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How the Pandemic Transformed Government Customer Service

With employees working remotely and citizens making urgent inquiries, the cloud provided critical support.

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Citizens typically associate government interactions with the services impacting their lives—licenses and registrations—but that all changed in 2020. The pandemic broke down many of the lines between the government and its people. For some, it was their first introduction to government as an information source, a financial lifeline, or a healthcare service—and that connection was crucial to keeping their families afloat.

For decades, local departments of labor or health authorities operated on modest budgets. Ideas like digital transformation were on the horizon and customer service was an afterthought. Government institutions knew their contact center technologies weren't up to par with the enterprise, but they functioned.

Until, of course, they didn't.

According to IDC, less than 30% of educational institutions and 55% of government organizations felt sufficiently prepared for the COVID-19 disruption (IDC Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, February 2021). These departments were not only ill-equipped to deal with the massive fluctuations of demand, they were also fundamentally tied to a specific location and couldn't accommodate remote work or physical distancing.

Federal, state, and local government institutions everywhere needed to reinvent their customer service approach in weeks or less—so they turned to the cloud.

Amazon Connect, an omnichannel cloud contact center solution from AWS, provides a solution that can be set up in minutes, is easy to use, and scales from ten to tens of thousands of agents. Customers only pay for what they use and agents only need an internet connection and headset to get started. Today, public sector customers see Amazon Connect as key for improving customer service, proven by the following lessons learned from the pandemic.

Provide service that scales during emergencies

Last year, when the U.S. economy slowed to a near standstill, every state experienced an unprecedented surge in unemployment claims. Millions of Americans were laid off, and government phone lines were quickly overwhelmed, resulting in impossibly long wait times and busy signals.

Rhode Island's Department of Labor and Training (DLT) experienced 10 times the typical volume of unemployment insurance claims in March of 2020, and their 30-year-old system couldn't keep up. Previously, DLT could only handle 74 concurrent

phone and 375 internet-based calls per minute. In just 10 days, they were able to stand up a new cloud contact center that could handle up to 2,000 concurrent calls per minute. This new cloud contact center, powered by Amazon Connect, allowed close to 90,000 Rhode Islanders—one out of every 14 citizens—to certify for benefits on the first day of operation.

Continually adapt, providing better assistance to the public

Government institutions, like all of us, had to constantly pivot during the pandemic. The first focus was on unemployment, then COVID-19 testing, then contact tracing, and finally vaccinations—contact centers needed to quickly adjust to the changing needs of the public. In order to provide the best citizen experience, their contact centers needed to be agile and shift focus, sometimes on an hour's notice.

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services promotes child safety and offers prevention services to strengthen families. Their Child Protection Hotline social workers are vital to helping the most populous U.S. county, with more than 10 million people, navigate difficult domestic challenges such as child abuse reports, investigations, and foster care. Amazon Connect helps them look at patterns, trends, and predictions that guide their work and help their staff navigate difficult situations without requiring supervisors to be there in-person or listening to every call. During the pandemic, administrators could easily adapt call flows and communications practices as public needs changed and social workers could better respond to the situation at hand.

Leverage machine learning and AI to augment agent impact

Machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) help organizations intelligently and easily listen to their customers and understand their needs, match them to the right agent, and provide them with

answers. Advanced AI technologies like sentiment analysis, caller authentication, chatbots, and agent assistance empower the agents to focus on the most complex problems rather than answering quick questions like, "Is your office open?" When these technologies are embedded into your contact center solution, they are easy to use.

Before the pandemic, the City of Johns Creek in Georgia offered an intelligent, automated, after-hours call center to answer resident questions with Amazon Connect's built-in AI. If it couldn't answer the question, the caller would be automatically transferred to the appropriate department based on keywords. This cut the receptionist's call volume by more than half, freeing up their time for issues that required more hands-on assistance. During the pandemic, city hall had to physically close its doors, but residents could still access the contact center 24/7. Because they were already using Amazon Connect, the city was able to respond immediately to its citizens' changing needs.

Government customer service reinvention

The last year and a half has brought on the biggest shift in customer service infrastructure that this world has ever seen. It moved government organizations to the cloud. As I work with public sector customers today, they're taking these lessons to heart—they're bringing scalability, adaptability, and intelligence into new customer service departments and response strategies. Administrators understand that great service from state, local, and federal organizations is possible—it's not on the horizon, it's now.

To learn more about Amazon Connect, AWS's contact center solution, [click here](#).

To read all the pieces in our "Contact Center in the Cloud" series, [click here](#).