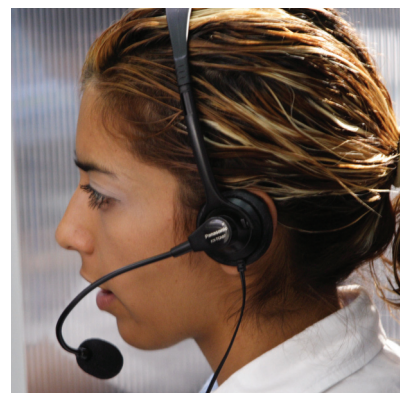# ICMA

Call 311:
Connecting Citizens to Local Government
Case Study Series

Hampton 311
Customer Call Center

By Tad McGalliard

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

In This Report

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RESULTS NETWORKS

Community and System Profile

City of Hampton, Virginia 311 Call Center

Form of Government
Council-manager

City Council
Seven members, including a mayor and vice mayor

Population
146,000

Annual Budget (Citywide)
$443 million

311 Call Center Budget
$578,170 (2008)

Major Components
- Physical location: In retrofitted facility adjacent to city hall
- Phones: One trunk, 23 phone lines
- Computers: 22; three used for training; two used for management

Number of Staff
Eleven full-time equivalents (FTEs), including nine customer advocates, a call center manager, and an information manager, plus two part-time advocates to help cover weekend, holiday, and evening shifts.

Location within City Government
Reports to the city manager's office through an assistant city manager

Type of System
Centralized customer contact center that includes call center, Web and e-mail features, and work order processing for various departments

Unique System Features and Management Tools
- Frontlink customer relationship management (CRM) system by Lagan Inc. and GBA Master Series work order management software
- Witness call recording system
- PERMITS' Plus for code complaints
- Dedicated servers
- Avaya phone switches
- BCMS Vu (call tracking) by Avaya
- Dell desktop computers; system transitions to laptops for mobility during disasters

Citizen Feedback Mechanisms
- Brief survey offered to customers after each call or e-mail; responses compiled into monthly report for city manager and city council
- Annual citizen satisfaction survey
- Direct contact with customer advocates

311 Service

Non-emergency 311 service is a local telephone exchange communications service that allows telephone customers to reach non-emergency local government services by dialing an abbreviated telephone number, 311. 311 traffic is routed over the public switched network to a call center designed by the local government. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has reserved 311 for non-emergency access to public services.

311 service is optional and may be purchased by a municipality, a council of governments, a communication district, another state or local governmental unit, or an authorized agent of one or more municipalities or other state or local governmental unit to whom authority has been lawfully delegated. The customer must be legally authorized to subscribe to the service. 311 is offered subject to the availability of facilities.

Brief History of Hampton's 311 Customer Call Center

Hampton is one of Virginia's independent cities, which means it is not part of a larger county. The city employs several thousand staff and manages a budget of more than $443 million that funds approximately sixty departments.

The opening tip for Hampton's customer contact center was a 1997/1998 strategic planning process that focused on seven core issues, one of which, "customer delight," provided the conceptual platform for what would eventually become Hampton's 311 contact center. Recognizing that the level of citizen satisfaction with government services was declining, the city decided that innovations, substantially beyond tinkering at the margins, were necessary to reverse the disturbing trends revealed in annual satisfaction surveys.

Customer delight is more than a catchy management term for Hampton. Popularized in business and customer service literature in the 1990s, the principle suggests that customer service should go beyond mere measures of satisfaction. The true goal of customer service is to delight consumers by ensuring that their needs are not only met but exceeded, thus ensuring loyalty. For a local government, this can mean more positive perceptions of local government operations and services by citizens and business, hopefully ensuring their willingness to invest time, taxes, and other resources in their community.

The city's customer delight initiative could not have been timed better. In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated 311 for local government use, opening up a new communication tool that could help Hampton achieve its goals. Quickly seeing the opportunity, Hampton became a pioneering community—the first in Virginia and one of the first in the United States to use a 311 system.

The strategic plan focus on "customer delight" revealed that citizens had three very simple desires:

1. A single point of entry to local government information and services that had an easy number to remember

2. Assistance from the first local government person who answered the phone, with as few forwarded calls as possible

3. Access twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week (24/7) to local government and services—a schedule that was in line with personal lives, work schedules, and the inevitability of off-hours non-emergency needs (e.g., sewer backups, stray wildlife calls).

The strategic planning process quickly jumpstarted interest in establishing a customer contact center, and a 311 project team was formed in September 1998. The team included participants from seven city departments as well as a resident business owner who had participated in the strategic planning process. One person was assigned full time to shepherd the project, but all other

team members took on the task while maintaining their day-to-day responsibilities. According to Kevin Gallagher, the team leader, the project team "had no earthly idea how to get from where we were to where we wanted to be …in the end it might have been a blessing because we didn't set off down a pre-determined path."

As the Hampton team began its research, it found relatively few customer contact centers operated by local governments and serving the city or county. After reviewing several existing programs, the project team decided that none of them would meet Hampton's expressed desire for a service that would engender "customer delight" throughout the local constituency. So the team began to customize their vision.

Beginning in January 1999, the team established an ambitious timeline with a goal of opening a fully operational 311 call center by the end of the calendar year. Key tasks during the next few months included:

- Gathering and analyzing information about telephone traffic in order to determine the necessary full-time equivalents for a new center
- Developing informational databases and frequently asked questions (FAQs) and assessing the types of

services often requested by and provided to local residents and businesses

- Identifying a location, completing necessary refurbishment, and installing the network
- Securing internal buy-in and excitement from department leaders and employees as well as identifying a governance structure or chain of command
- Selecting staff and training them in key areas such as organizational structure and responsibilities, customer service and telephone etiquette, team building, and operation of the startup software systems.

Within the year, the City of Hampton 311 Customer Call Center opened for business, with the phone lines lighting up on September 13, 1999.

During the first full year of operation, the center received more than 221,000 calls for service and information. In 2007, it received more than 280,000 calls, with approximately 21 percent of the volume coming in during the evening or on weekends, illustrating the importance of non-traditional hours in a community.[1]

Volumes peaked in 2003 with more than 302,000 calls, largely as a result of the surge brought on by the

Summary of Key Findings

System Functionality and Major Features

Finding 1. Customer service designed to delight local citizens and businesses provided the foundation for the City of Hampton 311 Call Center startup and its continued operational mission.

Finding 2. Many of the human and financial resources necessary to start up a 311 service center may already exist within a local government.

Finding 3. Leadership at the highest levels of city government is necessary in starting up, operating, and sustaining 311 services.

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

Finding 4. Customer expectations of service providers have dramatically changed in the always connected world, and a customer call center should meet those expectations.

Finding 5. A continuously improving, high-performing customer contact center should be capable of providing answers to questions, initiating requests for service, and connecting citizens with information and services beyond the home jurisdiction.

Finding 6. Creative "guerilla marketing," networked advertising, and grassroots outreach are important components of increasing awareness and use of a customer contact service.

Performance Measurement and Service Provision

Finding 7. Central to ensuring customer delight is a process for managing, and in many cases exceeding, customer expectations.

Finding 8. Measuring customer delight with the City of Hampton 311 Call Center shines an important light on the effectiveness and continuous improvement of the system.

Finding 9. Before, during, and after a disaster, a customer contact system provides invaluable informational services to local residents.

Staff Training

Finding 10. A robust, continuously refreshed and improved knowledge management system is central to a successful customer contact center.

Finding 11. A successful knowledge management system needs an effective information manager.

approach and aftermath of Hurricane Isabel. Table 1 illustrates the volumes and types of calls received by Hampton customer advocates.

The contact center originally used software called Our Town and then later engaged a local company to help manage the system's knowledge database. In 2008, Hampton used Frontlink, a customer relationship management (CRM) software built directly for local governments and provided by Belfast-based Lagan Inc., to power its call center's CRM and knowledge database of FAQs. Using Frontlink, call center advocates are able to input service orders for various public works and parks and recreation requests as well as access the city's assessment data to answer questions for banks, mortgage companies, realtors, and others. In addition, call center advocates can connect with the city's codes and compliance systems using a software program called PERMITS' Plus, offered by Accela Inc. This software, used for permitting inspections and reports of zoning violations, is installed directly on each advocate's terminal.

The call center's knowledgebase contains approximately 4,300 questions and answers about local government and some surrounding organizations and institutions. It is keyword- driven so customer advocates can quickly enter information into the system to find the appropriately scripted question and answer. It also includes features that allows customer advocates to initiate work orders to address such public works problems as potholes and malfunctioning streetlights and to give citizens information on codes and compliance permitting and real estate assessments.

System Costs

Hampton has been able to keep the customer contact center revenue and cost neutral. A one-time capital outlay of approximately $350,000 was necessary to refurbish an existing facility and to outfit the center with required equipment. The annual operating budget in 2007 was $592,651. Table 2 provides budgetary information for the call center. In 2008, approximately 88 percent of the 311 budget went to cover personnel costs, 5 percent to cover maintenance contracts and leasing agreements, and 7 percent to cover general operating costs.

System Functionality and Major Features

Finding 1—Customer service designed to delight local citizens and businesses provided the foundation for the City of Hampton 311 Call Center startup and its continued operational mission.

Local governments provide a wide range of services to citizen customers. In the early and mid-1990s, city management in Hampton noted a downward trend in citizen satisfaction with local government services, service delivery, and information sharing and embarked on an effort to reverse it. An ambitious strategic planning process kicked off in 1996 and lasted for eighteen months. The process included more than 150 residents and representatives from all levels of government.[2]

A key element of the strategic plan was customer delight, as illustrated in a vision statement, "Hampton City government will exceed its customers expectations by providing unparalleled service."

Rightly, the planning process and analysis of citizen satisfaction surveys pointed out the difficulties that residents had reported in trying to get even very basic information from city government. As a medium-sized, independent city in the state of Virginia, Hampton provides a full range of government services. As in many cities of its size, the labyrinth of departments, bureaus, offices, commissions, and other entities presented an unintended maze for a citizen seeking an answer to a question or the resolution of a problem.

Table 1.   Call Volumes and Distributions for City of Hampton 311 Customer Call Center

Performance Indicator	2005	2006	2007 (estimate)
Calls Received	288,155	295,660	245,000
Informational Calls (%)	71%	67%	64-70%
Requests for City Services	58,062	61,237	61,000
E-mail Requests	1,081	1,549	2,600
Off-Hour Calls (%)	21%	22%	21%

Table 2. Annual Operating Expenses for City of Hampton 311 Call Center

2004	2005	2006	2007 (Budgeted)	2008 (Budgeted)
$485,605	$514,298	$524,740	$592,651	$578,170

The strategic planning process revealed that Hampton should "make it as easy to get basic service delivery as it is to get emergency services. By doing so, customers will become more delighted with city government."[3] Citizens wanted convenience, quality, and quick resolution of their issue, whether it was a simple question about office hours for a particular department or more complex queries or requests that would require follow-up work orders (i.e., potholes). The working assumption is that citizens are more engaged and willing to invest in their community if they are getting a good value from their government.

According to Assistant City Manager Mary Bunting, customers were always the central factor in making decisions about a call center. "Unlike some cities that did it [implemented customer contact centers] specifically to take traffic off of 911, that was not our motivation—we had that as a by-product—but our whole motivation was customer delight."

While the process started without a preconceived notion of a customer service or call center, the focus on customer delight in the *1998 Hampton Strategic Plan* laid the foundation for an ambitious effort to have a call center operational within a relatively short amount of time.

Customer delight provides an organizational vision for the city to engage with residents and businesses. When asked about its importance, Bunting noted, "The city feels very strongly that citizens are willing to pay a price for government if they are getting good value for the money—namely, convenience, quality and speed."

Finding 2—Many of the human and financial resources necessary to start up a 311 service center may already exist within a local government.

When Hampton made the decision to move forward with a 311 customer contact center it was with the expectation that it *would not* create substantial new fixed costs for the local government budget and that it *would* lead to customer delight and increased efficiencies across the organization.

The realities of local government finances quickly surfaced, however. Shrinking sources of revenue would not support a call center as an addition to current operations. Therefore, the city decided to reengineer city services to generate budgetary savings to fund the initiative.[4]

One of the expected outcomes established by the city's original call center project team was to accomplish the reengineering with the expenditure of little additional revenue, with most of the staffing necessary for the new service coming from existing departments.

The city manager's office continuously made a strong case with various departments that it was in their best interest to give up their front-line customer service functions and positions, assuring them that when the positions moved to the call center, so would the calls.[5]

Because the staffing plan was to be implemented by reengineering, the initial call center positions were open only to existing city employees. The selection process included a variety of screens, including an emphasis on providing high-quality customer service, understanding city services, and personalities suited to a job that involved constant contact with residents and businesses. In the end, nine full-time positions—newly named customer advocates—were reallocated to the new 311 call center. A call center manager position and an information manager position were created, and a small amount of money was set aside for part-time advocates to help cover weekend and holiday shifts.

Capital costs for the center were about $350,000, which included expenses for outfitting the call center and for refurbishing an old courtroom to house it. In its summary report, the city of Hampton noted that jurisdictions considering a 311 service, "will need to make a one-time capital investment in equipment, software and location"; furthermore, "close attention should be given to researching software and equipment," as there are still few concepts off the shelf that will serve all needs.

Finding 3—Leadership at the highest levels of city government is necessary in starting up, operating, and sustaining 311 services.

In September 1998, the customer contact center project team recognized that planning, design, development, and implementation of a new service was going to require the highest levels of leadership and engagement.

The city manager's office briefed departmental managers about the project throughout the various stages of the effort. Moreover, the briefings provided opportunities for the city manager's office to demonstrate not only how the call center concept was going to work, but also how it would allow departments to focus on their core activities.

As the call center has evolved, it has been strongly supported by Hampton's mayors, council members, and the city manager's office, both programmatically and financially.

Importantly, the concept was "sold" to departments by articulating the expected benefits, which included time and cost savings in addition to elevated levels of citizen satisfaction. This freed departments to focus on their core responsibilities, rather than having front-line or back-office employees pull double duty as customer relations staff.

The 311 call center reports directly to the city manager's office through one of the three assistant city managers, who is responsible for an assortment of other operations aligned as a "business team" formalized by city council as "quality government."[6] Reporting directly to the city manager's office demonstrates that the 311 center is designed to serve all internal and external constituents and ensures that its operations do not get entangled in a single department's politics or budget.

Citizen Engagement and Public Outreach

Finding 4—Customer expectations of service providers have dramatically changed in the always connected world, and a customer call center should meet those expectations.

When asked why Hampton decided to implement a 311 system, Assistant City Manager John Eagle responded, "because our citizens wanted it …they didn't ask for it by name, but they told us they wanted better access to information and services that fit with their schedules."

Through its 1998 strategic planning process and annual citizen satisfaction surveys, "the city found that people were growing increasingly frustrated with local government service delivery …in a world where business can be conducted virtually 24 hours a day, local governments continue to operate their services during traditional business hours, often forcing citizens to take time off from work to do business with their city government."[7]

What the city heard from its local population was not encouraging, according to City Manager Jesse Wallace: "We [the Hampton city government] were hearing from our citizens that the city was very difficult. In fact, we were the hardest organization to contact of any that they had to deal with …citizens felt that they had to know as much about our organization as government employees did in order to get anything done, and that was just wrong."

Hampton's 311 service is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; however it took some creative organizational engineering to make this happen. The contact center is open from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. and staffed by customer advocates. From 11:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m., the city's police communications unit steps in to cover the one to three non-emergency calls (such as nuisance wildlife or traffic light malfunctions) that come in during the overnight hours (45 to 60 per month). Because police communications provides this coverage, the city can advertise the 311 call center as a twenty-four-hour operation and increase customer delight. The call center is closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Finding 5—A continuously improving, high-performing customer contact center should be capable of providing answers to questions, initiating requests for service, and connecting citizens with information and services beyond the home jurisdiction.

One of the key outcomes set forth in Hampton's 1998 strategic plan was the "timeliness of city service delivery," which would be illustrated by an improvement in the amount of time it took a city agency to complete a transaction or deliver a service.[8] For many city departments, Hampton's call center is the kick start for a service requested or needed by a resident or business, because the call center's knowledgebase software is integrated into their work order platforms and systems. For example, the 311

system—Frontlink—is tied directly into the work order management system of the city's public works department. Frontlink acts as a Web-based relay system, which allows advocates to enter data into a single application that automatically creates work orders and sends notices to the appropriate project managers. Work orders for other services, including animal control and parks and recreation, are entered directly as well. This relay system overcomes the need to duplicate data entry in another location or agency.

While the primary focus of Hampton's 311 service is obviously the city's departments and services, the knowledgebase increasingly includes FAQs for other agencies and organizations. Citizens often don't or can't differentiate the level of government originating the service that they might need, and when in doubt, they call Hampton's 311 center. According to Hampton's Call Center Manager Elizabeth Nisley, "Even though we don't provide a service, if we have something in the script, we can usually provide an answer. If it's not in the script, we won't tell the caller 'wrong number.' We'll help connect them with the right service."

Finding 6—Creative "guerilla marketing," networked advertising, and grassroots outreach are important components of increasing awareness and use of a customer contact service.

The phrase "guerilla marketing" was coined in the middle 1980s by Jay Conrad Levinson, a management and marketing consultant and author.[9] The conceptual underpinnings of guerilla marketing suggest that there are low-cost and in many cases no-cost ways to market products and services to customers.

Local governments are always on the hunt for innovative ways to market programs and to get the word out to citizens about new and existing services, upcoming deadlines, and more. When the Hampton call center opened in 1999, there was a flurry of press releases and stories about the new system. During the service's second year of operation an insert was included with water bills sent out to households and businesses.

Hampton's 311 call center does not have a dedicated marketing and outreach budget but relies instead on those services that generate a heavy volume of traffic to get the word out to constituents. City departments put "311" in their advertisements because it is in their ongoing interest to ensure that the first line of contact comes through the call center and not directly to the department. For example, the solid waste department includes 311 information in packets delivered to new construction or to new homebuyers who don't have garbage containers. The wastewater department leaves door tags on people's homes that includes 311 information if the residents are not home when they go out. Hampton's drinking water supplier, Waterworks, communicates information about 311 to new customers.

The call center maintains a Web page that includes information about the system as well as a Web-based form to allow Internet users to interface with customer advocates electronically. Other departments (public works, for example) provide an online form, through the call center's system, that allows customers to report missed garbage collections. The codes department includes information on its Web site about contacting the call center. A link to the call center is not immediately obvious on many of city's departmental home pages, however, and adding such links would provide more marketing exposure for the service.

Elizabeth Nisley notes that part of the success and the wide-ranging understanding of 311 in the Hampton community is word-of-mouth. "With as many community meetings as I've been to, there is often a time when someone asks a question about some issue and a person sitting nearby whispers 'call 311.'"

Performance Measurement and Service Provision

Finding 7—Central to ensuring customer delight is a process for managing, and in many cases exceeding, customer expectations.

When a citizen connects with the Hampton 311 contact center, the process of delighting that customer is already in motion. In an era when customers of all kinds have started accepting minimal or even sub-par service as the norm, and when it's rare to connect with a real person on the other end of the phone line, Hampton has made its system as delightful as possible for residents and businesses.

Central to ensuring customer delight is managing expectations and meeting needs within an identified timeline. As the city's system has evolved, Hampton has been very careful to: (1) establish timelines— based on experience—within which departments are

confident that they can get the necessary work done and (2) provide citizens with timelines that give them a window within which to expect a resolution of their issue. Customer delight is achieved when the citizen's needs are met and exceeded—for example, when service delivery occurs in the early portion of the time window provided by a call center advocate. In short, customer delight results from reasonable promises followed up by "overdelivery," or as Nisley put it, "If someone calls us hopping mad because their garbage didn't get picked up, we can tell that person not to worry, just put it out, and a truck will be there in twenty-four hours or less to pick it up …when the truck shows up thirty minutes later and the citizen calls us back amazed, that is customer delight."

Finding 8—Measuring customer delight with the City of Hampton 311 Call Center shines an important light on the effectiveness and continuous improvement of the system.

When a resident's interaction with the 311 center has been concluded, the resident is given the option of completing a brief survey designed to assess the level of satisfaction with the service provided. In the period 2005-2007, the percentage of customers reporting very good to excellent service held fairly steady between 93 and 94 percent. The opportunity for users to comment on service is an option if a person connects by phone or e-mail with 311.

Phone questions are based on a five-point scale (1 = excellent; 5 = poor):

- Please rate your experience with the Call Center?
- How would you rate the service you received today?
- Did the Call Center meet your needs?
- Based on your interaction with the Call Center today, has your impression of city services improved?

Customers e-mailing the call center are given the option of responding to similar questions.

Results from the customer surveys are compiled and comments are transcribed verbatim in reports sent to the city manager's office and to each city council member on a monthly basis for their review.

In addition, a biennial citizen satisfaction survey—commissioned by the city but run by an external firm—includes several questions about 311, providing another measure of the service's performance.

Finding 9—Before, during, and after a disaster, a customer contact system provides invaluable informational services to local residents.

Located along a narrow peninsula surrounded by river systems and the Chesapeake Bay, Hampton is exposed to severe weather emanating from the Atlantic Ocean, especially hurricanes. And nearly five years to the day after the 311 system started, the city was threatened by Isabel, a major category five hurricane that had formed off the African coast as a tropical wave and reached peak winds of 165 miles per hour. Isabel started to turn toward the United States. As landfall became certain, emergency operations centers (EOCs) up and down the eastern seaboard lit up. Local governments and citizens began to prepare for what was to become a major meteorological event and a costly natural disaster.

When Isabel roared ashore, it was as a category two hurricane, packing top sustained winds of 105 miles per hour and pushing ahead of it a storm surge that would affect coastal areas from North Carolina to Delaware. The forward motion of the storm took it through southeastern Virginia and the Hampton Roads area, where some of the worst damage and loss of life occurred. The city of Hampton was not spared: it suffered major damage as thousands of trees were toppled; the entire city lost power; and several coastal neighborhoods were destroyed.

A few days before the storm's landfall, the city ordered mandatory evacuations of flood-prone areas. In the days that followed, the city's 311 call center would see record call volumes, which would not begin to decrease until four weeks after the event. According to local resident and business owner John Ishon, the 311 service may have paid for itself in both the short and long term because "the whole thing might have been worth it, just for what the contact center was able to do during the aftermath of Isabel."

Immediately before and for several weeks after Isabel, Hampton's 311 call center was in an emergency operational mode. In the wake of the storm, power was out across the region and a host of issues needed emergency and non-emergency attention. The lack of news and information access began to alarm local citizens. Television was unavailable to almost everyone, and radio stations, which were off the air for a period of time, were able to offer only limited information. But the call center continued to operate using an emergency generator. And while some residents lacked

phone service, many of those who continued to have telephone access relied on the call center for updated and accurate information.

During the hurricane emergency, the 311 call center also proved to be a valuable asset for Hampton's 911 communications center, which was being tested as never before. "Hampton's 911 center was able to focus on true emergency calls for service for police, fire, and EMS. Without 311, the extraordinary volume of calls would have ended up in 911—which could have effectively crippled their operations as they faced their own challenges of radio and phone communications."[10]

Even during the worst of the hurricane's winds and water, Hampton's call center never went silent, which helped to quell rumors and to get timely, accurate information to citizens.

Hampton's investment in a 311 call center demonstrated its value during another emergency as several hundred evacuees from Hurricane Katrina relocated to the city. The social services department and various nonprofit organizations orchestrated efforts to help people rebuild their lives. As these efforts unfolded, the call center provided an information outlet for evacuees trying to learn about the availability of services and served as a conduit among the multiple organizations helping Katrina victims.

In addition to its exposure to severe storm systems, Hampton lies in close proximity to a nuclear power plant and several major military installations—any of which could experience an emergency that might affect the city. Based on the performance of the 311 call center during Hurricane Isabel, the city leadership came to recognize the incredible value of the service during emergencies and has opted to move its operation to a hardened location—a move that is expected to occur in 2011 or 2012.

Staff Training

Finding 10—A robust, continuously refreshed, and improved knowledge management system is central to a successful customer contact center.

The motto for Hampton's 311 call center is "just one call does it all" and that is exactly what the program is designed to do. Hampton's strategic plan revealed that customers were increasingly frustrated about trying to figure out who to call when an issue needed the city's attention. In the minds of citizens, the traditional "blue book" pages of the phone book had outlived their usefulness. And when compared with the customer service received from many private-sector organizations, connecting with the city sometimes required multiple calls to a variety of offices, few of which had customer service as their primary mission.

Central to the center's success is a robust knowledge management system that is in perpetual motion, keeping up with changes in city policies, procedures, contacts, services, and initiatives that citizens call about. As Hampton's system was being developed in 1999, the call center project team expended considerable effort in gathering statistical data, call volumes, and information about frequently asked questions (FAQs) from city departments. Based on that information, the team developed knowledgebases that were then loaded into the 311 knowledge management system software.

Over time, the knowledge management system has grown to include about 4,300 frequently asked questions, with scripted responses. The system is continuously growing and undergoing revision as new issues are raised and old procedures updated. Hampton's information manager ensures that the FAQs the customer advocates use are current and offer appropriate information for callers.

Finding 11—A successful knowledge management system needs an effective information manager.

Only two new positions were created when Hampton established the 311 call center. The first was a call center manager position to oversee the operation. The second, an information manager, was established to provide liaison with the city's departments and to ensure that the call center's knowledge management system was maintained with up-to-date information.

The information manager provides a "just one call does it all" liaison for the city's departments and service providers to get information to the call center. As the connective tissue between the call center and the rest of the city, the information manager maintains and refreshes the knowledgebase used by the call center's advocates by periodically requesting updates to FAQs from city departments. The backbone of the knowledge management system, updated FAQs, ensures that any informational and service delivery changes are current and accurate. When departments make changes in the period between FAQ updates, they can make one call to the 311 center's information manager and be assured that the updates will

be made immediately in the knowledge management system. The information manager also takes the lead in scripting new responses to questions that are asked by citizens and business but are not yet part of the knowledge management system.

Prediction is the holy grail of customer service, especially in the private sector, where sales, profits, and customer loyalty are often determined by understanding what customers will want or need. In Hampton's 311 call center, the information manager is tasked with "predicting" on a daily basis the types of calls that may come. By staying on top of local news in the region's print and electronic media, the information manager can prepare the call center's advocates for any influx of calls that may come as a result and quickly make adjustments to scripted responses. Similarly, departments can help the information manager prepare advocates for an influx of calls by forwarding public communications and press releases that may be about to enter the local news cycle.

"Sometimes, especially during budget season or other times when there is extended news coverage of a particular issue or when assessments go out, we know to expect calls," says DJ Russel, the 311 call center's information manager. "People will want to know when the next budget hearing is going to take place or who they can talk to about their assessment."

Undoubtedly, having a single person dedicated to updating the knowledge management system and connecting with departments prior to major announcements helps Hampton's system stay current and relevant. Russell noted that she is "amazed" at how many 311 systems don't have information managers and how many require departments to input FAQs and scripted responses directly into the knowledge management system. Hampton's approach is to alleviate some of that burden on departments by centralizing the updating function in a single effective position.

Methodology and List of Study Participants

The author of this report conducted interviews with nineteen individuals familiar with the city of Hampton's planning, start-up, and current operation of a 311 customer contact center. The author wishes to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

Mary Bunting, Assistant City Manager

John Eagle, Assistant City Manager

Kevin Gallagher, Supervisor, Public Works Department

Mary Hicks, Specialist, 311 Call Center

Dacia Hollis, Web Developer, Information Technology Department

John Ishon, Resident and Local Business Owner

Jim Kearn, Former Manager, Animal Control Office

Ross Kearny, Former Mayor and Current City Council Member

James Laster, WAE Advocate, 311 Call Center

Angela Leary, City Council Member

Mike McHenry, Resident

Ritchie McKeithen, Former City Assessor

Elizabeth Nisley, Manager, 311 Call Center

DJ Russell, Information Manager, 311 Call Center

Steve Shapiro, Director, Codes and Compliance

Lori Thomas, Team Leader, 311 Call Center

Jesse Wallace, City Manager

Symphoni Wiggins, Advocate, 311 Call Center

Jim Wilson, Director, Parks and Recreation

Notes

In addition to the sources cited in the following notes, the author drew on two reports from Lagan Inc., accessible at www.lagan.com: *Cutting Edge City Strives for Seamless Integration* (2005) and *Leveraging 311 Call Centers for Disaster Preparedness and Response: The City of Hampton* (2006).

Endnotes

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2   City of Hampton, *The 1998 Hampton Strategic Plan.* Available at www.hampton.gov.
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9   Jay Conrad Levinson, *Guerilla Marketing,* Houghton Mifflin, 1984 (most recent version is the 4th edition).
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The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide.

ICMA National Study of 311 and Customer Service Technology

With funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, ICMA is conducting the first ever national study on 311 and related customer service technology used by local governments in the United States. The study will explore the benefits of and barriers to local governments adopting integrated systems for customer service. A national survey of local governments, together with information collected from a series of in-depth case studies, will help create a portrait of how local governments are using such systems to respond to citizen needs and build the local government-constituent relationship. When viewed together, the survey results and findings from the case study research will present current practices and successful implementation of coordinated systems for customer service.

For more information about the study, contact...

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