

NZLG Magazine article

Subject: Contact Centres- meeting council's customers

About Hindin Communications

Hindin Communications have provided information systems and expert consultancy in the Contact and Service Centre space for over 8 years. Their clients range from the Work and Income multi-centre/virtual floor contact centre, through the District Council level to the award winning Manawatu After Hours Shared Service in collaboration with Horizons Regional Council and Palmerston North City Council. Hindin's winning approach – look at the people involved, how your staff need to work and how your customers want to interact with your organisation.

Meet the People

Depending on the size of your organisation your 'Contact Centre' may range in size from someone staffing the front desk with a phone to a room of Customer Support Representatives (CSRs) with supporting information systems. No matter the size of organisation the outcome is similar – rapid supply of the information requested (such as progress on a LIM request, or 'What are the council doing down my road with that digger?'), and the recording of a request for service.

The Contact Centre implements the customer facing part of your Customer Service Strategy for your organisation. The Contact Centre must be viewed as a vital and valid step in facilitating council business. You can have the technology, but it is your staff that will action the requests for service, and that will load correct information into the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) database. Without a Whole-of-Council approach to Customer Service you will struggle to implement an effective Contact Centre. ***Customer Service is not a single function in an organisation – it is an attitude.***

An effective Contact Centre is one that facilitates high levels of customer satisfaction ('I got the information on that park really quickly', 'The council knew exactly what step my LIM was at'), reduces the cost to serve the customers and effectively reduces corporate risk through effective and accurate communication.

The Contact Centre as part of the Council business leads to reduced long term costs to serve. Rather than get your Planning Engineer to answer the same question repeatedly, involve them in supplying that knowledge to the Contact Centre – the engineer can then do their job.

Reducing Cost to Serve (CTS) should not reduce access to council. The channels for access to council include Email, Letter, Fax, Chat, TXT, Web, Phone, walk-in. As the new communication savvy generation become customers of council you will see a rise in demand for TXT, Chat and Web-self service based technologies – even over email (which is currently rising). These new technologies have been shown in the U.S. to be

effective in reducing CTS. *Look to the future technology trends without losing sight of the people involved and the supporting processes.*

The second benefit highlighted earlier is risk reduction; *A consolidated approach to communication and collaboration through a Contact Centre leads to a repeated and consistent message being supplied every time.* If the only information being supplied comes from one accurate source then the risk of misinformation leading to litigation is reduced.

If you are implementing a Contact Centre, or have one in operation you need to look to those key points to ensure success:

- Whole-of-Council Approach
- Customer Service as an attitude
- Look at technology, but ensure customer engagement

You can then achieve:

- Reduction in cost to serve
- Management of corporate risk
- More effective use of skilled resources

The Contact Centre in local government is there when you open the doors in the morning and there when the offices are shut, it is the voice and face of your council – what can you do to help them better represent you?