

LIVEPERSON SUCCESS STORY

Government agency offers customers the option to hang up the phone and chat with customer service representatives instead – winning praise and gratitude for the convenience

About the City of Long Beach, California Utility Services

The Commercial Services Bureau provides a wide range of city services, utility bills, business licenses, parking citations, preferential parking permits, ambulance billing, garage sales, alarm permits, billing and collection services and marina slip recurring credit card program. The Bureau's primary mission is to provide customer friendly, convenient and easily accessible services to both Long Beach residents and businesses.

The Utility Services department within the Bureau is responsible for providing a wide range of vital services for Long Beach residents and businesses, including gas, water, sewer, and refuse services. Customer service representatives at the department answer questions regarding payment, billing history, service options, and recycling requirements. They also sign up customers for additional services, and set up appointments to have utilities turned on or off as required.

The Challenge

Customers calling into Utility Services customer service department often complained about waiting on hold. "Even if a customer had to wait just two minutes, he'd complain, sometimes quite bitterly," explains Derrien Cotton, Customer Service Representative for City of Long Beach Financial Management. "But I understand why. Many of our customers call from work, and they can't afford to wait on hold; they need to get back to their jobs. In those cases, frustration can set in pretty quickly."

Because customer-friendly and convenient service is a top priority to the Commercial Services Bureau, and because all residents and businesses within city limits require multiple utility services, the City decided to address the frustration felt by its customers. The City wanted a way to enable their customers to get customer service, schedule appointments, and ask billing questions easily and without delay.

The Solution

The Utility Services department implemented LivePerson Pro, LivePerson's award-winning live chat service, with the goal of deflecting incoming email and phone calls to the chat channel. To encourage live chat as the first mode of contact, the department placed a click-to-chat button on the top of their home page, ahead of their email and telephone numbers.

Five customer service reps were trained to use the software, and were up-to-speed in no time at all. The Canned Answers feature makes quick work of responding to routine questions such as providing the address to which to submit payment or explaining what baseline gas service means. Combined, the representatives handle some 200 chats per day.

"Many of the questions we get are quick, informational inquiries, things like 'Can I come in to pay by bill?' or 'Where can I get more recycling bins?' Those types of questions are perfect for chat because they don't take a lot of time for our customers to ask or for our reps to answer. The whole transaction takes just a few minutes. And our reps can easily handle multiple chats at the same time, which means customers spend very little time waiting for assistance," said Ms. Cotton.

Another advantage of live chat: customer privacy. Live chat enables customers to pose questions and schedule utility-related appointments discreetly while at the office. They simply type their requests in a chat window, rather than read sensitive information, such as their account numbers, out loud from their cubicles.

And live chat has even tamed the frustration of waiting on hold. "Customers who ask questions that require research don't mind waiting on hold because they're on their PC and can continue to do other things. LivePerson Pro sends automatic messages to the visitors, explaining that our representatives are still working on their questions. They can focus on other tasks in the meantime," explained Ms. Cotton.



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Tangible Results

Long Beach utility customers who've used live chat to receive customer service have nothing but praise for the option. Business customers in particular can "queue up" their requests; i.e., type in the date, time and address for appointments prior to the start of the chat. Presenting this information in written form to the customer service representative streamlines the transaction, and lets the customers return to their own jobs faster.

"Using LivePerson Pro has helped us achieve an important goal: making it as convenient as possible for our customers to do business with us," said Ms. Cotton.

About LivePerson

More than 7,000 small and midsize businesses, non-for-profit organizations and government agencies use LivePerson's award-winning live chat and contact center solutions to improve customer service, increase online sales, and manage interactions across all channels: chat, email, and self-service knowledgebase.

Contacts

LivePerson, Inc.
462 Seventh Avenue
3rd Floor
New York, NY 10018

T: 212.609.4200
F: 212.609.4201
info@liveperson.com
solutions.liveperson.com



To encourage the use of live chat, the City of Long Beach gives prominence to its click-to-chat button. Customers enjoy using chat, and have nothing but praise for the service, which lets them ask questions and schedule appointments quickly and conveniently.