

### New Plymouth's commitment to customer service



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New Plymouth District Council (NPDC), situated in the north island of New Zealand, is committed as part of its charter to providing no less than 'sensational' customer service to its 70,000 constituents.

The council handles approximately 600 calls from the public each day. These include private property and ratepayer enquiries, as well as requests for service for the district's facilities, such as parks, roads, waterways and community centres.

On a practical level, the council's service guarantee means that 80% of calls it receives must be resolved at first point of contact. The remaining 20% must be efficiently forwarded to, and followed up with either another department within the council - located over 12 sites around the district - or one of the council's private contractors.

To assist them in achieving this goal, New Plymouth's customer service staff require a variety of information immediately on hand - ratepayer details and property maps, histories of previous calls, status of work in progress. This information is stored across various systems and databases, but what the council really needed was a way of pulling all the information together and making it available to the front line staff dealing with the public.

In looking for an effective way to integrate its systems and improve the council's service, Guy Bodger, Manager Customer First, says "We wanted to do more than simply log calls as they came in. We knew we wanted a system to actively manage and improve our service. It was very important to us in terms of achieving our customer service standards, improving customer satisfaction, and being able to provide feedback."

#### Implementing Infra

The NPDC, in partnership with Delta Software (the New Zealand distributor for Infra Corporation) subsequently implemented the infraEnterprise web-based system to record all calls and service requests coming in from the public through the call centre.

As calls come in, problem types built in to the system, and associated with different council groups, automatically route calls to the right department.

The council was previously using a client-server based product, but found it was too slow across the WAN. The move to a web-based architecture fitted the council's strategy to centralize IT services, as well as being faster.

"Infra is quicker and easier to use than our old system," says Bodger. "We've found it has been very easy for people to get used to." The council has implemented Infra's Mail Message Access functionality, which provides access to system calls for non-frontline staff, via email. "People who don't need to have a hands-on use of the system find it easy to respond to an email," says Bodger.

Delta Software was involved from the beginning of the project and has been instrumental in a successful implementation.



## Integrating Infra with the council's systems

Integration of the Infra application with the council's mapping, ratepayer and contractor systems was an integral part of the implementation project, for its ability to provide a single view of all information that might be related to a customer's call.

Says Bodger, "One of our problems has always been that contractors are looking at one system, and call centre staff are looking at another. Now we have a commonality because jobs in both systems are integrated and visible to everyone."

Now when a call is logged into Infra, it is passed electronically into the Hansen asset management system used by contractors. Contractors schedule the job in their own system, and as soon as it is closed or updated, the details are notified straight back to Infra.

"Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with our customers, and between ourselves and our contractors, are much more effectively monitored and managed now.

"Our customer service staff are able to see that, for instance, two days ago a contractor went out to inspect a job but hasn't yet done any work," says Bodger. "At the same time that we are tracking the work performed by contractors, we can provide up to date information to customers."

Infra has additionally been integrated with the council's Geographic Information System (GIS) map-TV provided by Spatial Media in Auckland, and Local Government Administration system Corporate Vision, containing details of ratepayers and properties plus maps of the district. When a customer calls, a map is displayed on the same screen as Infra, showing flags of calls that are already open in the area, such as repairs, services or calls relating to parks and open spaces.

"This means that if a call has already been logged for a particular problem, we don't have to duplicate it," says Bodger. "It also assists us in assigning resources to calls, because we can schedule a contractor to attend a number of jobs in an area at once, instead of making separate visits. We can also avoid sending out resources to the same call twice.

"We're now able to combine our views of the customer and property details - Infra has delivered that for us."

Integration with the Local Government Administration system additionally assists in maintaining the integrity of customer data. With the council's previous service desk system, a single customer's name could be entered with a different spelling each time they called. Now, if a name is entered incorrectly, the service officer will be notified because it will fail to create a match against the existing ratepayer data.

## Visibility through Reporting

"The reporting in Infra is very effective for providing service performance visibility to the organisation," says Bodger. "We've got some good reports out of Infra that come standard with the system and we've also developed some of our own. We are required to do bi-weekly reporting of service performance to council management, and Infra has been very effective in helping us to do that."

## Empowering customers with online call logging

New Plymouth will additionally implement the Infra Customer Portal, enabling customers to log calls online. "Being able to deliver our service online is very important to us," says Bodger. "We want our customers to be able to log a request online, get an immediate automatic response and be able to independently follow up on the status of the request."

## Success leads to an expanded role in IS

Having initially implemented Infra to manage the council's business from a customer

service perspective, the system has subsequently been moved into IS to manage internal IT incidents and problems. In its IS role, Infra acts as the core tool for managing service levels, incorporating Service Level Agreements for each of the various groups in the organisation.

The council is also keen to further extend the use of Infra to manage business process workflows across the council, using the application's Change Management functionality.

## Boosting service and staff morale

"Since the Infra system has been installed," says Bodger, "we've had instances where customers have sent our call centre people bouquets of flowers. That is a reflection on our ability to deliver a high overall level of service, and it's happening because of how well informed our staff are and how much more effective we are at managing service now. Infra has made a significant difference in providing that information.

"When staff feel they can answer customer questions and have up to date information at their fingertips, they feel very much better about the job they're doing. They don't have to say, 'I'll ring the contractor and see what's going on'. The information is right in front of them.

"We're now much more effective on the telephone - we're able to provide details back to our callers, let them know if someone is already on the job and when we've closed the call. The system is proving to be really powerful for us in that way.

"We've improved our late service request performance three-fold since managing service requests in infraEnterprise."

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