

The Citizen IMPERATIVE

Service NSW was launched to focus on everyday citizens and business, treating them as customers and making government more commercially aware of the services it offers the public.

Images by Scott Ehler

Michael Pratt is the first New South Wales Customer Service Commissioner—in fact, the first such commissioner in Australia. Michael is using his experience in senior roles at Westpac, NAB, and Bank of New Zealand to oversee service reforms across the New South Wales public sector. In the banking sector, Michael has driven major improvement in the delivery of customer service across multiple channels. His appointment, and the subsequent establishment of Service NSW, has been part of a major effort by the New South Wales Government to streamline and modernise its approach to customer service.

“There has been a lot of feedback from citizens about the inefficiency of governments,” says Michael. “As a result, the New South Wales Government decided significant change was required to focus on citizens as customers—and deliver real customer service. Now the New South Wales Government is starting to interact with citizens in a very different way.

“One of the key things the New South Wales Government

identified was that the person in this role not only had to face a deep understanding of customers and change management, but also how to manage the multiple channels available to customers now and into the future. Banks are really at the leading edge of customer interactions across channels.”

In creating Service NSW, Michael and the Service NSW team led by CEO Glenn King helped re-engineer many government transactions to create greater efficiencies for customers, including delivering significant cost benefits and synergies across the New South Wales Government. “We have 18 service centres around the state, approximately split half in regional areas and half city-metro. The Service NSW website was launched in July 2013. Service NSW also has contact centres located in Parramatta and Newcastle.

“We have already helped more than three million customers across Service NSW channels. To date, 53 per cent of customers use our digital channel, enhanced by other centres using our one number available 24/7. Customers

have completed transactions, booked appointments, and made inquiries. Transactions vary from applying for their first child’s birth certificate, to getting their driver licence for the first time, or starting their own business. We have also opened new services such as bereavement assistance.

“In 12 months, there has been a huge positive response from the public. The really satisfying aspect of our work is that we are averaging 98-per-cent customer satisfaction across channels. This is something I have never seen before. Service NSW is clearly hitting the mark with customers. Citizens really want this. I get regular feedback via email or phone calls from people saying this is exactly what they expect of their government.”

Service NSW is harnessing the digital space to give people the opportunity to access more services online at their own convenience. Service NSW has also invested in its physical space and customer touch points. “We are still opening physical centres. Many will be smaller, kiosk-type centres. We also have concierges who help customers do transactions on the >

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“If I walked you around our development centre, you would meet many ex-bankers, and for a simple reason. Bankers have been through the industry changes—they understand customer service. With bankers, we’ve mixed employees from the government who understand the organisation of government, the governance and the structures. This offers a good mix of people who know the workings of government with people who understand what we have got to build and manage. It’s a very good team—and I have always said, ‘You develop a good team: it makes life a lot easier for you and your customers.’”

delivered on the paperless office. We can learn a lot from them.”

What makes Service NSW unique is the organisation’s multichannel approach. “If you look at case studies globally, many focused on one channel. Today, we are the only government organisation in the world that I am aware of that has launched all three channels simultaneously. This has been a huge success and factors what customers want. For example, customers will come and talk to us in a service centre or call us at the contact centre, but then may want to log in and complete their transactions online.

The Customer Service Commissioner has formed the New South Wales Customer Service Advisory Board with industry leaders from the private and public sectors. Such leaders include Virgin Australia Airlines CEO John Borghetti, Microsoft Australia Managing Director Pip Marlow, New South Wales Business Chamber CEO Stephen Cartwright, Leighton Holdings Chief HR and Corporate Services Officer Dharma Chandran, as well as two New South Wales Government secretaries: the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Family and Community Services.

“In parallel, I am also involved in strengthening the customer-centric culture throughout New South Wales government agencies, not just Service NSW. We are developing a whole-of-government strategy to be known as Customer NOW aimed at building a service culture that is responsive to customer needs.” Integral to this is an understanding of what customers need and expect from service providers and the New South Wales public sector as a whole. Many agencies are already undertaking customer-focused initiatives and actively seeking feedback on ways to improve their services.

“In April, I hosted the inaugural Customer Service Advisory Board meeting which will oversee, steer, and govern the strategic direction for Service NSW and the broader customer change program called Customer NOW. Through the board, we will be leveraging their skills and experience in customer service. For example, what John Borghetti has done at Virgin is outstanding. He has transformed a mass-market-positioned airline into a service-focused organisation bringing Virgin up the value chain, delivering significant culture change, improved performance, and great service throughout. Equally, at Microsoft, where Pip Marlow has transformed their workforce and their approach to customer management, they have truly

“We want to go a step further. We want to address significant process restraints and build a common understanding of how the New South Wales Government should address customer service, prioritising areas that can be improved, measuring and delivering customer service consistently.”

Service NSW brings a completely new approach to customers from government agencies. Its establishment shows how the New South Wales Government is making a real commitment towards customer service by adopting a strongly driven customer culture and a more commercialised ethos. This is a world-class initiative that will change the way people view government and the way governments view their citizens as customers. ●

spot using our online platform in the centres. We are also piloting new digital capabilities such as self-service stand-alone kiosks.

“This sort of capability offers outstanding benefits, for example in regional New South Wales, as it provides citizens more access to government services than is currently available. A kiosk can be located in hospitals, in airports, shopping centres—where customers need the service. There is a big opportunity here to think differently about the way we can deliver services to citizens, our customers.”

While much of this transformation has been based on technology, Michael states the most important aspect of Service NSW has been the people involved. “60 per cent of our people have come from government agencies and are doing a great job. This confirms for me that many employees within government do genuinely care about citizens as their customers and want to do a good job, but they are held back by poor and outdated processes. The other 40 per cent of Service NSW employees have come from places like airlines, banks, and hotels. For example, concierges in hotels are very good with customers. Excellent service is a mindset that is prominent in their industry. We are getting people from sectors that really do get ‘customer management’ and how to deliver it very well.



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