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Best Practice: Process to Follow-up Work Requests
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Abstract

In an effort to ensure complete customer satisfaction, the Physical Plant Division at the University of South Florida has developed an inventive and automated mechanism to communicate and follow-up on work requests from the University Community to the Physical Plant

As soon as the customer initiates a work request, an e-mail is automatically sent from Physical Plant to the customer confirming the specifics of the request. This step prevents misinterpretation of the work requested. Then, on completion of the work, another e-mail is automatically sent to the customer. This e-mail informs the customer that the work has been completed and also provides the customer with a very simple (four question) survey about the manner in which the work request was performed. Once submitted by the customer, this survey is automatically forwarded to the Director, the Associate Director, and the Administrative Coordinator for the Physical Plant. The survey is immediately reviewed. Any concerns or dissatisfactions expressed by the customer on this survey are addressed by telephone communication to the customer by a member of the Management Team of Physical Plant. The Management Team then follows through and ensures that the customer is satisfied with the response of Physical Plant.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of South Florida, located in Tampa, opened its doors to 2,000 students in 1960. Today, almost 37,000 students attend classes at USF each academic year and the University of South Florida is the second largest university in the Southeast. In less than 50 years, the University has built a reputation as one of America's most dynamic research universities and ranks in the top national classification of the prestigious Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. USF now conducts instruction, research and public service, physically and virtually, at four campuses and numerous off-campus sites throughout the Tampa Bay area and central Florida.

Statement of Problem/Initiative

As USF grew, the Physical Plant Division recognized a need to measure the effectiveness of the work order management system along with ensuring that customer expectations

were met with regard to the processing of work orders. Also, measurement capabilities were needed to comply with the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) Assessments for accreditation.

Design

The existing Work Management Center software package was modified with several enhancements. Under the previous system, work requests could be received via phone, fax, or web form. In each case, a Work Management Center employee inputs a work request into the software package, and a printed copy of the work order is forwarded to a technician to perform the work. A copy of the original request was then forwarded to the initiator via campus mail. The enhanced software now accepts a scanned copy of the customer's original hand-written or faxed request. The computer system then automatically sends a confirmation of the work order via email with an attached copy of the request. This allows the customer to review the request immediately for any inaccuracies or missing information. About 10% of the initial requests are modified by the initiator after receiving the confirming email. Also, the scanned copy of the original request is forwarded to the technician performing the work. The accuracy of work is enhanced because the technician can directly view the customer's original request. The other component that promotes customer satisfaction is the automatic work order follow-up survey that is sent to the customer via email when the work is completed. This allows the customer to comment about the work performed by completing the auto work order customer survey linked in the email. The survey is comprised of four statements relating to timeliness, satisfaction with the work performed, and

professionalism and responsiveness of the Work Management Center personnel and the maintenance technicians. The customer is asked to respond to each statement with the range of choices from strongly agree to strongly disagree. An area is also provided for additional comments from the customer. If the survey returned indicates a problem, it is forwarded immediately to the maintenance team responsible and to upper management for follow-up. About eight percent of the surveys returned to the Work Management Center require some follow-up due to either dissatisfaction or miscommunication.

Implementation

The project was a joint one with Physical Plant Administration, responsible for the Work Management Center and the in-house technical department. Much of the software enhancements were borrowed from earlier projects. The email-based survey software was adapted from a 1999-campus survey project. The image scanning and storage software was adapted from the existing invoice document imaging system. The cost for the enhancements included approximately 100 person-hours of software development time to integrate the various components. Graduate student programmers were employed, and the development expense was approximately \$2000. Project management was provided in-house at no additional expense. Also, two scanners were purchased at a cost of \$3000 each to scan the original work requests.

Benefits

The benefits to the system are many. First, the information is confirmed before the work is started, eliminating any miscommunications prior to starting the work. Secondly,

technicians have instant access to the customer's original hand-written request, further reducing any miscommunications and improving work accuracy. Thirdly, customer satisfaction is being measured and used as a catalyst for affecting change per the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Assessment for accreditation. Fourthly, the Work Management Center is seen as responsive to customers' needs and expectations and any dissatisfaction can be remedied in a timely manner.