Achieving
Customer
Service
in the Real World

Industry Perspective

Information Builders

Executive Summary

Rapidly expanding technology has changed expectations of customer service in the public sector. Citizens, and other government customers want to be able to see how their tax dollars are being spent with easier, faster and more connected services from their governments.

When citizens expect to be able to access information and accomplish tasks on their own, as they can with Travelocity or Amazon, it has large implications for how government provides services and manages its data. That's why organizations should consider self-service analytics to improve overall customer service.

Self-service analytics is a business intelligence (BI) approach to data analytics that enables customers to access and work with an organization's data and information without the help of the information technology department. Self-service analytics can help government agencies develop applications that support flexibility, familiarity and flow. Through self-service analytics, public employees can better manage data on their diverse constituent bases and help customers address their needs on their own, without having to take the extra time or effort to interact with an agency worker.

Government has recognized the importance of self-service analytics to improve customer service. But agencies still face many challenges including:

Bad data.
Most government departments lack proper data governing processes. Though there have been efforts to consolidate data centers, many agencies still struggle with data redundancy, quality and integrity challenges which need to be addressed improve customer services.

Lack of intuitive interface.
Many government websites, fail to meet the users' expectations in terms of their experience getting to the answers they need. Agencies often don't consider how easily an end user can navigate a website to get information using any type of device.

Legacy infrastructures.
Government tends to get stuck in older infrastructures that make it harder to invest in newer and more innovative customer service technologies. This makes it increasingly difficult to keep up with technology modernization and customers' real-time demands.

Costly deployments.
Many customer service technology solutions in the marketplace today require heavy consulting investment. It has become increasingly difficult to find quick, easy and cost-effective options.

So what can government agencies do to improve their technology for meeting customer service needs? This is where self-service analytics can help.

Kevin Mergruen, Vice President of Public Sector, and Jake Freivald, Vice President of Product Marketing, at Information Builders sat down with GovLoop and shared how your agency can use self-service analytics to meet your customers' increasing demands for information.

In this industry perspective, we explain how Information Builders can help your government agency use self-service analytics to improve customer services. Since 1975, Information Builders has been dedicated to superior customer service and market-led innovation through the power of information. "We focus on three types of business and enterprise software solutions: business intelligence, data integrity and data integration," Mergruen said. "These solutions can help governments address their customer service challenges in a cost-efficient manner while making sure they have consistent and accurate data."

Self-Service Analytics Basics

What do self-service analytics look like at a government agency? Let's take a look at the basics to get a better picture of how to use this tool in the public sector.

For the general public, it means having a more personal connection with local and federal governments, a better understanding of how to interact with government, and more knowledge about what services are available.

"Self-service analytics is a way of looking at information, asking questions in a very flexible way and getting direct and rapid answers," Freivald said. Executives, operational employees, customers and other business users make better and faster decisions when they get single-click access to relevant, real-time analytic content.

Before deploying self-service analytics, analysts and advanced users at an agency would need to perform data manipulation to uncover any inconsistent patterns, relationships and anomalies. But that's a time-consuming and tedious process. Self-service analytics speeds this process to help developers and IT staffs use powerful, yet intuitive tools to make robust analytic content available to all customers. It also is easy for customers to use so they can easily answer their own questions just by clicking on your agency's site.

"Self-service analytics is about taking that mountain of data and extracting the insights you need from it so you don't have to keep going back to the same people over and over again," Freivald said.

To give your customers exactly what they need, when and how they need it, use an enterprise analytics and applications platform with a broad range of features to satisfy the widest range of information requirements.

When deploying self-service analytics, it's important to ensure that your agencies' self-service capabilities meet the following criteria:

The platform must be flexible and open.
In designing your platform, it's important to consider your customers and design an interface based on the type of user. Keep in mind that one size does not fit all. Know who your customers are, what information they want to see and how they want to see it. Ease of use should also be a top priority. The ability of all types of users to use the same application across any type of device via a smart user interface is key.

Data must be accurate and complete.
Most of the applications deployed to citizens need to combine data from more than one data structure. Sometimes this can lead to inconsistencies in the data. That's why it's important to have a data quality program in place to ensure that shared information is complete and consistent.

Development should be iterative and responsive.
An iterative approach is critical to customer application development in order to quickly deploy and improve your services, based on customer feedback.

Additionally, using technology with responsive design creates one view that automatically resizes depending on the platform or mobile device a customer uses.

"When you are able to leverage responsive design, that allows you to build and deploy for any platform or any device and facilitate a consistent user experience that optimizes your self-service model," Mergruen said.

As government organizations design new self-service customer applications, it's important to avoid these common mistakes:

Static information.
Presenting information in a non-responsive manner on your websites or mobile platforms does not answer all the questions your user may have, forcing them to contact your call center anyway.

Overly complicated information for users.
Fancy or technical information does not always mean clear information. Clarity is paramount when designing citizen service applications. Anyone should be able to read your web or app content and understand what your agency offers.

Overly complicated information for developers.
It's equally important to ensure that your IT staff members and other employees understand how to navigate these applications for customers. Avoid building a platform that requires a lot of maintenance across many dashboards. Keep it simple and low-maintenance, with easy-to-access visuals and reports.

Inaccurate information.
Often, agencies assume all their data is up-to-date and accurate and they deploy without fully profiling their data. It is critical to review and profile data before apps go live because if there are mistakes in your data, customers will be left confused and frustrated.

When you adhere to these criteria in deploying self-service analytics and avoid these common mistakes, you not only improve technological capabilities and understanding within your workforce, but you also help your agency become more responsive to the diverse needs of your constituent base.

Case Study: How Maryland MVA Created Service Center Fast Lanes
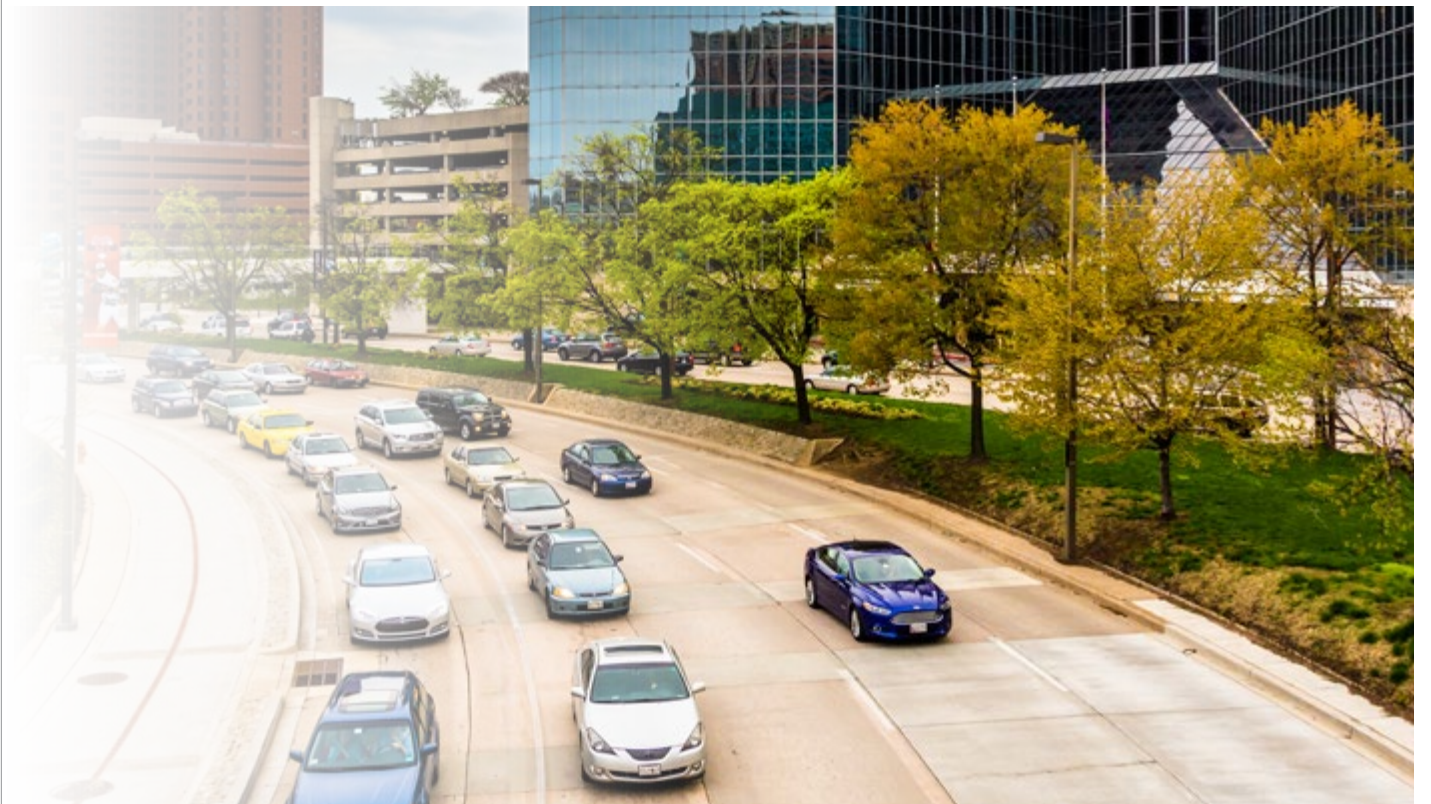
What are some real-life examples of how data-driven decision-making combined with self-service analytics can rapidly improve customer service delivery and customer satisfaction? Just ask the State of Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (Maryland MVA).

With population growth, residents traveling more miles and new trends in security, MVA struggled to improve citizen services, especially with a constrained budget. At the same time, the agency faced challenges with its internal data management strategies because of a high number of disparate data sources and legacy applications.

Because of these challenges, Maryland MVA leaders were concerned about how they could better issue licenses and registrations for millions of people and vehicles, reduce wait times, move operations online, and transform a normally frustrating experience into a pleasant one.

To turn the frustrating experiences around, Maryland MVA focused on using BI tools to drive better decisions and manage their data.

In partnership with Information Builders, Maryland MVA's BI efforts included better ways to capture information and codify it into systems. BI helped MVA better manage its data and information, which is especially important because the department provides a number of services, such as licensing all commercial and non-commercial drivers, registering and titling vehicles, issuing photo identification, and conducting driver and motorcycle safety programs.

With the help of Information Builders, Maryland MVA managed to:
• Shorten wait times and lines.
• Move services online.
• Provide appointment scheduling.
• Reduce operational costs.
• Improve citizen satisfaction.

Additionally, self-service analytics has allowed for the automation of official reports for MVA's executive branch. Now, MVA's reports comprise the following characteristics:

- BI data systems now retain significant detail for comparison and trending analysis.
- Reports are run on demand, allowing historic results to be recalculated with different parameters as needed.
- Full PDF documents (with dozens of reports across many pages) can be run based on date selection or automated to run on a schedule.
- MVA's "Weekly Branch Report" used to take 20 man-hours to produce, but menu selections now give instant updates.
- A menu-driven interface allows end users to run their own versions of critical reports for any time frame by district, office size and county.

"Maryland's MVA is now getting ahead of the game to identify how they can increase efficiency so that the customer experience is even better than it's expected to be," Mergruen said.

At the Maryland MVA, customers don't have to come in person for every type of service. Now customers can meet their needs on their own through many online services This has dramatically reduced lines at MVA. In the past four years, the average wait time at MVA decreased from 40 minutes or longer to 25 minutes or less.

With smarter self-service analytics, employees at MVA can easily track key concerns of the week by district, county and office size. Now, MVA can view updates of current traffic in Maryland, how many people showed up at onsite locations and how long they had to wait in line for services.

How Other Agencies Improved

In addition to helping Maryland's MVA greatly improve its wait time, online services and tracking of customer service delivery, Information Builders combined self-service business intelligence to help other agencies achieve strategic goals, including:

Revenue generation.
The New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration can now identify unpaid taxes through a single view of the citizen, rather than disparate views. This capability helps the department collect millions of dollars in revenue that would have been otherwise lost because of the disparate views of such data.

Deficit management.
The Los Angeles County Auditor-Controller Department reduced waste and fraud through pervasive contract management and dashboard applications deployed countywide.

Government compliancy.
Colorado deployed a statewide financial reporting portal to provide transparency on spending of taxpayer money to meet the requirements of the American Recovery Reinvestment Act and provide better transparency on the spending of taxpayer money.

Citizen security.
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department is reducing crime and enhancing quality of life for its citizens through the use of predictive policing and BI for better information management.

Conclusion

In government, better customer service means much more than simply improving customer satisfaction. It means increased transparency and accountability to citizens. It means helping public employees do their work in a more efficient manner. It means improving collaboration and communication between government and the public as well as other government entities.

"For public organizations, it's about helping citizens have more of a personal connection to government and understand the services available to help them to improve quality of life," Mergruen said.

The pace of technology and citizen demands is only accelerating. It's up to government agencies to keep up with the modernization of technology as well as the diverse needs of their constituent bases. While this is certainly no easy task, having a solid platform and strategy can help you get started. With Information Builders' approach to BI, integrity and integration, your agency has a much better chance of keeping up with the demand.

"It's important that agencies be flexible, adaptable, and more cooperative in order to better achieve your mission and serve your constituents," Freivald said.

It can be as simple as reducing wait times, moving services online, or answering your customers' questions faster. Use self-service analytics and responsive design to turn your data and technology challenges into opportunities to better serve your customers and their needs in the real world.

Information Builders

Information Builders helps organizations transform data into business value. Our software solutions for business intelligence and analytics, integration, and data integrity empower people to make smarter decisions, strengthen customer relationships, and drive growth. Our dedication to customer success is unmatched in the industry. That's why thousands of leading organizations rely on Information Builders to be their trusted partner. Founded in 1975, Information Builders is headquartered in New York, NY, with offices around the world, and remains one of the largest independent, privately held companies in the industry. Visit us at informationbuilders.com and follow us on Twitter at @infobldrs.

govloop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 250,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.