

CASE STUDY



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Durham District School Board

Reducing Costs and Improving Service with Automated Telephone System

BUSINESS PROBLEM

Every September, school boards across North America are flooded with calls from parents looking for everything from eligibility information to bus stop locations to pick-up times.

For the Durham District School Board near Toronto, Ontario (Canada), the number of calls fielded during the first week of the school year had reached 25,000.

"Managing so many calls was daunting to say the least," says Lynda Smith, Durham's Manager of Transportation.

GOALS

The board, which already used Trapeze MapNet for its routing and planning, needed a way to manage the huge call volume at the beginning of the school year without installing new phone lines or hiring and training temporary staff.

"Automation was key," says Smith. "We wanted a system that would increase the level of service for parents.

We wanted something that would automatically handle the routine inquiries that take up so much time. And that would use our existing data systems in real-time."

Beyond the crush of calls that mark the beginning of the school year, the board also wanted to give parents a way to get up-to-date information about weather-related delays or cancellations, route changes and more.

SOLUTION

After investigating several options, including setting up a

SNAPSHOT

Type of Operation:	Student Transportation
Service Area:	7 municipalities with 115 schools
Students Transported:	15,300
Number of Vehicles:	400
Trapeze Products Used:	MapNet, STIS (using IVR technology)

temporary call center, the board installed Trapeze STIS, an automated telephone student transportation information system.

Trapeze STIS integrates interactive voice response (IVR) technology with the transportation data in MapNet. The seamless integration with MapNet enables the exchange of current student data with the IVR system without the need for additional manipulation.

RESULTS

Trapeze STIS enables parents to dial up and log in using the student's identification number. By entering an additional eight-digit security code, they can access the student's bus information, including pick-up/drop-off times and locations.

Additional student data such as school, grade and personal information, are also available. Users have the option of speaking directly to a transportation agent at any time.

Transportation staff members, meanwhile, can record bulletins about scheduling changes due to weather conditions, service interruptions and school holidays.

The system automatically delivers the bulletins to users

associated with specific districts, schools, routes, stops or students. Because transportation staff members can update information offsite at any time, the bulletins remain current.

The system handled 7,121 calls between August 20 and 31, 2001, and another 6,633 between September 1 and September 19.

BOTTOM LINE

"We are optimistic the system will not only improve the quality of service," says Smith, "but more importantly, significantly reduce the number of telephone calls that are currently handled by transportation department staff. And parents can get accurate information about their children's busing."

For other school boards considering installing an IVR system, Smith recommends installing a separate server, a dedicated modem line, vacant analog lines (Durham used 12) and allowing at least two weeks to install and test the system.

"Good friends in the IT department can be helpful too," she adds.