

Challenge

Today's consumers want timely billing, quality customer service, answers to questions night or day, and the ability to pay their utility bills at their leisure. The City of West Lafayette finds eGov Strategies Online Payment System a valuable tool to meet these demands.

West Lafayette required a solution that furthered its commitment to provide the highest quality of customer service for many transient customers brought to the area due to ties with Purdue University or as part of the more than 100 high-tech companies located at the 650 acre Purdue Research Park which offers a state-of-the-art communication infrastructure and world-class research facilities and employs over 2,500 people. This tech savvy community wanted to provide convenient 24-hour services beyond the established city hall work day. Additional advantages sought by the city's finance department included increased productivity through reduction of manual operations which would improve banking transaction quality and reduce errors.

Solution

West Lafayette leveraged eGov Strategies' uniquely designed online payment system to establish a cost-effective method for focusing on standard government practices, transactions and reporting that:

- Offered convenient and reliable 24-hour customer service
- Reduced banking and transactional errors
- Enhanced staff productivity
- Increased security and reliability

Convenient and Reliable Service Available around the Clock

The city has found that the new system has increased customer satisfaction and has thereby set a positive tone of trust between the city and community because of convenience, reliability, security, and availability of the online system. The system provides a handy 24-hour online payment option that reduces late-payment charges to customers since customers now have the option to settle accounts up to midnight of the due date.

In addition, the city's billing process has been made more reliable and timely. The use of e-billing ensures bill delivery in a timely fashion by avoiding billing delays which are inherent in printed bill runs. Printing delays, missed post office hours, or a holiday schedule which complicates delivery are becoming a thing of past; all while recurring costs of printing and mailing bills are being reduced.

Reducing Banking and Transactional Errors

The e-billing and online payment system is integrated with the city's back office billing and financial systems, eliminating the need for hand entry of collections and significantly reducing the potential for human error. Additionally, accepting credit cards eliminates the risk of bad checks, charges associated with bounced checks by banking institutions, and staff time required to resolve bounced check issues. An added benefit for the city is that bills are quickly paid by online participants, making funds available to the city earlier, rather than at end of the billing cycle.

The easy to learn system offers a number of reports that enhance auditing and allows for easy reconciliation of bank statements, identification of any exceptions, and acts as a double-check for day-to-day data processing. This access to data has assisted in furthering the city's



transparent government initiatives. Furthermore, the ease of use of the system has reduce training time to a fraction of the previous tedious manual process.

Enhanced Productivity

The ease of use and automation of the online payment and e-billing system has provided the city with the opportunity to organize and define their billing workflow. This was not available in the past because there was limited time during the billing cycle to focus on the process and because there was no effective tool to improve the process. The improved time management has resulted in:

- Having the ability to send e-bills with minimal staff effort and to confirm the deliverability of the e-bills
- A reduction in the dependence on the postal mail system, thus freeing staff from rigid hourly deadlines and thus allowing them to plan their workload based on need
- Increased flexibility to manage the billing timeline internally

Reducing manual manipulation by staff reduces man hours by 260 hours (over one full month or 32.5 days) a year. The tasks associated with these time savers include:

- Printing and internal handling of printed bills
- Post office deliver run of printed bills
- Weekly planning of schedule to accommodate printed billing process

Increased Security and Reliability

By relying on the e-billing and online payments experts at eGov Strategies, the city has enhanced the security of the billing and collections process. The city's billing system is isolated from external users and the transactional functions of the system are conducted in a secure environment, buffered by sophisticated physical, procedural, and software-based security measures. Furthermore, data integrity is ensured as the city is in control. "We have found that, e-billing provides additional security for the city, as a result official city billing statements cannot be altered by outsourced printer," said Judy Rhodes, Clerk-Treasurer.

In addition to security, the city has also taken advantage of the reliability of the system in an unanticipated way. Shortly after the system was brought online, the city's local, out-sourced printer mistakenly changed the billing date on an outgoing bill. The eGov Online Payment System ensures bills are available to customers on time, and can act as a backup system to postal mail delivery and printed bills. "Unfortunately, since implementing e-billing the outsourced printing arrangement offered by another vendor misfired. When that happens bills don't get delivered," said Rhodes. "However, with the eGov e-billing System we were easily able to direct the public to our website where customers could pull up their accounts and review bills."

Results

Within the first five months of usage, the e-billing system had 7% of customers sign up for e-billing and is now collecting approximately 9% of all utility payments, with an average monthly growth rate of 15%. Based on the early success of the system, Mayor Dennis has established the goal of 50% or more participation level by the end of the first year and will be launching campaigns to promote sign ups and encourage new residents to the area to take advantage of the system.

While convenience, improved customer service, ease of use, and efficiency are all positive results of the new system, the effect of the system on the city's bottom line has been dramatic. The following table illustrates the estimated savings in the first year:

Item/Task	Quantity	Cost Item/Task	Total Annual Savings
Mailing	5,400 pieces	\$ 6.50	\$ 35,100
Time Saved	5 hrs wk/260 hours	\$ 15.00	\$ 3,900
Gas Savings (20 miles a week)	1,040 miles	\$ 0.55	\$ 572
Anticipated Additional Sign Ups	3,150 signups	\$ 6.50	\$ 20,475
Total Savings - Year One			\$ 60,047



2/3 of online customers opened e-bills **immediately**

City of West Lafayette, Indiana