

## Case Study #9 – CANBERRA CONNECT

### 1. Background

Canberra is the National Capital of Australia. It is located within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) which comprises 2400 square kilometres of land within the State of New South Wales and is governed by the ACT Government. Canberra is essentially a city state, with only minimal rural landholdings and population outside the actual city. Its total population is about 333,000.

Canberra Connect is an ISD initiative that began in early 2000 when the then Chief Minister of the ACT sought a “one stop” service delivery solution to three problems: the difficulty experienced by citizens trying to contact ACT ministers and public servants, to obtain government information, or to access or pay for a government service. The White Pages Telephone Directory included hundreds of different telephone numbers for departments and agencies in the ACT Government. Canberra Connect was built around the vision of a one-stop shop. The initiative started with a project team bringing together by 2001 the channel components, namely, the whole of Government switchboard, the existing ACT Government Shopfronts located around the Territory, and an e-services component to develop a website - all under the slogan “Access Made Easy.”

Following a change in government in late 2001, the new governing team was not keen to support a previous government’s initiative, so the future of Canberra Connect was in doubt. Moreover, the fact that the notion of e-government was also ill defined placed additional scrutiny on this new organization. However, much work had already gone into consolidating the three existing channels (shopfronts, web, phone) into the one organizational business structure (Canberra Connect) and consolidating this new business in a single department within the Government.

By 2002 the number of payment transactions undertaken by the shopfronts, call centre and online had increased threefold, and citizens became aware of the new Canberra Connect service, particularly in relation to paying their bills and accessing government information, instead of queuing at a shopfront. Then, in January 2003, a major firestorm hit Canberra after minimal warning and burnt over 500 homes resulting in the deaths of several citizens and the devastation of suburbs and bushland. This was when the full value of an integrated service delivery model came into play. The call centre operated 24 x 7 for 10 days, the shopfronts stayed open and supplied extra staff to the call centre, and the emergency website operated by Canberra Connect supplied citizens and the call centre with up-to-date emergency information.

An independent inquiry following the bushfires put Canberra Connect into the Territory Emergency Plan as the Emergency Information Centre and Canberra Connect’s future was secured as a one stop shop and multi channel service provider on behalf of Government. The initiative responded to several challenges: establishing easy access to ACT government information and payment services; consolidating service delivery channels, delivering ease of service and service consistency to citizens; and providing recognizable, effective and efficient means of delivering services on behalf of the ACT Government. The major obstacles to Canberra Connect’s creation and development were getting the ACT government agencies to buy in to a consolidated service concept,

demonstrating the value for the Government, establishing the initiative's brand and purpose within the community.

Canberra Connect is currently being positioned as the driver of strategic information and payment service channel coordination for government. This proposal, which is currently before the Cabinet of the ACT government for consideration, will set the strategic plan for Canberra Connect for the next 3-5 years.

## 2. Organizational Design and Governance Arrangements

Canberra Connect is wholly owned and operated by the ACT Government. It does not operate under legislation. It is currently a branch in the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) which provides a broad range of municipal services from the ACT. Fifty-five percent of the work undertaken by Canberra Connect is for business units in this department. If this percentage declines below existing levels, consideration will be given to moving Canberra Connect to a whole of government shared services environment in the Department of Treasury. Government agencies are strongly encouraged to use Canberra Connect services.

Canberra Connect is a single consolidated business unit managed by its Director. Below the Director are 4 distinct areas – Shopfront Services, Call Centre, Payments and Portals, and Customer Service Integration. There is a single executive unit supporting the Director and a total staff of approximately 150 heads, or about 120 FTE. Canberra Connect reports to the Executive Director, Community and Infrastructure Service, who reports to the CEO of TAMS. There is also a Minister responsible for Canberra Connect within the broader TAMS portfolio.

## 3. Business Model

Canberra Connect fulfils the ACT Government's responsibility for providing accessibility for all citizens, with a strong community service obligation.

### *3(a) Activities, Channels and Migration*

Canberra Connect provides information and payment services for the Canberra community that relate to ACT Government business. The Shopfronts provide counter service, primarily for citizens to make payments. The Call Centre is mainly concerned with providing information while the Internet provides Web service for both information and payments. The channel migration strategy is constant reinforcement by Shopfront and call centre staff of alternative payment channels. Government payments via Canberra Connect can also be made via Australia Post outlets and via Bpay (transfer of funds between customer's bank and provider online or by phone).

### *3(b) Funding*

Canberra Connect has a mixed funding model, with approximately 80 percent of its funding coming from the Government and about 20 percent from a fee-for-service charged to agencies for which Canberra Connect delivers services. The annual operating budget is \$AUD11.3 million.

### *3(c) Human Resource Issues*

The major HR/staffing issues are finding and retaining appropriately skilled staff in a full employment environment, both in Canberra and in Australia as a whole. Keeping and motivating frontline customer service staff is difficult because of the demanding and repetitive nature of the job.

Staff are offered flexible working arrangements, including both permanent and contractual full-time and part-time positions. Comprehensive technical and soft-skill training is provided and there is a strong focus on Occupational Health and Safety. All employees are trained in Customer Service Delivery and there is channel specific training such as telephone skills (for call centre operations), cash handling and dealing with difficult customers (in the shopfronts). There is also system specific training depending on whether the individual works in the shopfront, call centre or online environment for example.

### *3(d) Performance Measurement*

The target for customer satisfaction with Canberra Connect services is 86 percent. The customer satisfaction result is determined by an independent annual survey of Canberra Connect services. The survey is a measure of awareness, attitudes, behaviour and customer satisfaction relative to Canberra Connect's corporate identity, channels and services.

Eighty percent of all calls to the Call Centre are answered within the prescribed target of 20 seconds. A call handling system counts the number of calls received, and then measures the time taken from call connection to the actual answering of the call by an agent. The system measures what proportion of calls are answered within 20 seconds under the GOS (Grade of Service). The 2007-2008 target for the average cost per transaction for call centres is \$3.70.

The average queue times at the Shopfronts is less than 12 minutes. The Q-Matic automated queuing system records the time spent waiting for service for every customer who enters a Shopfront. The time in the queue is measured from when the client takes a ticket from the automated queuing system, until that person is called to the counter by a customer service officer. The targeted average cost per transaction for Shopfronts in 2007-2008 is \$8.92.

The 2007-2008 target for the average cost per transaction for web transactions is \$0.72. The result is achieved by counting the number of visits to each website as recorded in

the web logs of each site. Web logs are then analysed using the web trends reporting and analysis tool.

### *3(e) Use of Information Technology*

Canberra Connect is heavily involved in providing services by using information technology (IT). Common IT systems operate across all channels. Notable examples of the use of IT include

- RAPS (a payment receipting system) collects money across Canberra Connect channels and other Govt agencies
- Integrated Customer Service (staff/customer faqs and feedback system) web based application provided by RightNow Technologies
- VOIP (IPCC CISCO product) in the call centre
- Adobe Live Cycle for online payments gateway
- Mysource Matrix for web content management

### *3(f) Partnerships*

There are technical partnerships with technology providers such as InTACT, an ACT Government IT unit and with external IT providers such as CISCO. Canberra Connect has instigated a cross-jurisdictional annual workshop or “think tank” involving state and local governments with occasional input from the Australian Government.

## **4. Community Engagement**

Canberra Connect has only modest involvement in community engagement. It conducts advertising, promotion, marketing and an annual survey to test customer satisfaction. The personal counselling service, LifeLine, has an MOU with Canberra Connect to provide call handling services in the event of a major emergency. In addition, Canberra Connect Call Centre provides the State Emergency Service with call handling and incident reporting services during flood or storm events. Canberra Connect also works closely with the motor traders association on service delivery matters.

## **5. Issues Encountered/Challenges**

Canberra Connect’s operational capacity and abilities are now well understood, but it is necessary to raise the right profile of the organization within government. Canberra Connect’s strategic and policy setting capability is not well known and needs to be improved within government.

Another challenge is to keep expanding services and to fund these new or expanded services appropriately. Sustaining high levels of customer service and on-going integration within and across government are also important challenges.

Retaining frontline customer service staff has emerged as an issue in the last year as Australia, and Canberra in particular, have entered a period of near full employment in a time of great prosperity. This has an impact on customer service quality as new staff are hired and trained, taking time to deliver Canberra Connect services to their full potential.

## **6. Critical Success Factors**

The major factors explaining the success of Canberra Connect are:

- high-quality customer service delivery, with a quality reputation across the community – an exceptional customer focus
- convenience, simplicity, and a choice of services and channels for both citizens and business customers
- tailored, unique and pragmatic solutions to agencies for service delivery through Canberra Connect
- internal customer service capability by staff at all levels of the organisation
- the internal knowledge and capacity of the senior team

## **7. Next Steps**

The next stages in Canberra Connect's service improvement strategy include

- the Consolidation of Government Information Project, a submission before Cabinet to consider mandating Canberra Connect information and payment channels within Government
- a 24 hour call centre operation to enable full access to all Canberra Connect services regardless of time or day
- developing a standard look and feel for all ACT Government bills to ensure correct usage of payment channel options
- replacing the existing payments and receipting system to secure government revenue collection
- providing rigorous channel management to deliver efficiencies to government and enhanced services to citizens
- giving a new push to marketing and brand presence in the community to build on the existing profile of Canberra Connect.

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