

Case study: Sarasota County Utilities



Situation

Address information captured in the Sarasota County Utilities customer service call center wasn't being verified until after a bill was returned, impacting communication with customers and compromising department perception as well as creating extra work for a department already at operational capacity.

Solution

Customer address data is now verified in real-time as it is captured with QAS Pro to ensure only verified contact information is submitted to the department's database.

Results

All customer communication is now received on time, cash flow has improved and the agency saves time, money and budget on customer communication.

“Every utility department has a problem with bad addresses – it’s not a matter of investigating the issue but rather investigating a solution.”

Tony Gipe
Manager of Utilities Facilities
Sarasota County Utilities

Incorrect Customer Address Data Causes a Ripple Effect

At county utility departments address information is relied on for customer billing and communication. A single bad address can set off a ripple effect of operational consequences. For example, when customers receive bills too close to their due date or worse, not at all, the call center is flooded with service calls. When mail is returned to the office staff members spend time researching address details and then re-working the documents originally sent to customers. Additionally, when customer bills aren't paid utility cash flow is impacted.

The Sarasota County Utilities department, headquartered in Sarasota, FL, serves more than 200,000 county residents and distributes about 80,000 bills each month. As postal authority standards have become more stringent in recent years seemingly minor errors in address data were resulting in more and more stacks of returned mail. In light of staff reductions and general budget cuts, as well as customer service concerns, failing to invoice customers combined with the time spent researching and re-working documents was not an optimal process. The stacks of returned mail didn't just represent wasted postage; they translated into operational

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roadblocks and the potential for unhappy customers.

Tony Gipe, Manager of Utilities Facilities at the Sarasota County Utilities, is responsible for the management of the utility's customer information system. He knew it would be more effective to verify addresses prior to using them in customer communication but the utility's current mailing vendor didn't offer a real-time option.

Experian QAS' Address Data Quality Solution

Gipe engaged Experian QAS in order to deploy the point-of-entry customer data verification that the Sarasota County utilities group desperately needed.

Experian QAS' products capture, validate, cleanse, standardize and enrich customer contact information and work with any application used to accept address data. At Sarasota County Utilities, Gipe selected QAS Pro to verify data as call center representatives enter it into SunGard Public Sector's local government application.

“If something is going to improve customer service it is worth looking into. Look at validating addresses right up front, while you have the customer, rather than after the fact. This can solve a lot of headaches and problems before they even start.”

Now when call center staffers take address information from customers, QAS Pro verifies that data in real-time against official postal authority records. The unique address capture methodology of this tool makes the entire data entry process faster and nearly eliminates the possibility of misspellings, typos and other common human errors. Employees are prompted to ask for forgotten apartment or suite numbers, street directionals and other address data details that impact deliverability – the details at the root of Sarasota County Utilities returned mail problem. QAS Pro works wherever an employee may need to capture an address in order to prevent these errors. Call center representatives now get customer address information right on the first try.

Gipe knew that Experian QAS was the solution his operation called for and considering Experian QAS' partner status with SunGard he did not have to investigate other vendors or initiate an RFP process. Instead, he piloted QAS Pro with two call center employees who later provided positive feedback on their experiences with the product. Gipe decided to purchase and then rolled QAS Pro out to all the Sarasota County Utilities call center workstations. Experian QAS provided onsite training to the wider group and within thirty minutes of that training everyone was capturing and verifying address data with QAS Pro.

'It's All About Improving Customer Service'

Gipe has seen a dramatic drop in returned customer correspondence and a correlating decrease in the volume of related inquiries in the Sarasota County Utilities call center. Seasonal county residents or newcomers – people who traditionally don't know or forget important address data elements – no longer present a challenge. Call center employees can work with customers with these issues to arrive at a full, complete and verified address, guaranteeing that initial, monthly, and final bills as well as new service requests are promptly processed.

Gipe has been so pleased with the product and level of support from Experian QAS that he has suggested the solution to other county operations. “If something is going to improve customer service it is worth looking into,” Gipe said. “Look at validating addresses right up front, while you have the customer, rather than after the fact. This can solve a lot of headaches and problems before they even start.”

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