SITUATION
School admissions period generates extreme demand for customer support.

Every year there is competition for school places in Birmingham. The council sees a huge spike in call volumes during the school admissions period from parents seeking information about their child’s application and school place allocation. In particular, there is high demand from wanting to appeal the outcome, and, when parents can’t get through, there’s risk of reputational damage.

The extra contact significantly increases the strain on staff resources and call centre costs. For example, on the day offers were made for secondary school places in 2016, 18 members of Customer Services staff were faced with 3,000 calls. The council needed to increase online applications (which had hovered around 83% for years) and provide better access to the information parents wanted.

SOLUTION
Targeted email shifts people online and reduces avoidable phone contact.

After scrutinising the needs and expectations of parents during the school admissions period, the council identified ways they could improve their services and reduce customer contact, making changes for the 2017 and 2018 admissions periods.

Channel shift measures to reduce paper applications and move people online for information included improved messaging via the contact centre’s interactive voice response (IVR), better communication with schools, targeted email newsletters to parents who had submitted applications online, and social media outreach.

Email updates delivered through the GovDelivery Communications Cloud kept parents updated on the process. For example, the council sent an email to 14,107 parents one week before the 2018 secondary school offer day to provide clear guidance ahead of the day. The email achieved a 99% delivery rate and high open rate of 65%.
BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

RESULTS

72% reduction in customer calls on school offer day reduces pressure on teams and call costs.

The council’s proactive use of email updates to keep parents informed meant any questions about the application and appeals process were answered either in the email or by driving people to the website. This avoided the need for telephone enquiries, reducing the pressure on Customer Services and the School Admissions team on offer day (and the days that followed). Consequently the council was able to focus on its casework, manage appeals more efficiently and save on call centre costs.

Results for 2018 secondary school offer day:

There was a 52% reduction in the number of calls coming through (“calls offered”) on the 2018 offer day in comparison to 2016, thanks to the provision of the right info in advance over email. The number of calls requiring assistance from staff (“calls answered”) also decreased by 72% in comparison to 2016, indicating that the IVR provided many callers with the info they needed.

Given that the average cost of taking a customer phone call is £2.59*, the 72% reduction in calls answered (~1,650 fewer calls) equates to an approximate saving of £4,275 on offer day alone. The reduced demand over offer day and the following week indicates a total potential saving of nearly £13,400 on call costs in comparison to 2016 - before measures were introduced.

*Based on SOCITM’s channel value benchmarking.

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<th>MARCH</th>
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<th>2018</th>
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(3 years of stats)
BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY OF BIRMINGHAM’S EMAIL OUTREACH
Powered by the GovDelivery Communications Cloud

304k EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

40+ SUBSCRIPTION TOPICS (B2C AND B2B)

3.7m EMAILS SENT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

28% OF LOCAL POPULATION SUBSCRIBED (equivalent numbers)

57.2% AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT RATE

39.7% “NETWORK IMPACT” (subscriber numbers boosted by cross-promotion via other nearby councils in GovDelivery Network: Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Solihull, Coventry, and Stoke)

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