STREAMLINING TOOLS - TOOLS TO MAKE GOVERNMENT MORE EFFECTIVE and EFFICIENT

INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEMS

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) has been a staple service for most building departments for over a decade. IVR involves the use of telephones coupled with a computer system that enable the caller to select from a menu of options to complete business transactions such as scheduling an inspection or setting up an appointment for plans review. The technology has made some interesting technological advancements in the last few years. Today, IVR systems offer speech recognition, text-to-speech, fax back forms and information, VoiceXML, converged IVR/Web host integration, and VoIP/telephony integration.

BENEFITS

IVR systems enable the inspection scheduling and meeting reservation systems of the building department to be open 24/ 7/365. Their popularity has largely been due to the basics and the parity of the technology; almost everyone has access to a cell phone which makes the service accessible to both homeowners and professional contractors alike.

SAVINGS TO GOVERNMENT

IVR systems have provided building departments with a simple popular 'win' in the area of customer service for their clients and has freed up staff positions previously tied to answering these routine inspection and meeting scheduling calls to work on other program areas. Sample savings sited by jurisdictions from the use of IVR systems range between one and four person years worth of labor depending on the size of the jurisdiction and construction volume.

SAVINGS TO PUBLIC AND TO PRIVATE SECTOR

The savings to the general public and to builders come largely from making this aspect of their interaction with the building department available to them at any time of day or night and no longer dependant upon calling back during regular business hours, or relying on the potential vagaries of simple answering machine systems.

BACKGROUND

There are usually four types of costs, plus annual maintenance, involved in IVR integration. Those costs are: software, hardware, integration services and infrastructure.

Software – Software costs usually start at $5,000, but can quickly escalate depending on the number of ports (simultaneous phone calls the system can handle.) Licensing by the number of ports is a very common means of charging for the software. In addition to those licensing fees, there may be an interface to your current building regulatory system. Those fees range from $5,000 – $30,000, depending on the type of system you use.

Hardware – Hardware is divided into the computer (a.k.a. server), voice boards (the phone ports), operating system, and any extras like fax capability. Hardware will usually start at $2,500 (or more) and can go over $100,000 for a very large system with 100 percent redundancy and built-in fault tolerance.

Integration Services – Integration services are hard to estimate, but vertical solutions can sometimes run out of the box with little or no changes. Horizontal solutions will have standard training rates (on-site versus at the vendor's facility) and/or an hourly professional services rate (usually something starting at $70 an hour).

Infrastructure – Infrastructure necessary is the Internet (for support and upgrades) and telephone system. Many IVR systems use POTS (analog phone lines), but the newer systems can use virtual ports through a digital system. In many cases these costs can be absorbed in the current operating budget for the jurisdiction, so you may not need to budget for them.

EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION AND JURISDICTION CONTACTS

City of Los Angeles, CA – Los Angeles has reduced amount of time it takes to schedule inspections from 3 – 4 days to less than 24 hours Contact: Steve Ikkanda, LADBS; Phone: 213-482-6715; email: sikkanda@ladbs.lacity.org

Forsyth County, GA – IVR has reduced 2-3 day delays to less than 24 hours. Contact: Kathy Lamb; Phone: 770-205-4574; email:khlamb@forsythco.com

SUMMARY

Although IVR systems are one of the most common accessories for a building regulatory system, don't assume your current IT staff has a lot of familiarity with the vendor you choose. The most popular systems, once setup and running, are extremely reliable and usually require little maintenance; but the integration may take several weeks to several months to be fully implemented. Be prepared to spend somewhere between $25,000 and $50,000 for a basic 4-line IVR system before integration, maintenance, and any extras.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: VISIT THE ALLIANCE'S WEBSITE AT:
www.natlpartnerstreamline.org and click on **"TOOLKIT."** On the Toolkit page, click on **"IVR SYSTEMS"**.