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by LogMeIn

State of Iowa
Elevating the Resident Experience with AI

iowa.gov

Industry
Government

Headquarters
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"I really see the chatbot as being a platform that's going to allow us to provide a consistent experience for Iowans, no matter where they come in."

—Dawn Connet, eGovernment Services Coordinator

State of Iowa residents experience an enhanced digital interaction across state agencies with AI-enabled technology and live chat.

Challenge

Nicknamed the Hawkeye State, Iowa is a midwestern state with a population of over three million residents. The State of Iowa is run by a series of agencies and departments all of which are linked back to the main website, Iowa.gov. This central site – along with individual agency sites – are charged with providing residents with an enhanced yet simple to use digital experience.

"We had several hurdles to overcome. One challenge is that while we have the central Iowa.gov site, all the agencies have their own website. As a visitor, you don't want to have to figure out which department you need to visit. And our old school chat option on Iowa.gov was with state librarians and only allowed one chat at a time," said Dawn Connet, eGovernment Services Coordinator. "Additionally, the organization of each agency's site was different so it provided an inconsistent experience, making information hard to find. And many sites had lengthy PDFs that visitors had to search to find the answer to their query."

In deciding to provide a more comprehensive and less cumbersome experience for residents and visitors, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) decided to update the central website self-service features with a platform that could be extended out to the individual agency sites over time to provide that consistent experience. "We opted to take the leap to an AI-based environment. We needed a platform that could work with our legacy systems and numerous stakeholders. When we coupled this with our live service the state references librarians provide, we felt residents would have an enhanced experience," said Connet.

Solution

The State of Iowa selected Bold360 to implement a live chat and AI-enabled chatbot and began the implementation with central Iowa.gov along with several agencies including Insurance and the Department of Transportation. In building the knowledge base for Iowa.gov, agencies were asked to provide Connet's team with the top five questions and answers to start. Following the launch, the team could then monitor what questions and phrasing were asked to best continue building out the database.

"As an example, residents were asking the Department of Corrections what they could wear while visiting an inmate or what they could bring. The information couldn't be found via a search on the agency website as we were using the word "offender" and not "inmate". This would then cause people to call the Department for information. Once we understood these differences, we were able to adjust so the chatbot's NLP would understand and serve up the right answer as well as even suggest other relevant information for a visit," said Connet.

With regard to applications, one agency, the Department of Insurance, integrated the chatbot not only into their website but also into a backend application. That meant that someone using chat could search and find the same information that they would find through the website. Additionally, the State of Iowa Library System is using live chat to better engage with residents.

The Department of Transportation is one of the state's agencies which implemented the live chat function to better service residents. "We wanted to improve our residents' experience and we had seen the success from the Iowa.gov team, so we opted to implement the chatbot first before moving to live chat," said Zhaia Wineinger, information specialist at the Department of Transportation. "We had a lot of data on what residents asked and we went through two years of questions we had received directly, through Facebook and our standard FAQ. We built a solid database with over 200 questions that we're continuously adding to."

Results

More than 15 different agencies have implemented chatbot widgets on their websites and the use of the chat platform is expected to increase and continue spreading across the various Agencies and Departments. "We will continue to expand our self-service features especially for large applications that may be difficult for our residents to understand. When people get stuck on applications, they end up calling into the agency . We feel the chatbot could assist with answering any questions," said Connet.

With the live chat and AI-enabled chatbot, the State of Iowa is seeing:

- A continually strong self-service score averages across all sites exceeding expectations with Iowa.gov at 70%; Insurance at 61% and Department of Transportation at 76%.
- Across the three sites, more than 56,000 resident engagements have been addressed.
- There is an average of 1,000 chats per month for Iowa.gov, providing significant time savings for staff as each chat would have been around a five-minute phone call.
- The Department of Transportation averaged 3,000 chats a month. With COVID-19, this number jumped to 15,000 chats a month, helping to deflect many calls while providing quicker assistance.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the chatbot and live chat options were extremely important in answering questions. "Most of the year we were seeing about a thousand chats a month, which is not a lot, but those are a thousand interactions that would have taken a five-minute phone call. That's a huge staff savings," said Connet. "Now, with the Coronavirus, that number has jumped. We know that we're able to help more people and that that will just grow exponentially as we make the chat available across other platforms and other systems."

Said Wineinger, "At the start of COVID-19, we knew we had to provide more assistance and quickly implemented the live chat feature. We trained over 45 agents quickly to be on live chat as everything became more chaotic with COVID-19 causing changes in the regulations. The AI chatbot as well as the live chat was a game changer for us as residents could ask their specific questions via either method or by phone."