

Mobile Workforce Management Transforms Service Delivery

By Jennifer Dewar -----✉

Customer service is becoming a high-profile component of a water service company's business strategy. Utilities today are grappling with the challenge of delivering exemplary customer service while maximizing operational efficiency and maintaining high quality standards.

American Water, the largest privately owned water and wastewater utility in the U.S., is one utility that has embraced technology with the goal of improving customer service, achieving operational excellence, and creating business value. The company launched its Service First project with MDSI's Advantex mobile workforce management system in 2004. With standardized processes rolled out in four regions across 17 American Water companies in 17 states to date, the Advantex system has transformed the way more than 1,000 field service representatives deliver customer service.

"The implementation of mobile workforce management has re-invented the way American Water serves its customers," said John Young, Chief Operating Officer at American Water. "It has enabled faster response times, eliminated redundancy and repeat visits, and is ultimately improving overall customer satisfaction."

Legacy System

Field Service Representatives (FSRs) at American Water are responsible for field customer service work such as water connection and disconnection, meter replacement or repair, leak inspections, line locating, meter reading, and pressure checks for approximately 18 million people. American Water's paper-based service order distribution system seriously

hampered the timeliness and efficiency of this field work. Hand-sorting of service orders into 'afternoon', 'morning', 'sewer', and 'water' categories wasted hours of valuable time.

Before mobile workforce management was implemented, FSRs picked up paper orders each morning and mailed completed orders back to the office where they were

aging an average of 155,000 field service orders per month. Field Service Coordinators (FSC) use Advantex Appointment Booking to schedule three-hour appointment windows based on individual skill sets, location, and availability, ensuring FSRs arrive at the customer site on time with the right tools to complete the job the first time.



Andy Williams, Field Service Representative at Pennsylvania American Water's Stafford Avenue center, reviews his work orders on his Toughbook.

manually closed. The opportunity for error and loss of orders was high and FSRs and Field Resource Coordination Centers (FRCC) had no information to respond to order status inquiries from customers.

Before Advantex, the utility could only offer all-day appointment windows and customers would have to make themselves available all day waiting for an FSR to arrive. In addition, there was no electronic mechanism in place to track valuable information such as the location of FSRs, time management, or order status.

New System

Today, the Advantex system at American Water automates the work order cycle – scheduling, dispatching and man-

Equipped with Panasonic Toughbooks and GPS devices in their vehicles, the field service representatives receive service orders remotely. As work progresses, they send order completion information wirelessly, instantly updating the customer's record. Customer Service Representatives at the call centers now have access to up-to-date information on service order status and can respond efficiently to customer inquiries.

Service order status is monitored in real-time, with automatic warnings signaling the need for immediate attention by the coordination centers,

enabling more responsive service and allowing supervisors to spend more time in the field working with field service reps to improve productivity. And by monitoring FSR status, FRCC staff can 'drop' additional work – often value-added work such as zero consumption, meter changeout, or collections – when it is anticipated that the FSR will have available time.

Customer Care

Karen Cooper, Manager of Business Services at the American Water Customer Service Center in Alton, IL, has been in the water industry for 28 years and knows first-hand the frustrations customers experienced before mobile workforce

management made real-time information available.

“The speed of our response to customers is significantly improved. With Advantex, we now have technology in place that provides real-time information about completed orders and enables the Customer Service Center to provide accurate and timely information to relay to customers about the status of their work order.”

Dan Farabee, an FSR with Pennsylvania American Water, acknowledges the benefits of mobile workforce management in handling customer emergencies and time-critical orders. “The response time to customer emergencies is the most noticeable improvement to field customer service operations. We can respond now in a flash.”

If a customer calls with a leak in their basement, FRCCs have the location, individual skill sets, and availability of all field technicians at their fingertips and can rapidly assign and dispatch the order wire-



Terry Rogers, Field Resource Coordinator at the American Water Wilkes Barre Field Resource Coordination Center, uses Advantex to monitor FSR's progress and to 'drop' additional value-added orders to FSRs.

lessly to the most appropriate technician.

Measuring Performance

Prior to launching the Service First project, American Water manually measured performance and productivity. Now with Advantex Decision Support (ADS), standard and user-defined reports enable management to measure bench-

marks and Key Performance Indicators (KPI), such as FSR productivity, dispatch efficiency, the number of missed appointments, and the ratio of completed versus assigned orders; current and historical data can be tracked for metrics such as job duration, travel time, and idle time. Access to relevant historical data has improved the company's forecasting and planning capabilities.

With today's public demanding more from their water utility than ever before, superior customer service is critical to survival. American Water has responded with their customer-centric Service First project, implementing the Advantex mobile workforce management system. By transforming the utility's field customer service operations, mobile workforce management has increased productivity, reduced costs, and heightened customer satisfaction. **WW**

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