CITY OF GUELPH OPENS NEW CITY HALL WITH **CENTRALIZED PAYMENTS AND SERVICES**

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BACKGROUND

The City of Guelph is a vibrant community of over 100,000 people situated in the heart of southern Ontario, just west of Toronto. With one of the premier research universities, and a variety of manufacturing, service, and high technology enterprises, it's also one of the fastest growing economic regions in Canada.

CHALLENGE

Prior to the opening of a new City Hall, the City was on a search for a centralized payment and cashiering system with the flexibility to process a wide variety of customer transactions at a single service window. The vision for the new state-of-the-art City Hall was to provide more convenience to residents, improve customer service capabilities, and centralize services and payments for transactions requiring five minutes or less to complete, such as making property tax and parking ticket payments, purchasing dog licenses and signing up for recreational programs.

SOLUTION

With ACTIVE Network, Government's recreation management software already implemented in a number of city locations, the City of Guelph invited an ACTIVE Network team member to demonstrate its payment and cashiering software solution.

Kelley McAlpine, Supervisor of Facility Booking and Program Registration and the Project Manager for the payment management implementation, notes, "We liked the demonstration and capabilities of ACTIVE's payment management solution. It addressed our exact needs and the company had tremendous experience implementing exactly what we wanted to do."

With the decision made to implement the solution, the City created a Central Service Committee to take inventory of all services and determine which ones could be handled in less than five minutes at a central service counter. All other services and transactions that required more than five minutes to complete would be redirected to the appropriate city department. McAlpine notes, "ACTIVE guided us quite a bit and helped us determine our procedures." The Central Service Committee then created FAQs and How-To guides for staff at the new "ServiceGuelph" counter.

WHAT'S YOUR ACTIVE?

IMPLEMENTATION

The City launched its pilot test almost a year prior to the City Hall opening. The City selected staff and supervisors from each department to participate in the training with ACTIVE and serve as department resources for the ServiceGuelph team. The City also began integrating the payment management software with several of its back-end systems, including permits, taxes, accounts receivable and parking. "We had to work with some of the other vendors as well on the integration piece, but ACTIVE was very helpful and responsive throughout this process."

RESULTS

In April 2009, the new City Hall opened with its ServiceGuelph team equipped to process over 50 different types of transactions from one location. "The software has done exactly what we were hoping it would. It streamlined our financial processes and made individual cashiers more accountable. The software implementation also provided us with an opportunity to really look at our business processes, which was a very helpful step."

Markham Wismer, ServiceGuelph Supervisor, adds, "The first few days of using APM in 'live' mode were quite smooth. Our ServiceGuelph team is able to process different types of transactions from one screen. People can purchase transit passes, sign up for recreation programs, buy dog licenses, pay parking tickets and property taxes, and more. From our standpoint, the payment management software is easy to teach to customer service agents and provides a good way of delivering services for both staff and customers. It has definitely been a step in the right direction in terms of providing better customer service. We now have a one-stop-shop to accept a wide variety of payments from customers."

Next for the City of Guelph is a big open house for City Hall, followed by the possible implementation of a Citizen Request Management or 311 solution.

THE CITY OF GUELPH'S ADVICE FOR OTHER MUNICIPALITIES IMPLEMENTING A PAYMENT SOLUTION

+ Get buy-in from key departments at the very beginning. "When a customer service agent is empowered to deliver a department's services, there is an inherent change to the corporate culture and one that has to be well-managed," notes McAlpine.

+ If you are centralizing services, train on business processes separate from the software itself.

+ Create FAQs and How-To's for your customer service agents.

+ Delegate a representative from each department to be the go-to source for customer service agents to call with department specific questions.

+ Hold monthly meetings to discuss new initiatives and programs as a collective team.

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