



CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

Increasing flexibility, speed and approval in the “ungovernment experience”

It’s a scenario occurring on a daily basis across the country: Constituents visit their county government agency only to face frustration. Palm Beach County Tax Collector Anne Gannon understands the challenges surrounding the modern government agency, including the unfavorable reputation. That’s why her two mantras are “the ungovernment experience” and “serving you.” Gannon adds that their motto is that, “We’d love for [the customer] to have a smile on their face when they write us a check.” The secret to getting that smile, however, is excellent customer service.

That’s why since the beginning of her term in 2006, she has shepherded her office through advancements to deliver on this goal. Her vision along with the use of Aumentum technology has helped her succeed in fostering community education, earning higher customer ratings and even nurturing a better work environment for her employees.

THE CHALLENGES: GAINING PUBLIC TRUST AND AN OUTDATED AGENCY

Gannon knew that forging deeper trust between the public and her office began with starting a dialogue. “Our biggest challenge was education. It’s a continuous process to educate the public about how the tax structure works, what the Florida statutes govern, and that if [the public] doesn’t pay their taxes, we have no control over it through legislature,” she said.

Internally, there was no shortage of challenges. “We actually have eight lines of business. We’re a little different than most county treasurers or tax collectors in other states. They don’t

issue driver’s licenses, titles and registration,” Gannon explained, adding that new legislation required her agency to start providing services traditionally linked with the DMV. “Even though our property taxes are the highest collections that we do, they don’t really take a lot of time—driver’s license issuing does.” To gain greater efficiencies for situations like these, she knew she had to modernize her agency to better manage all eight lines.

However, the agency hadn’t changed in over 25 years. Navigating their previous system was difficult; “We weren’t able to manage or seek information,” Gannon explained. Further, she wanted to facilitate payments by having an electronic option.

With an updated system, she hoped the agency would be able to support more efficient service—in turn minimizing confusion, customer dissatisfaction and the long lines to which the agency was accustomed. Once a solid process was in place, Gannon wanted to continue to nurture success, asking herself, “Do we create the kind of atmosphere that allows our place to fail, and what do we need to do to change that attitude?” After making adjustments, she’d still ask, “Is this the best way to provide service?” Understanding that errors are costly to their own customers, the taxpayers, she wanted an ironclad system to eliminate errors and ensure they wouldn’t be repeated.

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS WITH AUMENTUM

Changing technology inherently involves a learning curve and reshaping office processes to accommodate a new system. Gannon’s staff

PALM BEACH COUNTY AT A GLANCE

SIZE

659,000 parcels of property, the largest land county east of the Mississippi River

POPULATION

1,320,134 in 2014—the third-most populous county in Florida, including both the state’s richest and poorest residents

RESPONSIBILITIES

Tax management and collection for about 140 districts and the school board; issuing vehicle titles, registration and drivers licenses

at Palm Beach County would discover that “The program has more options and capabilities than we even dreamed of.” That’s why it proved critical that Aumentum collaborated directly with her eight-person tax team that would manage the technology on a day-to-day basis.

Indeed, they experienced a symbiotic relationship. “Thomson Reuters has been very receptive to suggestions,” said Gannon.

“The Aumentum team has been with us from the beginning,” she said. “They’ve been very patient.” Her team made great strides with a partner that has “always been very helpful and very professional” in their interactions.

With their new solution, they enjoy an integrated cashiering system. This allows for a one-stop shop so customers can pay their property taxes, tangible taxes and bed tax, complete their vehicle registration, or even get their alligator or fishing license while they’re at it.

Today about 90 percent of her office’s processes use Aumentum software for property tax payment. Gannon stated, “It has enabled us to collect taxes more efficiently and to remit them to the districts that we collect on behalf of much more quickly than we used to,” adding that they’ve become adept at moving people through lines in a new, painless process.

THE RESULTS: INCREASED EFFICIENCY, HAPPY EMPLOYEES, HAPPIER CUSTOMERS

Now that her team enjoys a simplified tax collection process, Gannon has been able to direct her efforts toward nurturing her employees and turning her attention to value-added activities. Employees are rewarded and recognized for contributing to excellent service. In addition, the office continues to promote constituent education, achieving success in their award-winning driver’s license programs aimed at first-time driver education. Palm Beach County’s programs have since become a model for other tax collectors in Florida.

Palm Beach County’s goal to continue a dialogue with the public has also been beneficial. “Our customers are part of our community. If we do something they don’t like, they’ll tell us. We constantly ask them how we can improve this or how they can understand what we do better, or where the process can be more efficient.”

The numbers talk: As of September 2014, 97 percent of 35,847 surveys rated the organization’s levels as good or better, with 85 percent receiving an “excellent” rating. The interactions are not only pleasant for the customer, but quick too. Palm Beach County responds to 96.5 percent of email inquiries on the same or the following business day.

For Gannon, improvement is a constant. She and the Aumentum team continue to work toward an ideal customer experience through online payments and developing a program to get customers in and out of the office as quickly and smoothly as possible. “Aumentum gets back to us and may not always have the answers, but they try to walk us through the processes and get back to us with the answers. They’ve been very responsive to our needs in our office.”

Thanks to the tenacity of the entire Palm Beach staff in achieving excellence and procuring the right tools, the agency has seen increased flexibility, speed and approval from both employees and customers alike.

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