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— Tom Page
Executive Director for WIN 211

WIN 211

inContact Selected as the First Hosted System to Support a Statewide 2-1-1 Intelligent Call Handling Platform

Washington State is the first state in the country to interconnect multiple, independently operated call centers under one common call handling and data management system. The state is also on track to deliver one of the most rapid statewide implementation schedules among all 2-1-1 projects to date – only 10 months to “bring up” eight geographically dispersed call centers, observes Tom Page, executive director.

Washington Information Network 2-1-1 (WIN 211) is the non-profit organization tasked with implementing the 2-1-1 call center solution in the state of Washington to provide quick and easy access to information about health and human services to the general public. WIN 211’s challenge was to define system requirements, manage the competitive evaluation process and select a vendor that could interconnect eight call centers across two states (Washington and Oregon) into a single, cohesive information service system.

The Requirements

WIN 211 is a group represented by more than 30 organizations, including United Way, several key state agencies, local community action programs and committed private individuals. Since each call center in the 2-1-1 network

is independently operated and has an existing telephone system, a key technical requirement was the ability to interoperate with many types of existing phone equipment. “Purchasing new equipment was a major obstacle for our smaller partners,” said Page.

Another requirement was a flexible call handling system to rapidly scale up in the event of a disaster, then scale back down during normal times, and route calls to any agent working from a call center or from home. Specifically, if one call center is down due to an emergency situation or all representatives are simply busy, the system must be able to automatically route the caller to the next available representative, even if that person is sitting at a different regional center. Each call center representative has access to a shared database of social services information, which enables the rep to respond to callers from any region.

One of the situations the WIN 211 group considered when writing their proposal was a widespread pandemic flu outbreak. “You don’t want all of your workers congregated in a call center,” explained Page. “You want the option of having agents work from home.”

The proposal also had several ease-of-use requirements for both the agent interface and the supervisor management interface. “We wanted to keep the training as simple as possible,” he added.

The Selection Process

The WIN 211 selection process “was a rather unusual and intensive review process,” acknowledged Page. It involved multiple teams of specialists assigned to a specific review step, each team working independently and ranking each vendor. Pricing wasn’t taken into consideration until the end of the process and only then did the teams compare notes on their independent rankings. Five vendors responded to the WIN 211 request for proposal (RFP).

The first step was a stringent technical evaluation. A team of five technical experts reviewed each vendor proposal against the WIN 211 RFP requirements. “inContact was ranked the highest in its overall ability to meet our technical requirements,” said Page.

Next, a team of operational experts reviewed the features, functions and user interfaces of the three remaining vendors by conducting site visits and sitting through lengthy vendor presentations. These teams were made up of call center agents, team supervisors, operations directors and IT directors. “Again, inContact was the top choice,” revealed Page.

On the final day of the review process the various team representatives compared notes. At this time the evaluators finally learned the financials associated with each offering. “inContact had been ranked #1 overall at each step,” said Page. “But at the final stage, when we reviewed the financials of each vendor’s

proposal, it was clear The inContact solution was more cost effective than the competing PBX vendors’ solutions.” For example, explained Page, the leading premises-based PBX contender required a \$640,000 upfront investment. The inContact setup costs were over six times lower than that.

Operational Benefits of inContact

According to Page, WIN 211 took the position that “we wanted the best system to meet our needs, regardless of cost.” If the preferred system had cost more than the organization had budgeted, “then our team would have figured out how to secure additional funding,” he added. With inContact, the WIN team was not put in that position. In fact, with the low upfront costs and reasonable monthly operational costs, WIN could apply its remaining dollars in other areas, such as emergency backup systems for all their call centers.

In terms of training and usability, the call center experts team found that “inContact was easy to learn, essentially eliminating the need for extensive training,” reported Page. The inTouch management tool had strong appeal among the supervisors as well. “With its call recording and remote monitoring capabilities, our supervisors were speculating how they could be anywhere – at the pool, on the coast - and still supervise their teams,” joked Page.

When the full system is in place and the

public is educated on 2-1-1’s availability, Page estimates 720,000 calls per year will be handled by a 75-seat, 2-1-1 response team.

The WIN 211 team took some chances by selecting non-traditional technology, acknowledged Page. “We are the first to go with a hosted solution for our call handling platform. However, we are also the first state to deliver – in record time – a comprehensive, statewide, very affordable 2-1-1 system with multiple call centers connected by a common call management system and a common database platform. Our call handling and data management system is linked together under a common managed platform. I know people around the country will be paying extremely close attention when we experience our first disaster.”

About WIN 211

Washington Information Network 2-1-1 (WIN 211) is a nonprofit corporation charged by state law to study, develop, implement and support Washington State’s statewide 2-1-1 services. WIN 211 is a collaboration of more than 30 organizations, including United Way, several state agencies, local community action programs and committed private individuals. The team’s goal is to ensure that every Washington citizen has immediate access to health and human services information, emergency and disaster response information, and public health information. To learn more visit www.win211.org.



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