The State of Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) administers federal funds for public services — such as food, medical, financial, and heating assistance, as well as child protection and family welfare services — through a network of approximately 100 state-wide offices. With the local economy in a downturn, the Department is facing an unprecedented demand on its services, which is threatening to overload its caseworkers. This challenge required a major rethink of its contact center operations. The Department now uses an innovative IVR solution from Genesys to boost online capabilities, which has freed case workers to tackle more urgent cases.

State of Michigan Department of Human Services Uses Genesys to Serve Citizens

AT A GLANCE

State of Michigan, Department of Human Services
www.michigan.gov/dhs

Industry: Government
Employees: 10,000
Number of Agents (case workers): 4,000
Number of Citizen Interactions: Approximately 500,000/month
An Increase in Applications and Inquiries

Based in Lansing, the State of Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) administers federal funds for public services through a network of approximately 100 state-wide offices.

With the recent economic downturn hitting the state’s flagship automotive industry, an unprecedented number of families turned to the DHS to request assistance to pay their food bills. As a result, the agency was faced with the challenge of how to process the increasing number of applicants seeking support, as well as how to accommodate the large numbers of subsequent phone calls and inquiries about application status.

Due to fixed staffing levels and limited funds, caseworkers (skilled staff who are trained in assessing applications) were struggling to keep up. Inquiries reached such a level that the department needed to find a more effective way to handle them quickly, and to process the food assistance forms faster, as mandated by the state’s governor.

Soaring Workloads

Automobile sales had slumped throughout the country due to the recession, rising gasoline costs, and the credit crunch. What’s more, the ‘Big Three’ manufacturers — Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors — saw their US market share decline from 70 to 53 percent between 1998 and 2008. Facing financial losses, they ‘mothballed’ numerous factories in Michigan, and drastically reduced employment levels. The result was that the state unemployment rate rose to 13 percent, well above the national average, and DHS offices were becoming inundated with phone calls and people standing in line to see caseworkers about food assistance applications.

The DHS employs about 4,000 caseworkers to process assistance applications, and each caseworker typically manages a portfolio of 700 clients. “Over a 24-month period the number of people seeking food assistance rose by 25 percent, but performance reports suggested some DHS offices were not delivering benefits in a timely manner because caseworkers were overloaded by a predominantly manual process,” explains Tess Layman, Director of Leveraged Services for the Department of Human Services, State of Michigan.

“With the government dictating how long we should take to determine client eligibility and provide payments, we needed to improve our service. We also had to avoid potential problems associated with long queues and irate citizens. To exacerbate matters, we anticipated a further increase in applications because federal unemployment benefit payments would cease in a few months.”

A Dual Self-Service Strategy

When a citizen applied for assistance they completed a paper form which was checked by their caseworker who then keyed the data into an application called ‘Bridges,’ starting the verification and eligibility process. The procedure occupied a caseworker for between 45 and 60 minutes, and would be frequently interrupted by telephone calls from other citizens.

To increase its efficiency, the Department chose to adopt a dual self-service strategy. First, it sought to enhance its Web presence with an online application form to replace the paper form. Then they wanted to introduce Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to process incoming phone queries. The Web-based component would integrate three legacy eligibility systems into a single platform, reducing the number of office visits and saving data entry time, while the IVR capability would deal with straightforward caller inquiries. Both components would free up caseworkers’ time for more complex telephone consultations or face-to-face interviews, thus improving service delivery.
“Genesys used its expertise to design the IVR solution, create a technical specification to satisfy our hardware requirements, and deliver services to configure and test our six IVR servers.”

TESS LAYMAN, DIRECTOR OF LEVERAGED SERVICES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, STATE OF MICHIGAN

“With a couple of other departments already employing Genesys technology successfully, and experience of Genesys IVR solutions within the Department of State’s contact center, we decided to expand our partnership,” continues Layman. “We asked Genesys Professional Services to develop, test, and deploy an appropriate IVR solution over a five month period in readiness for the anticipated avalanche of inquiries.”

Tight Deadlines
Genesys Professional Services set to work immediately to meet the deadline, placing the Genesys Voice Platform (GVP) — a software-only, open standards-based IVR — at the heart of the solution. The GVP solution provides the agency’s clients with touchtone access to a range of services and can leverage speech recognition technology to more dynamically engage with the clients. GVP was deployed as a self-service voice system tightly integrated with the Genesys Customer Interaction Management (CIM) platform to provide routing and access to the most appropriate skilled resource, as needed.

GVP is a key element of the Genesys intelligent Customer Front Door™ (iCFD™), a system which uses intelligence to create a more efficient and pleasing customer experience. For example, client calls are handled efficiently because they’re directed through the proper self-service steps depending upon each person’s profile and history, without requiring the caller to repeat all of their information from the beginning. This not only saves time for caseworkers, it also greatly reduces time for citizens to be served and, therefore, results in a better overall experience.

To meet the agency’s ‘go-live’ date, Genesys adopted a flexible and proactive approach to scheduling various activities such as laboratory and production builds. As a result, Genesys Professional Services successfully deployed the 550-port GVP solution following extensive platform and load testing over a four week period. “Genesys responded well to the tight timeframe,” says Layman. “It used its expertise to implement the GVP solution, create a technical specification to satisfy our hardware requirements, and deliver services to configure and test our six IVR servers.”

Saving Time and Resources
The iCFD™ solution supported by GVP provides state citizens with a single toll-free number to call the DHS about food assistance, and callers rarely get busy signals or are left on hold. Routine phone inquiries are now automatically handled by the self-service options, while more complex requests are routed to one of the agency’s caseworkers. In addition, the agency’s enhanced Web presence enables claimants to submit applications online, as well as check the status of their applications, which saves the DHS time and resources. In fact, following the Genesys implementation and addition of the online capability, the DHS has seen workloads ease substantially and customer service levels increase.

“Over the last 13 months, the Genesys solutions have handled nearly a half million phone calls to our offices without involving a caseworker. At an estimated five minutes per call, that relates to several thousand hours per month released for caseworkers to conduct more complex work,” states Layman. “With our new online capability, we have received 188,300 application forms without those people having to enter an office to see a caseworker, a massive time saving at one hour per interview.”

SOLUTION
• Genesys Voice Platform (GVP) creates access to a range of services and leverages speech recognition technology to more dynamically engage with citizens
• Genesys Customer Interaction Management (CIM) Platform provides routing and access to the most appropriate skilled resource
• Genesys intelligent Customer Front Door™ (iCFD™) directs calls through self-service steps depending upon callers’ profile and history

BENEFITS
• Over 13 months, Genesys solutions have handled 496,145 phone calls, freeing up several thousand man hours per month. Agents now have more time to work on complex cases
• The online capability automatically feeds application forms to the IVR database so clients can determine their application’s status without involving a caseworker. One hour per form for 188,300 forms represents a massive time savings
• The scalability of the GVP solution will support other assistance programs and forms the foundation for a consolidated IVR platform
“With this level of scalability, our ultimate goal is to consolidate all our IVRs onto one platform. Genesys has proved to be a good partner for establishing a viable solution.”

TESS LAYMAN, DIRECTOR OF LEVERAGED SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, STATE OF MICHIGA

When a person makes an online application for food assistance, the data automatically enters the Bridges application via staging tables before Bridges updates a separate self-service database overnight. The IVR also accesses this database, so when clients make self-service calls, the IVR instantaneously provides callers with the status of their claims. To reduce caseworker workloads further, the agency also runs a processing center, which deals with routine inquiries that fall outside areas covered by self-service. “Although caseworkers still have a heavy workload, with the Genesys solutions in place, they now spend considerably less time on each case, and can focus more on getting assistance payments out on time,” says Layman.

Next Steps
The Genesys solutions are sized for the future, and the DHS plans to extend them to other programs such as cash, daycare, and energy assistance.

“With this level of scalability, our ultimate goal is to consolidate all our IVRs onto one platform. Genesys has proved to be a good partner for establishing a viable solution; it was responsive to the timeframe, is very supportive, and delivers excellent professional services,” concludes Layman.

About Genesys
Genesys, the world’s #1 Customer Experience Platform, empowers companies to create exceptional omnichannel experiences, journeys and relationships. For over 25 years, we have put the customer at the center of all we do, and we passionately believe that great customer engagement drives great business outcomes. Genesys is trusted by over 4,700 customers in 120 countries, to orchestrate over 24 billion contact center interactions per year in the cloud and on premises.

Visit us at www.genesys.com or call us at +1.888.436.3797

Genesys and the Genesys logo are registered trademarks of Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Inc. All other company names and logos may be trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders. © 2012 Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories, Inc. All rights reserved.