AT&T Wireless Solution Provides Fast Lane for Citizen Complaints

About New York City SCOUT
The New York City Street Conditions Observation Unit (SCOUT) exists to improve street level quality of life in city neighborhoods and make city government more responsive to conditions that can negatively affect New York City residents. SCOUT inspectors from the Mayor's Office of Operations drive every city street at least once per month in search of problems such as missing traffic signs or graffiti on buildings; inspectors are also charged with ensuring that reported problems have been corrected.

Situation
New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg launched the Street Conditions Observation Unit in 2007 to help the city repair broken streets and sidewalks, eliminate litter and garbage on vacant lots and generally make life in New York City more pleasant. As part of the program, the city established a SCOUT Web site with an interactive map, which the mayor urged citizens to use to report problems in their neighborhoods. New York City needed a method to enable city workers to respond to neighborhood problems in a way that leads to higher quality of life for all New Yorkers.

Solution
SCOUT inspectors visiting New York City streets to check conditions and follow up on citizen complaints are equipped with BlackBerry® smart phones that use the AT&T wireless network. The mobile solution makes it easy for inspectors to report their findings while they're at the scene and route them in real-time to the city so corrective action can be taken. The process holds agencies accountable for responding to citizen complaints and helps ensure good quality of life for city residents.

Extra Sets of Eyes on City Streets
Every day, tens of thousands of people in New York City dial 311, the city's phone number for government information and non-emergency services. Last year, 15.2 million people – more than 48,000 each day – called to ask questions or report problems. About 7,000 of these calls on any given day concern quality of life issues: traffic lights that aren’t working, leaking fire hydrants or trash that hasn’t been picked up.

Established in early 2002, the 311 line is designed to be a single source for any non-emergency citizen questions for city government and any problems they want the city to solve. From the 311 Customer Service Center, reports are routed to the city department or agency in charge of resolving the problem, whether that be the police, sanitation, parks and recreation or any other of the approximately 100 agencies within New York City government.

Beyond being a convenience to citizens, the 311 line also lets city administrators become aware of problems they might not otherwise know about; it also helps track the city’s effectiveness in solving them. For example, when complaints about potholes soared, managers dispatched extra workers to patch them and the backlog of complaints shrank quickly.

As part of his ongoing efforts to improve life in the “Big Apple,” New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg wanted to make sure city workers act quickly to fix the problems citizens reported. He created the Street

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NYC SCOUT Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Needs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobile Solution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Value</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Focus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Study - NYC SCOUT

Conditions Observation Unit – SCOUT – dispatching 15 seasoned city employees from six different departments to every city street – all 6,000 miles of them – at least once every month. Their goal is to determine whether the most severe 20 percent of problems reported to the 311 center have been solved.

“This new team, equipped with GPS technology, brings an extra set of eyes to our City streets,” said Bloomberg. “Whenever I’m driving through the city and I see a pothole or garbage on the street, I’ll pick up the phone and report the problem to 311, just like thousands of citizens do every day.”

A Real-Time Snapshot of Quality of Life Problems

Jeff Kay, director of the Mayor’s Office of Operations, said the SCOUT program gives the Mayor’s Office an opportunity to see first-hand the conditions that affect city neighborhoods. SCOUT inspectors generate between 1,000 and 3,000 reports per day, records of which are maintained by the Office of Operations. They also conduct follow-up inspections to see that the necessary work has been carried out. “With SCOUT inspectors in the field, we can provide city agencies with a real-time snapshot of those conditions, and ensure they take appropriate action,” Kay said.

SCOUT inspectors traveling by three-wheel scooters observe and report conditions including litter or debris on the sidewalk; illegal dumping; overflowing litter baskets; street potholes; graffiti on buildings; missing or damaged traffic signs; leaking or open fire hydrants; and damaged bus shelters, sidewalk sheds or park property.

To make it easy for them to report problems, the inspectors are equipped with handheld devices, BlackBerry 8800 and BlackBerry® Curve™ 8310 smart phones equipped with TeleNavTrack™ mobile workforce management software. AT&T brings together GPS, mobile and Web technologies, integrating the city’s back-office applications to help enhance the inspectors’ productivity.

Inspectors use the smart phones to submit reports directly to the Mayor’s office and to the 311 Center, where reports are treated just as calls from the public would be and sent to the city agency responsible for taking corrective action; these include the Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Buildings and the Department of Parks and Recreation. To facilitate speedy transfer of the inspectors’ reports, the city needed a reliable wireless network.

Accountability in Meeting Citizens’ Needs

The SCOUT program relies on the AT&T network to help ensure that information is transmitted reliably and quickly. The network lets the traveling SCOUT inspectors see whether the most critical problems have been fixed and easily report their findings using the GPS-enabled BlackBerry smart phones.

The SCOUT reports transmitted over the network allow the 311 Customer Service Group “to sit down with all the agencies and see where the processes are broken” in resolving problems reported over the 311 line, says Girish Chhugani, executive director of Program Management Office. “It is definitely holding us accountable for meeting citizens’ needs.”

“Not only is technology helping to speed up the delivery of services, it’s also helping to make City government more accountable.”

- Michael Bloomberg, Mayor, New York City

Additionally, New York City has created a SCOUT Web site (http://www.nyc.gov/scout) to give residents access to information about the quality-of-life issues the SCOUT team has discovered. The site allows anyone to see the conditions that have been discovered by the SCOUT team and monitor the progress of efforts to repair those issues. A click on the Web site’s interactive map of New York City’s five boroughs identifies the neighborhood; color coding indicates the number of days since the last SCOUT inspection.

The SCOUT program and the voice and data services provided by the AT&T network alert city officials to problems they might not otherwise see; the program also provides continuous feedback on how good a job they are doing to solve those problems. “The more problems you find, the better off you are, because that allows the city to respond quickly to solve them,” says Chhugani. “Our infrastructure definitely helps us monitor how good a job we’re doing for our citizens.”

Mayor Bloomberg, who started the SCOUT program, believes that its intense focus on customer service and smart use of new technology has helped make City government more efficient and responsive. “Not only is technology helping to speed up the delivery of services,” he said, “but it’s also helping to make City government more accountable.”

For more information contact your AT&T Representative or visit us at www.att.com/wirelessgovernment.

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