

GOVERNMENT

Citizen Interaction and Case Management:
Improving Government Operations and the Delivery
of Citizen and Business Services with CRM Solutions

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Introduction

Most government organizations face two competing pressures: They need to deliver high-quality services to citizens and businesses, and at the same time, improve efficiencies and reduce costs. This white paper discusses how government organizations are increasingly turning to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions to successfully meet and reconcile these challenges.

In recent years, the private sector has revolutionized the meaning of customer service. For example, retail and banking customers can access customer support services when and how they choose, through a range of channels that include access to online information, around-the-clock contact centers, fully transactional Web sites, and interactive Web chat sessions. Customers now expect companies to know who they are when they call and to respond to inquiries quickly, track orders precisely, and resolve complaints efficiently. These high standards of customer service in the private sector have in turn raised the expectations of citizens, businesses, and contractors when they deal with government organizations. Citizens and businesses now expect more seamless, personalized, and convenient self-service options for interacting with government organizations, across multiple channels, regardless of time and location.

To address these expectations, government organizations are adopting a citizen-centric approach for service delivery, inquiry management, and other business practices. They are redesigning their internal business processes to focus on the needs of their citizens, businesses, and other service users. This citizen-centric approach requires centralized access to detailed information about citizens and services, and many government organizations are using CRM solutions to deliver these capabilities. Equipped with integrated portals and contact centers, employees can quickly locate and share information, which lets them build and sustain citizen relationships with the same tools private sector organizations use to manage their customer relationships. Managers and front-line workers can resolve inquiries, learn from feedback, and fix the root causes that create service problems.

Just buying CRM software does not deliver a citizen-centric approach, but it provides the foundation for citizen-centric ways of working. This paper focuses on the ways government organizations—from national ministries and agencies, to local, municipal, city, and regional governments—can use CRM solutions to support the modernization and integration of public services.

CRM solutions help government organizations transition from a service-centric to a citizen-centric approach by:

- Providing rapid and seamless access to the organization's knowledge base to rapidly resolve citizen requests
- Simplifying processes and improving efficiency
- Connecting services within the organization
- Linking to partner organizations
- Integrating with service systems and back-office functions

Specifically, CRM solutions can support two interrelated functions for government organizations:

- **Citizen Interaction Management:** The ability to organize and manage a wide variety of citizen and business contacts, inquiries, and requests
- **Case Management:** The ability to track, manage, and resolve applications, inquiries, and internal tasks

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Citizen Interaction Management

CRM solutions enable staff to manage front-office contact with citizens more efficiently and effectively. This aspect of CRM is often referred to as citizen interaction management or contact management. Many government organizations introduce a CRM solution as a means of handling and logging information inquiries, usually in conjunction with an **information call center** for handling telephone inquiries, or a **contact center** that can handle e-mail, hard-copy applications, faxes, and interactive Web communications. Typically, call and contact centers handle inquiries from citizens who are applying for services, responding to correspondence, or requesting further information. These basic inquiries cover the same topics on a daily basis, taking up valuable time that technical staff could devote to more complex issues. By setting up a call or contact center to handle these inquiries, government organizations can provide better service at lower cost and free technical staff to concentrate on more strategic activities.

CRM solutions also provide tools for recording and responding to citizen inquiries. A robust CRM solution provides access to the organization's knowledge base, allowing call or contact center staff to quickly answer inquiries such as "what time," "how," "where," and "why." The system also records detailed information so that the next time the citizen contacts the organization, the agent can refer back to the original inquiry and explain the actions that have been taken and the progress made. Contact details need only be collected once, reducing staff workload and ensuring citizens don't need to repeat information.

When citizens apply for services, call or contact center staff can complete electronic forms that significantly reduce paper trails for processing applications. Equally important, staff can realize major efficiency gains by using electronic forms that automatically fill in information already recorded in the CRM system.

CRM solutions also can connect services for citizens and businesses in ways that make sense to them. Centralized contact information gives organizations a comprehensive view of the mixture of services that citizens or businesses can receive. For example, a senior citizen who wants to find out about housing benefits might also be interested in hearing about other benefits available to seniors. A new business registering as a restaurant will need to learn about local by-laws, food inspection processes, and refuse collection arrangements.

Easy access to centralized service and contact details also means that specific groups of service users or geographic areas can be quickly notified about a relevant problem, such as a risk of flooding, a change in refuse collection schedules, or road closures.

Effective citizen interaction management forms only part of an integrated CRM platform. The real power and efficiency gains come when the front office is connected with service information and back-office functions. Without this integration, organizations merely provide a faster way to manage inquiries and apologize for delays.

Case Management

Too often, contact centers equate quality of service with how quickly staff responds to an inquiry. Case management shifts the emphasis to how efficiently their problem or request is resolved. Most citizens value rapid resolution more than “a friendly manner” or the ability to provide additional relevant information, although these elements are both key factors in delivering quality service. Equipped with the right tools, experienced and well-trained staff can handle and resolve inquiries more efficiently. A well-designed CRM solution connects customer inquiries with back-office systems, enabling effective case management.

Traditionally, case management has been handled manually. For example, a paper-based application for a building permit or planning permission would become part of a hard-copy file containing all correspondence and activity details. When case management is supported by a CRM solution, authorized personnel gain instant online access to centralized, real-time information, freeing managers and case workers from dealing with large amounts of paper. They can work with consistent, standardized processes from initiation through resolution and create alerts for action or escalation. Error rates are radically reduced by eliminating manual records, duplicate data input, and multiple handoffs. Equally important, CRM solutions deliver consolidated views of all cases, comparative data on performance, and search capabilities that support management information requirements.

In addition to helping government organizations efficiently manage individual cases and workload, CRM solutions provide managers with information that helps them understand case lifecycles, how best to route cases to achieve rapid resolution, and where problems occur.

Using CRM to Support Specialist Units and Functions

CRM solutions provide powerful tools that support discrete services and specialized processes across the entire organization, including:

Complaint handling and management: Complaint handling is a critical but time-consuming, often costly task for all government organizations. Direct and indirect costs can strain budgets. Mismanaging or failing to resolve complaints reflects poorly on organizational processes and creates ongoing friction with citizens. Using a CRM solution, staff can accurately and rapidly capture and classify complaints. Complaint cases are routed automatically to appropriate staff, who can then easily track progress through to resolution. In addition, data collected about complaints provides a powerful information source for evaluating staff and business unit performance, weak processes, and areas where proactive action can eliminate complaints.

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A CRM solution can enable recruitment units to track applications, contacts, and progress—regardless of the channel used—from initial contact through hiring or rejection.

Recruitment: Specialist recruitment units often support large departments or multiple departments in government organizations. In many cases, these units deal with the same individuals through multiple communication channels. Recruitment advertisements typically direct potential applicants to Web sites for information, application forms, and terms of employment, but recruitment staff will still take telephone calls and send out hard copy documents. A CRM solution can enable recruitment units to track applications, contacts, and progress—regardless of the channel used—from initial contact through hiring or rejection. Staff can easily be assigned or re-assigned to specific recruitments, tasks, or interviews. They can schedule follow-up appointments efficiently, and set up automatic alerts to ensure candidates receive the documentation they need and a superior recruitment experience.

Economic development or inward investment units: Attracting new businesses and employment opportunities is vital to almost every community. A CRM solution helps economic development staff effectively manage outreach and marketing campaigns and monitor a pipeline of new or expanding businesses. It also enables them to advise potential new businesses on key topics such as the availability of suitable land and buildings, planned public investment in new roads and infrastructure, incentives to relocate, and the availability of suitably skilled employees. Staff and managers also can use centralized economic development dashboards to view progress and identify follow-up actions.

Grant management: Grants often involve time-consuming and expensive administrative processes that demand precise management and standardized, transparent processes. Traditionally, grants have been managed by small units using a combination of spreadsheets, calendars, word processing, and ad hoc databases. Increasingly, government bodies are consolidating these units and processes for issuing and managing grants. Using CRM technology, grant applications can be received online. Key functions such as allocations, monitoring, and inquiries can be managed electronically. Automated processes allow applicants to track the progress of requests and allocations, as well as facilitate compliance with accountability, audit, and legislative requirements.

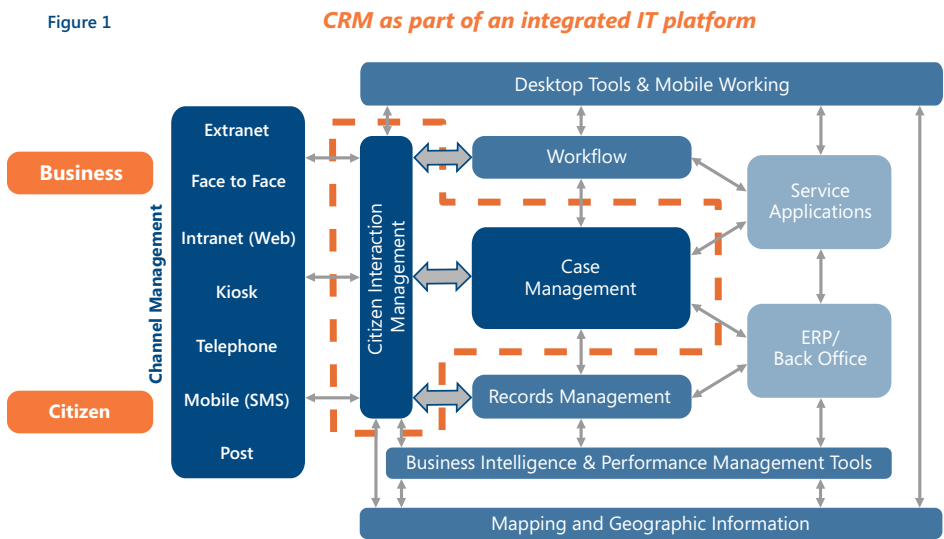
Field service management: The work patterns of field services staff are changing dramatically. In the past, an environmental health inspector or building control officer visited their office every day to collect relevant files and write reports. If they needed additional information, they would have to research it in the office and then schedule another visit or follow-up action. Today, inspectors can leave home with a handheld device that contains the schedule of visits and all relevant documentation. During their visit, they can use the device to complete an electronic form that records all relevant details and reference information, as well as review outstanding issues or requests. They no longer need to visit their offices as frequently and can instead focus their efforts on serving customers, because all the information they need is updated in real time. As priorities shift, managers can make scheduling changes remotely.

Citizen segmentation: Private sector companies use customer segmentation to tailor services to specific customer needs. In turn, government organizations are adopting the technique to improve levels of citizen satisfaction. Information from the CRM system can be combined with socio-economic data to divide citizens into customer groups, based on identifiers such as age, housing type, and socio-economic status. Coupled with location data, the main services used, and channel preference (telephone, e-mail, Web sites, and face-to-face), segmentation helps facilitate informed decisions about targeting and promoting services. This allows government to provide personalized, cost-effective service for all citizens.

CRM as Part of an Integrated IT Platform

CRM effectiveness dramatically increases when solutions are linked with **workflow** and **electronic records management** systems. Workflow enables organizations to monitor tasks and the movement of documents from the start of a business process through completion. Electronic records management systems provide powerful tools for managing, searching, retrieving, and controlling access to electronic documents. Integration between CRM solutions and workflow systems ensures that the right information is available at the right time and in an appropriate format. Electronic records management systems also support important functions such as statutory information inquiries, integration of e-mail records, and version tracking for documents.

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Business Intelligence tools transform the data captured through CRM solutions into powerful information used for planning, decision making, performance management, and resource allocation. CRM systems provide government organizations with deep visibility into citizen interactions, including the services they use, their levels of satisfaction, and the problems that they experience. Analytical tools equip organizations to adapt to changing circumstances, improve satisfaction levels, and make informed trade-off decisions about costs and levels of service. Because location is often key to effective service delivery, particularly for local and regional governments, CRM-based analysis becomes even more powerful when linked with **mapping** or **geographic information systems**. Business intelligence tools also enable organizations to use cluster analysis that helps them link cause and effect for service issues.

CRM systems can also support **mobility and flexibility** as more employees work from multiple offices or their homes, or work on the road with wireless-enabled laptops, tablet PCs, and personal digital assistants. Increasingly, the boundaries of CRM solutions are blurring as they form part of an integrated IT platform (See Figure 1).

Key Benefits and Real-World Examples

CRM practices and solutions enable government organizations to implement and support the delivery of modern public services. Key benefits include:

- **Improved access** to services by citizens as they find it easier to obtain information on how and where to access services
- **Higher levels of satisfaction** as citizens find it easier to obtain information and quicker to resolve inquiries
- **Better support for citizens** through improved tracking and follow-up for inquiries and cases
- **Improved efficiency and savings** through better planning and resource allocation. CRM solutions can highlight peaks and troughs of activity, as well as help managers spot emerging trends and deal proactively with common problems
- **The ability to integrate** front-office inquiries with back-office delivery systems
- **Improved use of resources** through reducing administrative costs and moving more staff to front-line delivery of services
- **Significant reductions in redundant contacts**, including progress-chasing by citizens across multiple departments and repeat inquiries

Improve Responsiveness

United States: California Department of Corporations—The Department of Corporations is the investment and financing authority in the State of California. It licenses and regulates financial services and securities-related businesses that operate in the state. As part of a state initiative to use information technology to make state offices more responsive to the public, the Department implemented a CRM solution. The Department can now efficiently receive and track public concerns and provide departmental responses. The public has responded positively to the Department's initiative, and the call center has increased its call handling capability by 50 percent.

Integrate Service Delivery

United Kingdom: States of Jersey—The States of Jersey is an island country of 88,000 citizens located about 100 miles south of mainland Britain and 14 miles from the coast of France. It implemented a CRM solution, including a one-stop shop environment and a single transactional Web site, as part of its plans to improve delivery of public services to citizens and save £20 million (\$40 million USD) by 2009.



“We’re now able to serve our citizens based on their personal specific needs and give them much more specialized attention.”

Abrantes City Council

Automate Manual Processes

Portugal: Câmara Municipal de Abrantes—Most of Portugal’s 300 city halls still deal with citizen requests manually. Abrantes is an exception, and it has a vision of creating greater community cohesion that offers each citizen online access to relevant information about education and health, as well as local government services. The goal is to improve the quality of life for citizens and make Abrantes more competitive at the national and regional levels through the innovative use of technology. Since 2004, the city council has been investing in new Web-based solutions to deliver integrated, high-quality, and cost-effective services to its citizens, online and through its customer contact center.

Abrantes has now cut in half the average time it takes to process a citizen transaction. Council employees are working more productively with a single information system that integrates citizen information from all its line-of-business applications. This solution is also now being extended to nine other neighboring districts, as Abrantes consolidates its role as a services hub for other councils. Abrantes City Council says: “We’re now able to serve our citizens based on their personal specific needs and give them much more specialized attention.”

Assessing CRM Readiness

Assessing when a government organization should implement CRM practices and solutions tends to be influenced by their progress in implementing e-government. In its simplest form, e-government is about using technology to enhance access to and delivery of government services for the benefit of citizens, businesses, and employees. In general, the implementation of e-government includes the following phases:

- **A basic Web site** or sites offer one-way communication of information such as regulations, key dates, and bidding processes for government contracts. In most cases, government organizations have little recognition of the need for and benefits of CRM during this phase, but it is important that they begin to understand the benefits of a citizen-centric approach and how CRM solutions can support their plans for moving to subsequent phases.
- **Online government services** allow citizens to request and receive information through electronic forms, document downloads, and e-mail. Government organizations begin to think in terms of citizen needs and to collect “customer” information. Initially, each business unit tends to want their own one-stop-shop, contact or call center, Web site, and CRM solution. This can lead some units to think that just buying the software will deliver citizen-centric services. Instead, they need to recognize that a citizen-centric approach requires new ways of doing business that CRM solutions can facilitate. At this point, a CRM solution can be introduced to handle specific services and functions, with the expectation that it will evolve into an organization-wide system. Organizations may also begin to link the CRM solution with existing desktop tools, financial processes, and electronic forms.
- **Integrated government services** enable citizens to work with online self-service applications and financial transactions such as electronic payments, renewal of licenses, and tax returns. At this stage, governments recognize the need for a one-stop-shop approach and a single transactional Web site environment that supports the entire organization. Officials begin to see the potential for the smarter use of corporate data, citizen segmentation, and the potential for business intelligence tools. These organizations devote considerable effort to linking front- and back-office functions to deliver Web-based access to transactional information, integrate branch- or division-level office systems with headquarters, and provide personalized services to citizens 24 hours per day.
- **e-Government programs create a single point of contact for all inquiries** through a citizen-centric front office, with standardized business processes that connect with the organization’s back-office system. New ways of working take full advantage of technology to provide effective and responsive services. Equipped with an integrated CRM platform, organizations gain powerful relationship and case management capabilities that integrate with workflow, document management, and mapping systems. People also can access information and tools remotely through a wide range of mobile devices.

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Moving Forward

Whatever CRM solution you choose, the important point is to recognize that CRM is much more than a system for recording customer contacts. It is an integral part of developing a citizen-centric organization. For government organizations, an effective CRM solution needs to support rapid and friendly response to inquiries, along with the case management functions needed to achieve resolution. Just as important, the solution should integrate fully with back-office and desktop systems and connect smoothly with business intelligence tools, workflow, mapping, and mobile devices. In short, a CRM solution needs to be part of an integrated technology platform and not a one-off, isolated purchase.

This paper has been developed for Microsoft Dynamics™ as part of its wider program of working with and supporting government organizations. To date, Microsoft has helped a wide range of government organizations create reliable, secure, and integrated CRM solutions that build on existing IT system infrastructures and that can adapt to changing needs. Transformational change requires careful planning and collaboration among stakeholders and across government organizations. Together with its partners, Microsoft can help government organizations evaluate their operational needs and successfully implement reliable, integrated, citizen-centric solutions. To learn more about how Microsoft Dynamics CRM can help your organization operate more efficiently and provide better service to citizens, visit www.microsoft.com/crm.

About the Author

John Thornton has over 25 years experience working with and for government organizations. Between 2001 and 2005, John served as the local government e-envoy for the United Kingdom. Working with local and central government, John helped ensure that all local authorities achieved the Prime Minister's target of having all local services online by 2005. He is an independent adviser, writer and broadcaster on business transformation, e-government, and innovation. John is a director of e-ssential Resources, which provides advice, consulting, and support to public sector bodies, and he serves also as a director of the SMART Governance Network.

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