Tennessee DHS speeds service delivery for citizens

3 days to stand up essential worker platform
33% of Virtual Agent traffic occurs outside business hours
50K applications processed since CSM go-live

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We can now provide our customers access, via self-service, to anything they may have previously needed to visit a local office to find out.

Pamela Fusting, Director of Operations, Customer Experience, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Getting services to those in need
The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) provides a wide range of social services to two million citizens across 95 different rural and urban counties. The department serves some of Tennessee’s most vulnerable citizens, as well as an array of small business organizations that support constituents.

Industry: Government
Location: Tennessee, USA
People: 4,000 employees
Products:
• Customer Service Management
Its mission is to help strengthen families by connecting Tennesseans to employment, education, and support services.

When a tornado hit Nashville in 2020, the department’s mission took on added urgency. Faced with major destruction across the Nashville area, the department needed an online resource to get vital support and services to those affected. Using ServiceNow, they had a portal up and running within a week, enabling affected citizens to quickly access services and benefits. When the COVID-19 pandemic followed soon after, the department once again needed to rapidly establish a way to serve customers. In just three days it was able to set up a second portal to help provide childcare benefits to essential workers.

“That was a big lightbulb moment for me,” says Richard Hawk, Senior Information Technology Manager at the Tennessee Department of Human Services. “The ability to create portals that would enable people to apply for benefits so quickly? That’s just unheard of, especially at the speed of government!”

In government, we’re often asked to do more with less, and with ServiceNow, we can - you get so much out of the platform in a short amount of time.

Richard Hawk, Senior Information Technology Manager, Tennessee Department of Human Services

Navigating extreme weather and global pandemics

However, this government department had been ambitious to undergo a journey of modernization for some time, extreme weather happenings and global pandemics aside – though both events could be seen to have accelerated the process. The department wanted to improve the digital experience of its citizens and local small businesses, providing self-service options to apply for benefits accessible through any device, at any time, and from any location. At the same time, it wanted to enhance the staff experience by automating workflows and harnessing data in line with its strategic priority to be a data-driven organization.

The department also wanted to improve its customer support model for Tennesseans. Previously, a wide range of services meant equally wide-ranging customer support structures were distinct and separated. As a result, data trails were often lost when transferring customers from one department to another.

“We really wanted a streamlined, omnichannel customer support landscape,” explains Pamela Fusting, Director of Operations, Customer Experience at TDHS.
Enhancing the citizen experience

By developing a customer portal with ServiceNow Customer Service Management (CSM), TDHS can now provide its citizens self-service access to information and application processes they would previously have needed to visit a local office or make a phone call for. A dashboard presents information related to their specific case – “It’s protected, it’s unique to the customer, and we have a single customer record around which all of the information is housed,” explains Richard.

When an application is submitted, citizens immediately get a status update within the portal confirming its receipt, and status updates thereafter as to its progress and conclusion – whether it’s been approved or denied. It’s another time-saving device that means customers needn’t make phone calls and send emails to pursue updates on their application status – and staff needn’t be waylaid by answering them; it’s all there at Tennesseans’ fingertips.

Further streamlining means that personal information submitted upon setting up an account and through questions answered to determine program eligibility is captured for future interaction, providing a 360-degree view of each case.

Crucially, for the government department and citizens, social service delivery has become a customer-centric process, as opposed to the impersonal program-centric one of the past.

Opening up access around the clock

Today, ServiceNow Customer Service Management provides a customer service portal for all Tennessee constituents. Virtual Agent has been instrumental in providing fast and efficient customer service through pre-programmed responses to frequently asked questions. Accessed via the department website, Facebook page, and Customer Portal—and integrated with the telephony platform—now around 380K chats are handled by Virtual Agent every year, the equivalent of approximately 22 call center agents.

“With ServiceNow, we’ve added a lot of automation that’s helping our staff triage and process applications in a faster and more efficient way than we’ve previously been able to do.”

Richard Hawk, Senior Information Technology Manager, Tennessee Department of Human Services

380K chats are handled by Virtual Agent annually
And 33% of this Virtual Agent traffic occurs outside of regular business hours – an advantage for customers who no longer need to restrict their inquiries to a ‘9-to-5’ window. Should customers need to be escalated to live support, the chatbot conversation that occurred up to that point is retained and transferred to the live agent, meaning fractured data trails and loss of data are a thing of the past. “The conversation can continue seamlessly for the customer; there’s no need for them to start over and repeat what was said in a previous conversation with the bot,” explains Richard.

**Positively impacting customers and employees**

The department is automating as much of the benefits application process as possible, including the stage that ensures an application has been completed fully and accurately – something that must happen before that application can even be considered. Previously, it took up to eight hours; now the task has been automated in ServiceNow so that if the application is incomplete, the system emails the customer to advise them it needs more work. If all is as it should be, the application is then assigned to a caseworker.

“With ServiceNow, we’ve added a lot of automation that’s helping our staff triage and process applications in a faster and more efficient way than we’ve previously been able to do,” says Richard. “Workers are now freed up to concentrate on applications and decide on cases.” As a result, workers are turning most decisions around in a couple of days or a maximum of two weeks. Prior to ServiceNow and the setting up of staff and customer portals, the department had accrued a backlog, which meant the interval between citizens applying for benefits and receiving a decision on that application could be months.

“Now, we leave the administration to the platform and spend more quality time helping customers in need, on a one-to-one basis,” says Richard. In the first year since the platform went live, more than 50,000 applications were processed.

For the department, equally important to providing services and improving access for customers is enabling those customers to give feedback through which it can gain actionable insights and continually improve what it does. As a result, it has seen a huge impact in terms of the real-time data that’s available which in turn is helping to inform decision-making and drive future improvements.

Tennessee Department of Human Services’ journey of modernization continues at pace, with learning and progress happening simultaneously. “And the great thing about that,” says Richard, “is we can change and implement more functionality on top of what we’ve already built – we don’t have to go back and start from scratch; we have a good foundation, and we’re excited about the future.”