Five trends to know for improved public sector communications

A new mindset—and the right tools—could help you evolve.

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### Overview

Communication is the backbone of every organization. When you effectively communicate with citizens and employees, everything else falls into place. But it's not always easy to connect with people, especially when the basic rules of engagement continue to evolve.

The amount and rate of change can be overwhelming. We've narrowed down five key trends that are impacting organizations like yours, along with tips for responding to each one. This guide should help you determine how to adapt and which tools can get you ready for success.

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You likely know that developing talent pipelines is a pain point for the public sector. Organizations across the country struggle to attract motivated professionals who can bring in fresh ideas and find new solutions to a wide range of complicated issues. In a recent survey, state and local government leaders cited recruitment and retention of qualified personnel with needed skills for public service as their top workforce hurdle.\(^1\)

And it’s not just about persuading recent college graduates to choose government jobs over private sector opportunities. Yes, millennials grab headlines for their growing presence in the workplace—and now Generation Z is fast behind them. But the key to attracting and retaining talented employees is recognizing the many different ways that people of all ages prefer to work. That means understanding which tools, processes and policies will best empower your entire team to be efficient and productive.

Start by examining your workplace culture. Is it driven by traditional expectations—everyone at their desks from 9 to 5, and in a physical conference room for every meeting? If so, consider switching up the routine to accommodate changing social and cultural expectations.

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Today’s citizens expect you to understand their every whim and respond accordingly. Big brands like Amazon and Netflix reinforce the seemingly instant personalization that drives our shopping and entertainment habits. Citizens also expect highly personalized experiences, so the public sector is looking at a new generation of data-enabled marketing tools and techniques.

A good place to start is simply learning more about your audience. Who uses your services and what are their main objectives and challenges? Which members of your organization need to connect with them and are they fully equipped to do so? These days, personalization brings to mind Big Data and analytics. While these are certainly smart options, you can start with more readily accessible and measurable tactics—email surveys (or surveys hosted on your website), social polls and in-person questionnaires.

Many public-facing organizations are also improving processes and tools to adjust citizen experiences from “high-touch” human contact to “low-touch” automation, which can expedite routine interactions such as renewing your car registration. Service programs can leverage advanced marketing techniques to engage the population and track user feedback. Still, many people want to communicate with a person, especially when they have a pressing concern.

The bottom line

Voice over IP (VoIP) can help your organization provide a critical human touch while embracing modern technologies. This communication system often combines audio and video conferencing, instant messaging, presence, desktop sharing, and call recording features into a single platform, giving you a holistic view of your customers so you can anticipate and meet their changing needs.

Plus, something as simple as hold music can improve your services, as can a virtual receptionist helping to direct citizens to the appropriate contact to address their unique concerns.

Up next: Are you taking advantage of the cloud?
By now, “the cloud” is a ubiquitous term used to describe our personal and professional storage habits. For years, smaller companies have leveraged cloud computing to compete with larger enterprises while keeping costs down. Now the public sector is getting serious about the cloud, too.

What does this massive trend mean for you? Organizations of all sizes increasingly acknowledge the benefits of cloud communications in supporting talent recruitment and retention, and improving citizen experiences.

Cloud computing unlocks the potential of key technologies, from artificial intelligence to data analytics. It’s a strong jumping-off point for innovation, especially if you start with updates that don’t require a complete infrastructure overhaul. For example, start with modernizing your communications system. By switching to a cloud-based solution, like unified communications as a service (UCaaS), public sector leaders can achieve immediate ROI and lay a strong foundation for continued breakthroughs.

The bottom line

Modernizing your organization starts with cloud-based communications, which allows you to integrate your communications tools into a single platform that is easily scalable, with a predictable monthly subscription model you can add to when your needs expand. By giving employees what they need to design and build new services quickly, they can provide more responsive services to your community.

Up next: What if you could leverage IT to achieve bigger goals?
As organizations adapt to the digital era, IT is increasingly seen as critical to helping them evolve. It's a wonderful development but one that remains theoretical for those who deal with multiple departments, especially with a small and busy IT team. How can you realize the potential of strategic IT without compromising critical day-to-day operations?

You could reexamine your business communications system. It might not seem like an obvious first step, but the right solution can make or break your key initiatives. VoIP is accessible by design, meaning it's both simple to implement and manage, and user friendly. Any employee can quickly take advantage of its many capabilities without relying on IT for support.

And in the event IT is the one looking for assistance, a good IP communications provider also offers managed services, including training and ongoing support, which frees up IT to partner with you on the next big idea.

With an IP communications network, IT can use a web portal on the internet to manage the company's needs from virtually anywhere. You can evaluate end-user requirements across the organization and change services at any location with an internet connection. This flexibility helps improve productivity in day-to-day operations.

Up next: Is your organization prepared for unexpected emergencies?
When you think of security, ransomware and phishing might come to mind. But hackers aren’t the only threat to your organization. Weather-related emergencies and other unexpected events can wreak havoc on your operations and reputation among customers. In recent years, natural disasters have increased in both severity and frequency, making it all the more important to take proactive steps to mitigate damage.

Severe weather has cost the U.S. nearly $500 billion since 2015. The number and cost of disasters are increasing over time due to a combination of increased exposure, vulnerability and the fact that climate change is increasing the frequency of some types of extremes that lead to billion-dollar disasters, and conditions are predicted to become more intense, widespread or of longer duration.

To offset damages, organizations should proactively establish a solid communications plan to mitigate unexpected disruptions. First, make a list of key stakeholders and their concerns: who to contact, how you’ll reach them, what you’ll say. This might include citizens who are worried about maintaining critical services, employees who need continued access to critical data and tools, and friends and family who need to get in touch with their loved ones. Develop and document a strategy for relaying important messages across multiple channels.

For example, in the event of an outage, an IP communications system can easily reroute calls to another location, to a mobile phone or to a third-party answering service so you can maintain continuity. Some services let you move phones to alternate locations and continue working with any internet connection.

How your organization handles any negative incident can make or break your reputation. By successfully weathering any storm (literally or otherwise), you gain citizens’ confidence in your ability to consistently meet their needs.

Prepare for natural disasters.

The bottom line

Your emergency communications plan starts with a reliable network and service providers. Find an end-to-end solution that manages, monitors and secures your IT environment 24 hours a day – including cloud, hosted and customer-premises elements. The right system can also troubleshoot network problems and maintain service uptime during times of crisis, helping you get back to business as usual.
Conclusion

How you respond to today's communications trends will vary depending on your organization size, immediate and long-term goals, current resources, and general attitude toward emerging technologies. Just keep in mind what you likely already know: Staying relevant means moving forward. To accelerate, choose the right partner to help guide you in the right direction.

Why Verizon?

Verizon is a global leader in technological innovation, with a broad portfolio of advanced communications and collaboration solutions. We offer America's largest and most reliable 4G LTE network, proven to be the best in overall performance, quality, reliability, speed and video streaming. It's also the best in data, call and text performance. Are you ready to make progress?

Discover how Verizon is helping to evolve and modernize public sector communications. Call us at 800.248.9685 to speak to a Verizon representative or visit verizon.com/business/solutions/state-local-government/ to learn more.

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