



Lambeth Council optimises productivity and asset utilisation with OPTI-TIME

The London Borough of Lambeth (Lambeth), one of 14 local authorities making up inner London, covers an area of approximately 10.5 square miles with around 270,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most densely populated boroughs..



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Sean Richings,
Business Support Manager
Lambeth Council

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Within Lambeth there are 67 contact centre advisors and 80 housing officers all of which among other duties, provide phone or in-person assistance relating to homeless services. The contact centre advisors are responsible for performing the initial assessment of the individual and where further help is required, they make an appointment with one of the 80 housing officers.



Appointments used to be scheduled using Microsoft Outlook, but with 60 contact centre staff attempting to arrange appointments for 80 housing officers it meant that double-bookings, missed bookings and data entry errors were a regular and unfortunate occurrence. In addition to this there was no way to notify or remind the citizen of their appointment and as such “no-shows” at allotted appointment times were common. In addition to appointments, the booking of meeting rooms was also an issue. Rooms

would be booked out for full days at a time as the contact centre staff were never fully aware when a room would be required, for how long, or if at all. With meeting rooms being a scarce and costly resource, such practice was wasting both time and money for Lambeth.

25% of the individuals dealt with by the unit are aged between 16 and 19 years old where mobile technologies are the communication method of choice. Unfortunately, Lambeth were not taking advantage of this method to contact customers, missing out on a big opportunity to improve service levels and service efficiencies.

Looking to increase efficiencies within the team and provide a better, more reliable service to Lambeth’s vulnerable citizens, Sean Richings, Business Support Manager for the Council, wanted a modern



case study

appointment scheduling and web booking system to streamline their appointment setting process.

Sean had previously seen an OPTI-TIME trial at Southwark Council and was impressed with the appointment setting system from Xmbrace.

When the time came for Lambeth Council to go out to tender for their own project, Xmbrace as well as three other companies, all put in a bid. "We chose Xmbrace because none of the rival bidders could offer a solution as adaptable as OPTI-TIME," commented Sean Richings. "In the end it



didn't even come down to money – it was the product that met our brief." OPTI-TIME was implemented in September 2010 and since then Lambeth has already started seeing the benefits. No-shows have decreased by 35% as a result of accurate appointment setting and text messages being sent when the appointment is made and again as reminders leading up to the appointment time.

Lambeth have also seen significant improvement in productivity around their homelessness service with the total time saved in dealing with homelessness cases alone being equivalent to just under 2 full time employees.

"We have a fully loaded overhead expenditure of around £125 an hour which includes the office space and the time of the contact centre and housing staff," explains Sean. "Having people sitting there doing nothing wastes money, so we had to find a



solution that allowed us to book appointments and provided us with visibility of the team's availability to meet citizens. We kicked off this project as part of our 'spend to save' initiative. OPTI-TIME has helped us by adding value straight away. The Xmbrace team were very responsive and listened to our requirements throughout the implementation process, and made sensible suggestions in ways that we hadn't thought about.

In addition, we can now control our room space and usage far more effectively as meeting rooms can now be 'multi-tasked' and used more efficiently. If there are only a handful of appointments during a day we can reduce the number of housing officers needed instead of having them all working when they are not required. Similarly during a busy period, we can react quickly and put another housing officer on the schedule. Staff are better utilised, less appointments are missed and we have improved appointment visibility and availability."

Lambeth Council is now looking to the future and how it can take the cost saving initiative even further, with a roll out to other parts of the council being considered. Sean concludes, "We are now looking to move out of the building we are currently using as it is expensive and a smaller space would suit us fine now. Using OPTI-TIME means that we are maximising our room usage – less is more after all."

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