

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

E-payments Solution Yields London Council £1m Monthly Revenue

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The London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham has implemented an e-payments service for its residents to pay council tax and parking fines online and through automated telephone payments. Take-up from the public has exceeded expectations since it went live last year and the borough is the first in the UK to reach £1m a month in revenues being channelled through its e-payments solution. Transaction costs for routine payments have been reduced and 1,000 employee hours a year previously needed to process manual payments have been saved.

Situation

Serving 162,000 residents, the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham is an all-purpose local authority in a densely populated area of west London. It collects £70m a year in council tax from its residents and is responsible for providing education, housing, environmental and social services, as well as enforcing parking controls.

Hammersmith & Fulham is required to respond to the national e-government agenda by offering its residents access to an agreed list of public services by 2005. The council's existing systems were unable to deliver the project so it took this deficiency as an opportunity to implement not only an e-payments solution, but also one that would generate cost savings and efficiency improvements throughout all stages of income processing. Hammersmith & Fulham wanted to offer residents the opportunity to pay council tax and parking fines by using a touch-tone telephone or over the Internet, as both services generated a large number of transactions that were costly and burdensome to process. The authority decided to provide a multi-channel payment facility to its internal users and directly to its clients, which built on its existing payment collection infrastructure.

Solution

The council awarded the contract for the e-payments solution to independent software vendor, Radius Computer Services. Its product, RadiusICON, is a state of the art, multi-channel e-payments solution that enables customers to pay bills electronically by phone or over the Internet. Radius came in ahead of its competitors because of its reputation for customer service, speed of implementation and deployment of modern Microsoft technology. The RadiusICON cashiers system was already in use in the council's two cash offices for payments of over 20 different types of income. A substantial number of these payments were being made by credit and debit card so it was an obvious progression to automate this process by utilising the integrated card facilities of the system. The solution also extends card

Solution Overview

Customer Profile

Hammersmith and Fulham council serves a population of 162,000 people in west London with a range of local government services.

Business Situation

The council required an e-payments service to enable residents to pay taxes and to buy local services through automated telephone payments and via the Web.

Solution

Multi-channel payments facility using intranet, Internet and IVR access using Microsoft technology.

Benefits

- Around £1m revenue a month via e-payments
- Reduced employee workload
- Lower transaction costs
- Meets e-government targets
- Convenient for residents to pay taxes and parking fines.

Software and Services

Microsoft® SQL Server™
Microsoft Windows® 2000

Partners

Radius Computer Services



payments to a wide range of services within the organisation via intranet, Internet and automated telephone access using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology.

Microsoft® SQL Server™, a Microsoft .NET Enterprise Server, is the data management and analysis backbone of the RadiusICON solution. The technology reduces operational overheads, improves resilience, eliminates the duplication of data and minimises errors. SQL Server provides extensive database programming capabilities built on Web standards. Rich XML and Internet standard support gives the local authority the ability to store and retrieve data in XML format easily with built-in stored procedures. With scale up and scale out capabilities, SQL Server meets the needs of demanding e-government targets.

To underline its commitment to high quality service and security the council has implemented a secure server network to protect card details processed within the system and a secure socket layer for all transactions across its network. The e-payments system is highly flexible and enables a customised front end for Call Centre users in particular, both via intranet and IVR modules.

Benefits

More Accessible Service For Residents

When the council produced its first Implementing e-Government (IEG) statement last year it was able to quote immediate improvements on services for residents. These included a 13 per cent year-on-year fall in calls to the authority's local taxation call centre, a two-minute time saving per customer at the cashier tills, and monthly savings of £1,500 in bank service charges.

"Once we had implemented the initial e-payment channels for the core funds, all departments saw the benefits of implementing an e-income solution," says Julian Hubbersgilt, e-Payments Project Manager for Hammersmith & Fulham. "Over the past year, we have had departments queuing to join in. By the end of this year we expect to not only automate all payment transactions, but deliver them through a variety of channels—not just the Internet, but also the call centre and the very popular IVR channel. This will encourage their use by residents, yielding efficiency and cost savings for the council."

Revenue Over The Internet

In a public spending environment where every pound counts, the council has achieved an impressive level of savings just months after going live. The level of e-payments for council tax and parking fines is averaging 8,000 separate transactions a month. Together these yield £900,000 every four weeks, with levels of over £1m being achieved in peak months. Automated telephone payments for parking fines have reached 400 a week with 30 a week via the Internet. These figures, although still a small percentage of the total raised by council tax and parking fines, are well in excess of all expectations. Current savings in bank charges council-wide have now risen to £2,000 a month, as high payment volumes have enabled the Council to negotiate reduced transaction charges with its Merchant Provider

Government Recognition

A year on from the 2001 IEG statement, Hammersmith & Fulham is reaping the benefits of implementing a system that is actually used by citizens, rather than just a tick-in-the-box approach to e-payments. The implementation has brought widespread recognition for the council from neighbouring local authorities and from the government. "It is one of the reasons why our council tax officers were recognised for delivering a three-star service by the government's Best Value inspectors, which is the highest standard a council can achieve. Anything that makes paying easier contributes to a high tax collection rate and helps keep

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down the level of council tax we all have to pay," says Councillor Andrew Slaughter, Leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council.

Customer Service Improves

Hammersmith & Fulham residents now have more options open to them to pay their taxes and fines. All payments—electronic or cash—are taken as part of an all-encompassing e-income management system. With seamless links to all other back-office systems, there is a considerable boost to efficiency and an estimated reduction of 1,000 employee hours a year, because the need for manual processing of payments has been reduced. As more people pay by automated telephone access or over the Web, calls from residents to call centres about payments have dropped by 40 per cent from more than 2,000 a month to 1,200. The number of abandoned calls when customers give up because they can't get through has dropped by 80 per cent. "This allows call centre employees to concentrate on trickier questions and problem solving for the public, thereby offering a better service," says David Taylor, Parking Manager, Hammersmith & Fulham. "It also takes stress off our people and fewer customers can claim they had no easy opportunity to pay their fine within the time period allowed. Instead they can claim a 50 per cent discount for prompt payment."

Rollout Council-Wide

Hammersmith & Fulham is seeking to extend e-payments to other council services including Housing Rents, Service Charges and Registrar's Services. More immediately, it will be used for divisional returns within the authority, petty cash processing and bank reconciliation as part of an integrated facility. Future developments also include Internet user authentication for clients to access their council tax statements and account details. "The successful e-payments site is just the first of a whole range of council services that will soon be available on-line," says Slaughter. "It is quick and easy to use and I would urge residents to give our e-payments service a go."

The use of Microsoft technology in Hammersmith & Fulham shows above all that local government can react quickly to the targets set by central government, improve operational efficiency and save taxpayers money, while offering a better service to all residents of a borough.

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products or services, call the Microsoft UK Contact Centre on 08706 010100. To access information via the World Wide Web, go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/uk>

For more information about Radius's products and services, call 020 8844 2141. To access information via the World Wide Web, go to: <http://www.radiusplc.co.uk>

For more information about the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham's services, visit the Web site at: <http://www.lbhf.gov.uk>

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