

NEW BRUNSWICK

Service New Brunswick

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Overview

In 1992, in response to pressure for change, New Brunswick embarked on a project for a single-window government service centre. Service New Brunswick (SNB) is a crown corporation with the mandate to make government services more accessible through one-stop service centres, through the Internet and over the phone.

At SNB Centres, customers can obtain a wide range of services including:

- apply for birth, marriage or death certificates
- purchase hunting and fishing licenses
- register for educational courses
- pay their telephone bills, driver license and other permit renewals
- register motor vehicles
- obtain maps, pamphlets, application forms and other information
- pay water and sewer bills from the local municipality

In addition to the counter services, SNB also operates a telephone call centre. The call centre provides a cost-efficient, alternative means of accessing government services and obtaining information on government services and programs. One of the major benefits of the call centre is that it provides access to those who reside in remote communities as well as the expanded hours the call centre offers.

Meanwhile, the Internet continues to provide opportunities for the New Brunswick government to provide services and information to citizens. The SNB Online website represents a significant transformation in the way citizens access government

information, services and products, and there is a growing list of services that can be completed online.

Building an integrated, cost-effective, citizen-centric service delivery for accessing government services is the key to success in the SNB initiatives. Service New Brunswick leverages the use of technology to maximise and achieve customer satisfaction. Citizens want government services that are as accessible, convenient and seamless as possible, and the New Brunswick government has responded by adopting the one-window approach.

SNB is also looking beyond the easy wins to more complex integration initiatives that require a business case that demonstrates sustainability. For example, with Student Financial Services, SNB is now the sole delivery agent. Students use SNB to find forms, which can then be sent electronically through the SNB site directly to the Department of Education. When the student calls to follow-up on the status of the application, SNB picks up the call, accesses the Department of Education database, and provides the relevant information. There is a legal contract in place about the use of the personal information contained in these files according to the Privacy of Personal Information Act. The Department of Education retains control of assessing eligibility and distributing the loan money. The improvement in the level of services to students has been significant.

Project Catalysts/Drivers

For the last 10-15 years, the Department of Education had been experiencing difficulty responding to the volume of telephone calls. This was especially true during peak times (end of summer and January), when only about 20-25% of calls were being answered. Focus groups had examined the issue and put forward two solutions: hire more staff, or partner with someone else.

SNB proposed that a partnership be established between themselves and the Department of Education in which SNB would answer their calls, absorb the seasonal “bump” in volume, and improve the response rate to 90-95%. A price per call answered was negotiated, and a contract was signed.

Both parties were able to win in this arrangement: SNB brought new business to their agency, and the Department of Education solved a problem they could not address as effectively on their own.

Achievements

From the point of view of the customer, the partnership has been very successful: the phones are now being answered. The satisfaction of the taxpayers will be quantified and the results used in subsequent contract negotiations.

SNB and the Department of Education have recently undertaken a survey to determine internal satisfaction levels – is the service being provided to external customers satisfactory, and are the SNB staff getting the information to do their job effectively?

Challenges

Balancing Co-operation and Givens

Especially when the negotiation has been drawn out and challenging, it can be tempting to make concessions in order to complete the process. It is very important for all partners to draw up a list of sacred things that should not or cannot be given up to the cause of integration. Customer service could be jeopardised more than it is being helped if provisions accepted to further integration negatively affect the original core business of the organisation.

Funding

In the process of negotiating agreements, partners have to be careful to secure enough funding to support the project. Complex initiatives that involve more than one department have costs associated with the integration that might not exist or cost as much as an initiative limited to a single organisation.

Critical Success Factors

Culture of Growth and Service Improvement

Customer orientation and the desire to take on new work is very important, given that most integration initiatives involve at the

very least changes to existing work. At SNB, this is instilled in staff from the beginning through training programs and team-building workshops. SNB front-line staff always have the opportunity to provide input into the changes that will affect their jobs, which gives a sense of ownership and control over the process. Service representatives also know that their performance and the performance of the organisation are measured by customer satisfaction. This includes being courteous as well as being accurate.

Defined Issue

Having an issue to resolve that demands change, as well as offering the solution to address it, is the easiest way to convince partners to come to the negotiating table. A major initiative has been to offer the advantages of the existing comprehensive SNB service delivery infrastructure to municipalities who wish to enhance service delivery to their citizens. Forty-two (42) of municipalities now use one or more of SNB's service delivery channels to provide information and payment-taking services to their citizens. This represents more than 80% of the population who live in municipalities.

Commitment to Customer Service

Both partners must be committed to customer service. Any gap in this fundamental issue is likely to lead to frustration and difficulty in the relationship. For example, technology and facilities management partners can have a different sense of urgency than do front line organisations. This can be addressed by having a contract in place that specifies the acceptable length of time to correct a problem with the system. The service delivery front end should not take the hit for program area responsibilities.

Vision for ISD

SNB enjoys very strong central government leadership at both the political and staff level. Customer service is very much the focus. The relatively easy wins were implemented early in the life of SNB. Those left to be integrated are much more complex and challenging.

With the maturation of the multi-channel service offerings to the citizen of NB, SNB has been adding emphasis in a number of areas:

- Services to Business – SNB has been working with various business groups to develop a sectoral approach to improving how they deal with government.
- Citizen Engagement – Recognising that the advantages of electronic contact between citizen and government for information and service delivery can be extended to e-government, SNB is developing tools to enhance how citizens can use the Web to interact with government.
- From effectiveness to efficiency – With the level of maturity in service delivery, SNB is now looking to identify any cost-savings that can allow for new services at minimum incremental cost.