- Measure and improve continuously

Five Steps with Executive Order Impact

The executive order aligns with these same steps identified by Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service in the following important ways:

Empower Customers

Customers crave convenience, and self-service is usually the ultimate delivery method. Agencies can fulfill the executive order’s requirement to streamline agency processes, reduce costs, and accelerate service delivery while reducing the need for customer calls and inquiries.
Offer Multichannel Choices

Customers who can exercise the option of using the communication channel of their choice will feel the most empowered. It is essential to provide them with interaction options across many channels, using a common knowledge foundation to provide consistency and efficiency. Agencies are expected to improve the customer experience by adopting proven best practices and coordinating those services across channels.

Listen to Your Customers

Learn what your customers are thinking, and then act on that information. Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service provides a built-in survey tool that provides timely, relevant feedback from customers at the time of interaction. This simple solution precisely meets the executive order goal of establishing mechanisms to solicit customer feedback on government services and then to use that feedback to make service improvements.

Design Seamless Customer Experiences

If an organization is to provide great customer experiences, customer issues must transition smoothly between departments, functions, and people. Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service offers a single knowledgebase that is shared across departments. Combined with the right workflow to access it, this knowledgebase gives everyone a 360-degree view of the customer. This represents an innovative technology for meeting customer service imperatives that lower costs, decrease service delivery times, and improve the customer experience.

Measure and Improve Continuously

A great customer experience demands that agencies evaluate, baseline, identify, and adapt to customers. The president’s order requires clear customer service standards and expectations, including, where appropriate, performance goals for customer service.

Introducing Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service

Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service is a customer experience suite that helps agencies deliver exceptional customer experiences across the Web, social networks, and contact centers. All these exceptional experiences are delivered via the secure government cloud.

Government agencies have been benefiting from the strategies and implementations of solutions found in Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service for more than 10 years. Among the more than 170 government agencies currently using Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service solutions are

- Nearly every Cabinet-level agency
- U.S. Army
- U.S. Marines
• U.S. Air Force
• Intelligence community entities
• U.S. Department of Defense

In April 2011, an independent source—Gartner Inc.—named Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service a leader in this regard. According to Gartner’s “Magic Quadrant for CRM Customer Service Contact Centers” report, a company, in order to be identified as a leader, must be seen as a source of clues about how to innovate for customer service, and Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service is just such a company. Besides providing new ideas, companies were evaluated for their ability to execute and for the completeness of their vision. Gartner’s report represents corroboration of Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service’s status as a leading partner in finding solutions that work.

Conclusion

Keeping customers delighted, streamlining processes, and doing more with less are imperatives in this second decade of the new millennium. The “why” of this push in both the public and private sectors is often easier to comprehend than the “how.”

With his executive order, President Obama is empowering government agencies to move forward, as their private counterparts have done, to foster new, better, and more quickly forged relationships with their constituencies. Raising the bar, this order can help federal executives close the gap between service expectations and delivery in a profoundly meaningful way.
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Hardware and Software, Engineered to Work Together