Telford & Wrekin Council Wins Prestigious APSE Award with AI assistant “Ask Tom”

Thursday 21 September, 2023

Telford & Wrekin Council's commitment to enhancing customer service has been recognised at the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards, where it clinched the win for Best Efficiency and Transformation Initiative. Their AI assistant, “Ask Tom”, has transformed local government services, setting new benchmarks for efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The Impact of “Ask Tom”

The Council viewed the adoption of AI as key to accelerating channel shift and driving greater efficiency through digital self-service. “Ask Tom” has managed over 25,000 resident queries since its inception, achieving tangible benefits for the council:

- **Enhanced Customer Satisfaction:** An incredible 99.3% satisfaction rate compared to 91.2% for traditional customer services channels
- **Operational Savings:** The 24/7 AI assistant saved advisor time, with 32% of queries being addressed outside of traditional working hours
- **Capacity Boost:** Due to the 69% reduction in traditional webchat and a 35% drop in call volumes, the council could incorporate three more service areas, optimising service delivery
- **Reduced Waiting Times:** Waiting times plummeted across all services – with a 16.5% overall reduction (more than 5-minutes), 40% in revenues (10 mins), 57% in neighbourhood services (9.5 mins), and 47% for highways (4.5 mins)

Cost Savings and Expanded Services

The fall in calls and webchats as a result of Tom’s capabilities to answer commonly asked questions has freed up essential resources for the council to manage complex enquiries. Additionally, the council has been able to integrate three new services: homelessness, registration services, and libraries, amounting to nearly 4,000 calls per month. This flexibility has also allowed the Council to better serve residents who may not be as technologically adept or lack online access.

The Council’s pursuit of excellence has not gone unnoticed. With a customer satisfaction index score of 71.2%*, they have outperformed the average score for other councils (64.4%). Furthermore, their customer effort score, which measures the ease of customer transactions, stood at 4.2, significantly outperforming the UK organisation average of 5.2.

The implementation of “Ask Tom” has bought previously unmet demand to light. The system identified resident challenges with issues such as paying their council tax bills, and as a direct response, the Council can now provide timely support.

The AI assistant’s integration into the Council’s MyTelford phone app also reiterates the Council’s commitment to ensuring their residents are always connected, informed, and empowered.

Setting a Benchmark for Success

As Fiona Watson, Chief Marketing Officer at ICS.AI expressed, “Telford & Wrekin Council’s proactive approach sets a standard for other councils and their AI journey has inspired many. Gemma Hancox, the Council’s Customer Contact Group Manager is a beacon of this transformation and has been sharing the Council’s success story at conferences, webinars, and forums”.

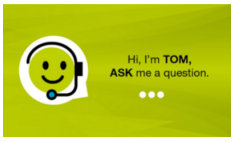
Gemma’s sentiment sums up the impact perfectly, *“A council isn’t a choice, customer have to come to us... local authorities have to be up there with the best private companies for customer service as that is our expectation as customers and it’s important that’s what we provide*”.

Inspiring the Future

The journey of Telford & Wrekin Council showcases the transformative potential of AI. As more council's look towards such solutions, “Ask Tom” stands as a shining example of innovation, efficiency, and

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customer service excellence and can serve as a roadmap to success.

The success of “Ask Tom” has led the Council to consider additional use cases and contact channels to extend their AI transformation journey and they continue working with ICS.AI, developing plans to integrate voice AI directly into their phone channel, as well as reviewing the huge opportunity for innovation with generative AI to further extend the potential to continue to improve customer service.

An outstanding achievement

As we reflect on the immense strides Telford & Wrekin Council has taken with "Ask Tom", we, at ICS.AI, extend our congratulations. Their exemplary work stands as a testament to the blend of technology, vision, and commitment to public service. Their recognition at the ASPE awards is well-deserved, and we look forward to seeing more local authorities drawing inspiration from their innovative steps. Well done, Telford & Wrekin Council and the entire team behind "Ask Tom"!

Contact ICS.AI: To find out more or book a demo, contact ICS.AI.

Press Enquiries: For press enquiries please contact Fiona Watson, CMO, ICS.AI - fiona.watson@ics.ai

* Source: The Institute of Customer Services

About “Ask Tom”, built on the ICS.AI SMART AI Platform:

“Ask Tom” is an automated digital AI assistant capable of answering hundreds of commonly asked questions, thereby freeing up contact centre advisors to manage more complex queries. Built on the ICS.AI SMART AI Platform, “Ask Tom” is trained utilising an organisational language model specifically built for the public sector, comprising over 1,000 council topics and performs to human parity performance levels, achieving at least the same level of first-time resolution as a human. Tom’s knowledge continuously grows, with the help of ICS.AI’s patent-pending SMART Mesh that allows it to improve while learning from other assistants on the mesh. “Ask Tom” is accessible to everyone and WCAG 2.1 AA compliant, with a dedicated ethical compliance sub-system which really makes it stand out for its inclusivity.

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