



Elmbridge Borough Council Turns Proactive Customer Contact into Service ‘Brilliance’

Council enters ambitious new phase in citizen service improvement thanks to VoiceSage SMS, Visual Touch Messaging & Voice Surveys.

AT A GLANCE

Applications

- Visual Touch Messaging – Surveys
- SMS Messaging – Surveys
- Interactive Voice Messaging – Surveys

Challenges

- Need to deliver a ‘360°’ customer experience
- Increasing number of inbound calls tying up valuable resources
- Departments working in siloes with little cross-functional interaction

Benefits

- Joined-up processes
- Visibility across the customer relationship lifecycle
- Meaningful performance management
- Improved customer experience
- Better use of staff time
- Fosters continuous improvement

Elmbridge Borough Council is one of Surrey’s 11 borough councils which, together with Surrey County Council, provide local government services to more than one million people. Elmbridge covers an area of 23,803 acres and serves more than 124,000 citizens.

Providing a high-quality service to these citizens is a cornerstone of the Council’s strategy. This depends on trusted relationships and good, consistent and timely communication.

Forging Strong Connections

Central to this strategy is a commitment across the Council to keep developing and improving the way it handles customer relationships, customer contact and customer service. “We pride ourselves on having a very strong connection with our residents,” explains Dawn Crewe, Head of Customer Service at Elmbridge.

Over the last few years, Elmbridge has been on a mission to make it as easy as possible for local citizens to interact with its teams and complete transactions. The goal is not only to make it quicker and simpler for residents to get in touch and complete tasks, but also to free up staff’s time - so that they can give individual tax-payers more attention and address their specific needs when they do get in touch.

To do all of this without driving up the Council’s costs, Elmbridge has engaged the latest citizen relationship management (CRM) techniques, including timely customer satisfaction survey campaigns in partnership with proactive customer contact service provider VoiceSage.

The 360-degree customer experience

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Dawn Crewe, Head of Customer Service, Elmbridge Borough Council, Surrey

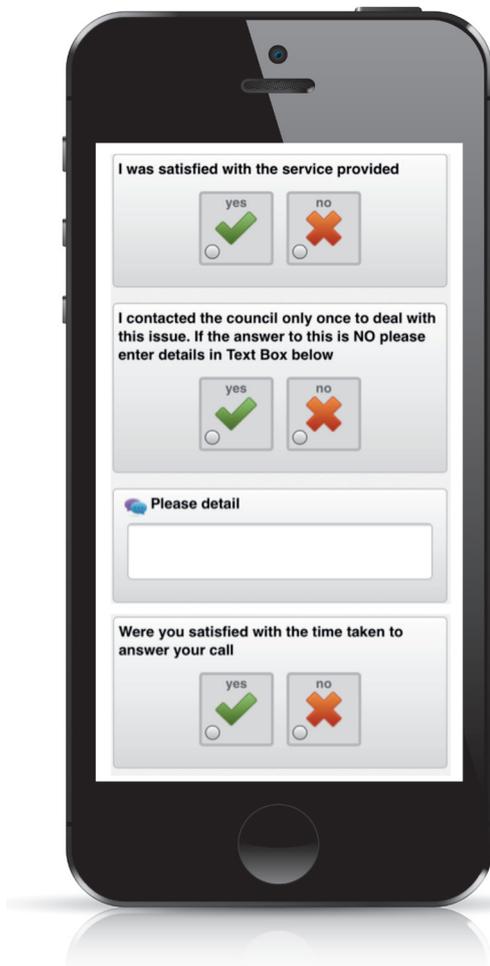
As a starting point, the Council wanted to develop more joined-up ways of working. This would enable it to build a complete picture of residents’ experience of its services and the way enquiries, transactions or issues are handled.

This has marked a change from its previous way of working. “Traditionally, we had very little cross-departmental or cross-function collaboration,” Dawn notes.

Fast forward two years, and it’s a very different picture. VoiceSage, which provides cloud based proactive customer contact services, has provided Elmbridge Borough Council with a complete customer feedback solution. The surveys are carried out using a blend of Visual Touch Messaging, SMS and Interactive Voice Messaging.

“When I joined the Council, one of my explicit aims was to deliver a 360-degree customer experience. Now, we have the technology to do just that,” Dawn says.

A 360-degree customer experience, she explains, is about tracking a case all the way through to completion – then capturing customer feedback on the citizen’s complete experience. This holistic view feeds into ongoing process improvements, which she believes is “innovative - and potentially quite brave” for UK local government.



Tracking the measurements that matter

The VoiceSage service not only manages proactive customer contact and customer relationship information all in one place, it also provides valuable and timely metrics so that the Council can keep a close eye on how it is doing in the eyes of citizens. Crucially, the measures used are ones that matter most to residents.

“For example, previously we had always reported how long it takes to answer a call, but in reality that statistic is fairly meaningless to our customers,” Dawn says. “Instead, we want to know how satisfied they are with the speed of response - a metric we only gained access to following our partnership with VoiceSage and its service. This is just one of the measurements we have started to use in very powerful ways.”

As more local government transactions move online, it’s also important that the Council doesn’t lose the personal touch and that it retains a way to monitor citizen satisfaction – based on the speed of response and the completeness of the resolution.

As soon as any case is marked as closed by the VoiceSage CRM system, an SMS or email is automatically sent out, prompting customers to complete a short follow-up survey about their experience. This feedback is vital in maintaining

and improving great levels of service. For example, it is used to drive positive changes to Council processes and services, ensuring too that these are communicated back to residents so they can see the impact of their feedback.

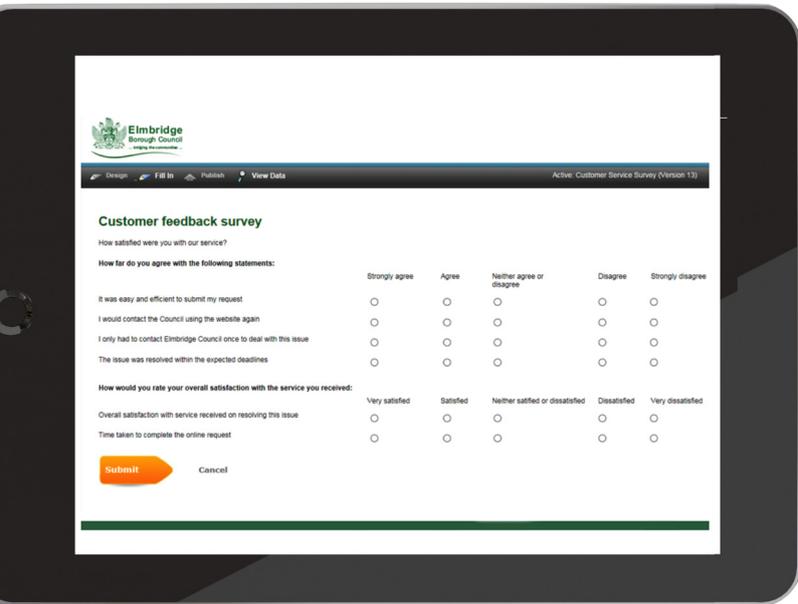
Team leaders scrutinise citizen feedback, to identify any possible skills gaps in the contact team, so that these can be addressed with appropriate call coaching or training, boosting citizens' experience in the future.

Elmbridge
Borough Council
Customer
Experience
Journey



Achieving 'brilliance'

Elmbridge is now extending its VoiceSage functionality to offer customers the ability to transfer customers with low scoring surveys directly to a supervisor, so that the issue can be discussed and resolved. Doing this is found to significantly reduce the number of poor experiences that are escalated to complaints.



Online Customer feedback survey

The VoiceSage service can also match low scores with individual customer details within the CRM system, allowing Elmbridge to quickly identify negative feedback trends and take proactive steps to rectify the situation.

The Council’s head of IT, Mark Lumley, believes this is a major step forward in Elmbridge’s broader and highly innovative ‘Brilliant Customer Service Every Time’ (BCSET) programme - the result of close co-operation between the customer services and ICT teams.

“We may have had some of this information before, as part of resident surveys and other engagements in the past, but we’ve never really had it as a central, defined element of every phone call with a member of the public,” he explains.

Use of techniques such as instant polling and building a database of customer satisfaction is all part the wider customer service programme.

“We are using a range of techniques to deliver our ‘Brilliant’ programme,” Dawn adds. “These include identifying and celebrating best practice, benchmarking and so on. While we look to technology to achieve that, it’s our people who know their service area best.”

From contact to service

The ‘Brilliant’ initiative is being driven right from the top of the organisation and the Corporate Management Board is clear about the aim, which is to move away from the notion of contact towards true service - by ensuring efficient processes and bringing the Council’s internal systems together in a joined-up way.

Again, customer metrics from the VoiceSage surveys are proving an invaluable tool here. “Everything now is being based on the customer experience surveys,” says Crewe. “As head of customer service, I firmly believe this is the way we should be reporting, so it’s great that we have turned things around culturally - making our focus all about a positive customer experience.”

Although it’s early days for the ambitious customer service programme, the initial signs are very positive: the improvements so far have attracted enthusiastic comments from residents and a growing number of reassuringly high satisfaction rankings.

“The literal comments in addition to the scores received have been hugely positive,” Dawn says. There are a lot of remarks along the lines of ‘This is really brilliant value for money’, which is fantastic and shows we’re definitely on the right track. We’ve been fortunate that none of the processes we are working on are broken, which means we can focus on the customer experience and trying to make things even better. And that will continue to be our goal for the foreseeable future.”