

Customizability is just the ticket for City of Sioux Falls

Taxpayer-driven budgets mean that state and local governments often have to make do with what they have rather than what they want – or need. But the City of Sioux Falls, South Dakota discovered that the customizability inherent in the PowerHelp CRM software from Vertical Solutions not only enabled it to improve its IT service desk, but also to automate its citizen complaint department, its police internal affairs system, as well as a health department application.

Dana Evans joined the City of Sioux Falls as an IT analyst in 2002. Each analyst at the city is responsible for a set number of departments, and one of her responsibilities is the IT help desk. The help desk supports 1,100 city employees, and logs more than 650 incidents per month in the slow season, and close to 900 a month during busy times of year. Her first task upon joining the city's IT department was to find an IT service management solution that could help the city not only improve its response to service-desk calls, but to track IT inventory. And it had to be affordable to fit into the city's limited budget.

"We had a difficult time tracking our IT inventory, and because we are a city government, we need to be able to track everything that was purchased via a PO," says Evans. The 4,000 items encompass just about everything in the city's IT department, from computers, printers, and handheld devices to network cards.

After researching several systems, Evans recommended PowerHelp CRM from Cincinnati, OH-based Vertical Solutions, a developer of CRM software solutions that offer in-depth functionality for support, field service, sales/marketing automation, and mobile environments. "With PowerHelp, we can tie our help-desk information with our asset management information, which is very beneficial."

PowerHelp CRM also offers the city a more sophisticated way to manage its IT incidents as well as powerful reporting capabilities. "Each year, we have to justify our positions and demonstrate exactly what our technicians and analysts are doing," says Evans. "With PowerHelp CRM, we can pull the information we need and generate the reports that show our workload."

Because the PowerHelp system has an automated incident-logging feature, end users can generate their own tickets. "That helps keep our agents more productive," says Evans. "They are working on resolving incidents rather than logging calls." The system also automatically escalates incidents, which means that Evans no longer has to monitor the calls and issue email reminders to agents.

Evans' team plans on deploying the PowerMobile module of the PowerHelp CRM software packages, which will be used by its field technicians to create and close calls in the field. "Our inventory moves around so much, and our field techs need to be able to go to a site and find out exactly what is in each location," says Evans. "With PowerHelp, we can track it online, rather than processing stacks of paper."

While PowerHelp has helped the city get a handle on its inventory and streamline its IT service desk, the flexibility and customizability of the tool has helped Evans find multiple uses for it within the city. For example, the city used a homegrown software tool to manage and track its citizen complaints, which run the gamut from snow plowing

problems to parking issues. The system was very limited, offered no reporting or escalation, and required one person to monitor a single email inbox and generate tickets for each incident. "The department asked me if PowerHelp could be customized to manage it, and I said yes!" says Evans. She tailored the program to the department's needs, and now citizens can log their complaints online. While volume varies dramatically, issues are now routed automatically to the right person, each of whom is responsible for responding within three days. "PowerHelp was a huge productivity enhancer for us," says Evans. "Because the system is now automated, we are able to respond a lot faster to citizen complaints."

Evans' successes with the Citizen Complaint department spurred calls from other groups, including the city's police and health departments. Evans customized PowerHelp to automate the police department's reporting system. Rather than tracking paper-based incidents by walking from desk to desk, the department can enter information via PowerHelp. Supervisors can log into the system at any time and find the status of incidents. A new implementation in the department of health will enable patients to communicate in a secure fashion with the city. "The city wanted to enable online chats with patients, but we needed to make sure they were secure enough to comply with HIPAA requirements," says Evans. "We will use PowerHelp to set up a portal where patients log in using a secure username and password so they can communicate directly with clinical staff."

For Evans and the city of Sioux Falls, the flexibility of PowerHelp CRM has enabled the city to stretch its resources and use one tool across multiple departments. "The system is very easy to use, and it's customizable," says Evans. "We push it! It's all one program, but I can modify it for each user."

Because the system is intuitive and easy to use, Evans has not had to do a lot of formal training. Instead, she uses the opening page of the system as a user instruction manual, spelling out steps that they must take in order to open tickets. "The system is intuitive, and each user can find the information they need quickly and easily," says Evans. "We are able to track a lot more information, and respond faster to our end-user and citizen requests. For us, PowerHelp CRM works, and offered a great return on investment."