WSDOT finds new ways to connect by land and sea

Client Situation

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is the steward of a large and robust transportation system including over 18,000 highway miles, 3,600 bridges, and 23 ferry vessels active in the largest vehicle-ferry system in the world.. With nearly 5.9 million residents in Washington State, the Department of Transportation has a large audience expecting up-to-date information on DOT issues, such as construction projects and road closings.

In the past, WSDOT operated more than 70 independent email distribution lists to push information out to citizens and stakeholders. Maintenance of the lists was labor-intensive and system performance was frequently poor, resulting in service delays in message sending. In addition to being labor-intensive and unreliable, the existing system had limitations for sending communications in case of an emergency, and was unable send text messages to mobile devices.

The mission of WSDOT is to "keep people and business moving by operating and improving the state's transportation systems vital to our taxpayers and communities." The department takes this mission seriously; when its original system had become cumbersome and made efficient communication difficult, the department decided to research other options.

Solution

After evaluating the available solutions, WSDOT partnered with GovDelivery, a software-as-a-service provider that uses automated email and text messaging to keep stakeholders informed when new information is available on topics of interest. In November 2008, WSDOT implemented GovDelivery's Digital Subscription Management solution, in place of its email lists, to automatically send updates on everything from Pierce County traffic updates, mountain pass conditions, and construction reports, to employment opportunities. "We use GovDelivery to automatically generate email [and wireless] communication to parties interested in WSDOT projects," said Jim Culp, WSDOT Web Coordinator.

To honor its promise of transparency, WSDOT has created a public webpage on WSDOT.wa.gov devoted to detailing the department's purchase of this service: outlining the effectiveness of the solution, explaining its benefits and illustrating how these benefits align with department priorities and goals.

Results

Today's citizens are on-the-go and want their information immediately available; providing timely, specific, and relevant information is more important than ever before. With the rising usage of channels such as text messaging and social media, WSDOT is now able to bring information to citizens wherever they are – whether through email, text messaging, RSS or social media channels using GovDelivery.

The Washington State Department of Transportation now offers more than 180 unique subscription topics including all Seattle area traffic incidents, Mountain Pass Conditions, Construction Reports, updates to Engineering Publications, employment opportunities and the Express Lane - a weekly summary of all WSDOT news and activities. The GovDelivery solution supports WSDOT's mission and efforts in providing relevant and up-to-date information to the public, meeting stakeholder expectations, and ensuring improved service.

WSDOT's GovDelivery solution was put to the test during the January 2009 snowstorm. Complete with flooding, avalanches and drifting snow, the storms impact was tangible and the true value of the GovDelivery system was proven. Highway I-5 and mountains passes were closed; there were 60 highway closures and power outages causing servers to go down. System administrators from WSDOT were able to access the system remotely to send nearly 77,000 email updates in one day through GovDelivery, reaching its stakeholders with no problem. "The 2009 snow emergency was proof of its performance in a crisis. We were getting messages out when we otherwise wouldn't have been able to."

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