



CASE STUDY

SMS Server / SMS Online

PROFILE



Industry
Local Government

Founded
1974

Website
www.adur-worthing.gov.uk

Category
B2C

Customer Since
2006

PROJECT

Objective
New initiative to encourage local councils to implement technological ways for consulting constituents and to encourage young people in the community to get involved.

Solution
Using SMS Online to handle SMS to email and inbound text messages with key word filtering. Also installed SMS Server to send SMS messages via MS Outlook.



Business Impact
Enhanced public relations, improved communication and efficiency, reduced admin costs, and also successfully engaged young people in the Borough.

Efficiency and public relations improve for Worthing Borough Council due to SMS

The Borough of Worthing is located in West Sussex and is divided into thirteen wards which are represented by thirty-seven councillors. The Cabinet and Council hold formal meetings approximately every eight weeks, to which public attendance is encouraged. The active involvement of the public ensures that Worthing Borough Council is provided with adequate information to establish the most effective methods of addressing the Borough's affairs.

The Challenge

Due to factors beyond the Council's control, some dialogue with the public had not been received. The E-Business Officer at Worthing Borough Council, explained: "Sometimes a member of the public will spot an issue, to which they believe the Council needs alerting. In the cases where they do contact us, there can sometimes be additional barriers to communication, such as busy phone lines, and they do not bother to call back."

Another area that councillors wanted to explore was the Council's involvement of young people within the community. However, traditional methods used to target young people had been relatively unsuccessful in terms of ensuring the message was effectively delivered and, once received, was retained. The Council was also interested in the potential of distributing alerts to the public. This was intended to increase public awareness regarding campaigns and opportunities offered by the Council, such as subscriptions to job vacancy notifications.

Following an E-Gov initiative designed to encourage local councils to implement new technological ways for consulting constituents, Worthing Borough Council contacted M:Science to discuss the use of adding text messaging as an additional communication channel to its portfolio.

"After considering various SMS solutions, we chose M:Science based on the product functionality, price and customer service received during the initial consultation."

The Solution

Worthing Borough Council is using SMS Online to handle inbound text messages, with which key word filtering and SMS to email functionality is also used. For outbound text messages, Worthing Borough Council is using SMS Server from which the Council will send SMS messages through Microsoft Outlook.

"After considering various text messaging solutions, we chose M:Science based on the product functionality, price and customer service received during the initial consultation period."

SMS Online is a web based interface that allows the user to send SMS Messages to individuals or pre-defined recipient groups through any web browser, anywhere in the world. It is as easy to use and as versatile as any popular online email service, such as MSN Hotmail.

SMS Server allows for two-way SMS messaging using an organisation's existing messaging infrastructure. The Microsoft Outlook plug-in means that SMS Server boasts out of the box integration. Additionally, enterprise integration is provided through an SMTP Gateway component, meaning users can enjoy SMS functionality without client implementation. The Server Manager can be run from any Microsoft Windows 32-bit operating system and provides the management interface for administration of message queues, users and sessions.



"One of the largest benefits of using M:Science has been the after sales support we receive, which has been very important to the Council when getting acquainted with using the new text messaging concept."

The Results

Since implementing an SMS solution from M:Science, the Council has encountered numerous benefits. Firstly, the public can now enquire and feedback to the Council regarding a variety of issues. Concerns over refuse collection and council tax bills can be texted in and, using the keyword routing function, assigned to the relevant department. Being able to easily report anti-social behaviour, such as dog fouling and vehicle abandonment, immediately after it is spotted, has led to an increase in the public alerting the Council to problems.

"Text messaging by nature is a highly effective mode of two-way communication. With SMS Server, we are able to send an automated response to acknowledge the receipt of the message. It's really convenient for us as some requests may be more urgent than others and need to be prioritised. By sending out the acknowledgement, the council staff can act upon the information they believe to be the most pressing, without the public feeling as though their message is being ignored, greatly enhancing our public relations. Text messaging also allows for anonymity, which may make some people feel more comfortable about reporting things in their community."

This increased public input has meant that the council can now deal with any issues and is constantly gaining a greater understanding of how the constituents feel regarding the decisions made about the Borough, rather than only receiving feedback from a minority attending the few meetings held. With regards to sending out alerts to the public, text messaging is an ideal tool. With SMS, the council can compose a message, select a pre-defined group and only have to press send once to dispatch the message to all the contacts within that group. This improves efficiency and minimises administration costs associated with other modes of communication. Text messages are received instantly, so the information is always time relevant.

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Additionally, the use of SMS reduces the problems associated with navigating call menus, busy telephone lines and the caller selecting the wrong department. This eliminates caller frustration, and leads to a higher turnover of enquiries being processed at a low cost, without putting additional strain on staff.

SMS has now been used to successfully engage young people, as SMS is a format with which they are highly familiar and find enjoyable to use. It has proved more effective than other communication methods such as flyers and emails, as once the message is received it is stored on the young person's phone.

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"We are investigating use of SMS text messaging for other service areas including Emergency Planning and Election Services."

Future plans

As SMS is highly versatile and has a virtually unlimited number of potential uses, there is plenty of scope and thought to roll out text messaging communications throughout other departments within the council.

"We plan to integrate our M:Science solution with existing applications used in other popular areas within the council, such as promoting upcoming leisure events with the community. We are also investigating use of SMS text messaging for other service areas including Emergency Planning and Election Services."



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