



Tweed Shire Council Case Study: Overcoming pandemics, borders and boundaries with Premier Contact Point

Introducing Tweed Shire Council

Tweed Shire Council was established on January 1st 1947, following the merger of the Murwillumbah Municipality and the Shire of Tweed.

Today, more than 94,000 people call the Tweed Shire home, and the Council delivers more than 50 services to them while also being one of the Tweed Shire's largest employers, with an annual budget of \$192 million. They provide a wide range of activities and services with about 750 employees. Planning and development, water and wastewater, major and minor construction, waste disposal, management of natural resources, community and cultural development, art exhibitions, recreation centres, parks and sanctuaries, cemeteries, and public swimming pools are all included in the regular day to day operations for the Tweed Shire Council team.

As explained by Anthony, Customer Service Leader at Tweed Shire Council:

"There's no one response for the same inquiry from every person. Depending on

where they live, the type of property they're on and what their inquiry is about, we have to go and do some further digging around their services to provide them with the correct response and outcome, or process they need to follow. So in many cases, we are tailoring our responses to our customer's needs, and what we can provide for them."

Anthony clarified how the Council catered to a particularly large demographic and an older population. Providing services online has been challenging as not everyone is tech-savvy.

He elaborated:

"Even though we are pretty technically advanced in what we can do to assist our customers, we still make sure that if somebody's not computer literate, doesn't have internet access, or doesn't own a smartphone, we can still provide a great level of service using old school forms and a telephone call."



Tweed Shire Council deals with a very diverse customer base. From remote locations that employ only a few Council services, to high density areas where they're using all Council water and sewer systems. We get a great variety of unique inquiries. It's fun, and it's also challenging to provide that level of service. We're always learning and growing in our roles.

**Anthony Morton,
Customer Service Leader, Tweed Shire Council**





We've been using outdated call centre software. It didn't have much functionality other than answering and redirecting calls to an agent. We needed to control the messaging that customers would experience when they hit the queue. For the Council's changing needs, our old system was not providing us with any enhancements for our customers.

We wanted to provide a good experience in routing calls, providing multimedia options for customers to do business with us in other ways and having some control over the messaging that they heard on hold or as they waited in the queue. We wanted to have the ability to adapt in real-time for any changing trends.

Anthony Morton,
Customer Service Leader,
Tweed Shire Council

The Situation

Being the largest Council in the Northern Rivers comes with its fair share of challenges. Those challenges only further increased after the pandemic. The Council had to adapt to working from home, especially being close to the NSW and Queensland state border with employees living on both sides.

Anthony explained how daylight savings was an example of one frequently arising complication due to COVID. It became an issue as customers operating on Queensland time would come across the border, only to find the Council offices closed or deadlines and appointments missed.

Along with that, the number of calls they received significantly increased. Managing the relationships with Councils across the border and dealing with the influx of inquiries required new technology that they didn't have.

In the words of Anthony:

"We found that as the Council was progressing, we were receiving a higher volume of calls directly through the contact centre. That meant we also needed to move with the times, and not expect that everybody had the time to pick up the phone and speak to somebody. To deal with that, we needed advanced technological features.

We wanted to put some upfront messaging at the head of the queue before customers even spoke to a customer service officer in case we had a weather event or some other event and customers needed upfront information. Other things like web chat were a requirement for us to enable people to have a quick chat and get the information they needed from the Council if they were busy or on the move.

The previous system had limited visibility of call histories, trends and reporting which is why it did not fulfill our requirements."

It was important for customer service officers at Tweed Shire Council to understand their customer needs and trends to know where to spend their resources. In order to achieve that, in 2018 they conducted a deep market scan through a Request for Tender process and chose Premier Contact Point, an enterprise grade, cloud contact centre solution that has proven to be invaluable for them.

Since the initial implementation of Premier's solution and in more recent times, council responded quickly to COVID-19 by rolling out a check-in portal and took the opportunity to help customers navigate to councils online channels. This allowed them to divert some call traffic away from their contact centre team by providing customers with information and updates on inquiries through self-service workflows in the check-in portal. Despite that, however, Council still needed to work closely with their customer contact technology vendor so that they could continue to improve customer service and provide further value to their community.

Enter Premier Contact Point

For Tweed Shire Council, Premier Contact Point provided the ultimate customer contact solution. According to Anthony, they chose Premier because of the ease with which they could liaise with their Australian based service desk with requests for help as well as having an open ear for feedback and suggestions. Premier would then look at the suggestions on merit, implement them and adapt their system to meet the Council's needs.

For Anthony, one of the most impressive things about Premier occurred before they implemented the platform; the Premier Contact Point team thoroughly understood the business and its requirements. Once they had a detailed understanding of what was and wasn't working for the Council systems and operations, they provided in-depth solutions and options that could be implemented and elaborated on how they would benefit the

Council. This hands-on approach went a long way to establishing trust between Premier and Tweed Shire Council.

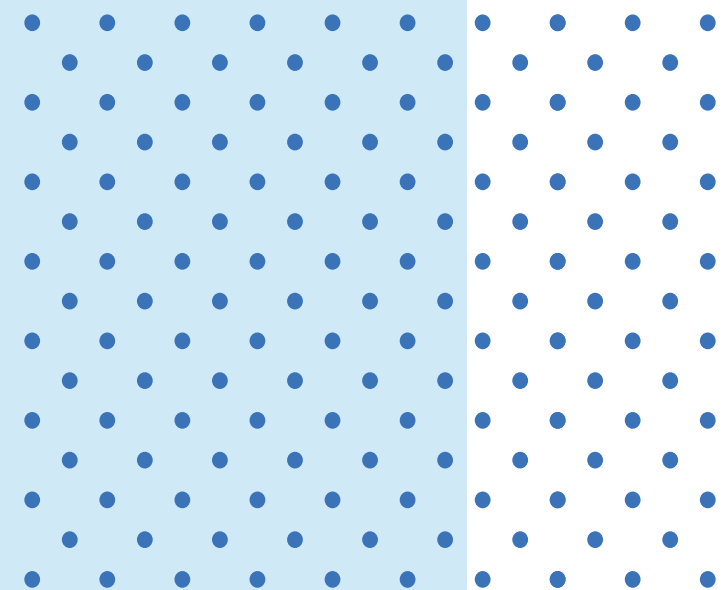
Anthony elaborated on this early establishment of trust:

"They just made us feel comfortable and assured us that we didn't have to cut through lots of red tape to get a response and that any feedback we had wasn't just going to sit in a queue for a ticket, to be dealt with by a larger organisation overseas. They made you feel like they cared and wanted your business. They didn't push me and didn't have the attitude that said: 'If you don't come on board, that's okay. We'll go on to the next person.' We always felt that whatever we were looking for, they understood, responded accordingly and provided the functionality we needed."



Implementing Premier Contact Point was stress-free. Premier's project manager kept us informed each step of the way, and the onsite training was very effective. The ongoing support from Premier's service desk team is excellent as they're always available to assist with any system changes or answer our questions. They made us feel heard and valued. They treated us and continue to treat us as highly and respectfully as they would some of their larger clients. This for us has been invaluable and has made Tweed Shire Council a great fan of the Premier Contact Point system.

Anthony Morton, Customer Service Leader, Tweed Shire Council





A lot of people are frustrated and don't have clear answers around restrictions or the requirements around COVID. We had further complexity with the border closures and issues connected to that. We had to try and find out information from the Federal and State Governments regarding COVID restrictions and allowances and implement them quickly. Residents often call us as their first point of contact, frustrated with the information overload available on Government websites. They want a more local perspective and think, 'I'll call the Council and see what they say about it.' This meant we were responsible for absorbing all the information and especially any changes to that data. We had to work out what that meant for our residents and ratepayers because they would be calling us for that assistance and guidance.

Anthony Morton,
Customer Service Leader, Tweed Shire Council



Countering COVID's Impact

With the pandemic came several challenges for Tweed Shire Council. The border closures resulted in heavy traffic congestion around the Coolangatta and Tweed areas. This hindered workers from commuting to and from their homes to work. Anthony explained how Council was getting most of the complaints and inquiries regarding the border congestion even though it wasn't something they were responsible for.

Tweed Shire Council countered this challenge by directing these complaints to those best equipped to deal with them, like the Queensland Government and State members leading the charge in reviewing these issues at a State level. This meant that even when they could not provide the ratepayer's with answers, they were able to steer them in the right direction so that their queries could be answered.

As Anthony mentioned:

"Even though there was not a lot that we could do to assist people, we would, at least, make sure that we could provide them with the most accurate information available. As well as provide them with somewhere to direct their inquiries around their frustration with the border closures."

The Council also tried to counter the COVID impacts for residents by cross-promoting their support services and educating and encouraging people to use their online channels for self-service. As a result, they saw an increase in online payments and an uptake in the use of technology even among the older demographic, keeping these at-risk Australians conducting their business safely from home for the first time.

Outcomes

For Tweed Shire Council, working with Premier resulted in significant outcomes. Now, they are able to achieve their grade of service goal, managing queues in real-time is a breeze and automatically directing calls to the right staff member is achieved with a click of the mouse.

With Premier's IVR technology, the Council could direct calls to different areas, leading to improved customer service. With the new auto-answer functionality, calls are automatically routed to the right customer service agents based on availability, which fewer calls were abandoned.

Anthony further elaborated:

"The ability to quickly update our queue, on-hold messaging, up-front flash messaging and notifications meant that many customers could hear the information they needed in their first 30 seconds of calling us and move on. So our customer experience has improved out of sight as well.

Probably one of the biggest wins for us was the disposition or wrap codes that we've applied to the system. We previously didn't have a good way of measuring the inquiries coming into the contact centre. So with Premier, we were able to easily do that. We've got 500 different disposition codes that we've grouped in multiple tiers. This way, depending on the nature of the call, the agent is able to accurately record what happened on the call."



Tweed Shire Council has experienced some significant improvements in managing customer experience since the implementation of Premier Contact Point. This starts with better-informing callers when they land in the queue, with tailored messages that can be easily changed in the Administration module. Calls are then passed to agents via the Agent Desktop module, and the 'auto-answer' option has enabled us to improve our Grade of Service significantly. The Agent Desktop is easy to navigate, which results in reducing our Average Handling Times. Transferring calls is made simple with an intuitive graphical representation of the agent, caller and third party and an easily accessible phone directory, which significantly reduces the risk of mistakenly hanging up a call.

Anthony Morton, Customer Service Leader, Tweed Shire Council

Premier also enhanced reporting that helped the Council better understand customer trends. This also helped the council shape their self-help options and redesign their website. Through Premier, Tweed Shire Council were able to incorporate newer features like SMS, web chat, understand agent behaviour and determine trends for improving customer experience.

In Anthony's words:

"The Agent SMS feature provides customers with a permanent reminder of which staff member they spoke with, what they talked about and any specific comments or reference information that resulted from the call. Multi-tier disposition codes allow staff to quickly and accurately record what happens on each call. As a result, the Council can now analyse customer trends better and identify areas to improve internal processes.

Administration of Premier Contact Point is much simpler than other systems we've used and allows us to easily configure complex queue treatments like offering voicemail and virtual hold. These two features have resulted in a significant reduction in abandoned calls because customers don't have to wait on hold anymore."





We've now moved to Premier's next generation platform which brings additional functionality, especially in handling SMS and web chat inquiries. Here, we've got an entire library of responses that an agent can select and then customise as they need to. It cut down the handling time on web chats, where agents previously typed responses. We now have a library where they can just get the answers they need in that chat feed with one click. Also, the introduction of hyperlinks to our main web pages, through the web chat and SMS libraries, has been fantastic.

**Anthony Morton, Customer Service Leader,
Tweed Shire Council**



What's Next?

The Council plans to add a new 'know your customer' feature to Premier Contact Point that will help them better manage omnichannel interactions with customers.

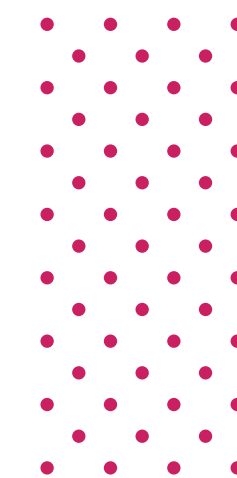
The latest version includes the Customer Contract Management feature which stores customer contact information, agent notes, last agent details and much more within Premier's database. Every inbound call, email, SMS and web chat is matched against an existing customer record and when one is found, the Agent Desktop screenpop instantly lets the agent know the customers name, the last time they contacted council, the last agent that handled their enquiry and much more. Moreover, it immediately allows the agent to address the customer by name and have access to detailed information on all past interactions. With this upgrade, Tweed Shire Council expects a further boost to their customer support, a reduction in customer effort and an increase in agent productivity.

When talking about new features, Anthony mentioned:

"We are also introducing a new feature that leverages the unique capabilities of smartphones, by offering self-service workflows whilst allowing the customer to speak to an agent if they need to. Depending on the customer's inquiry, we can present an 'app-like' visual menu as well as sending them links or forms to complete whilst they wait on hold in the queue. So by the time they speak to a customer service officer, the process is almost complete. For example, if you are ringing and select from the Visual IVR the option for dog registration, we can push a form to the customer so they can start providing the information or they can access self-help links. Moreover, we're also looking to open up the channel for customers to liaise with us via SMS, as they do for web chat or email."

Moving forward, Council plans to handle multiple concurrent web chats, utilise Premier's included Teams integration, and use the Agent Affinity feature to automatically route calls and other interactions to the last agent that handles their enquiry.

For Tweed Shire Council, the journey to improve is never-ending. They strive to move on to bigger and better things and continue to improve their customer service delivery with Premier in the future.



Hi, I'm Steve...



Steve Fitzgerald
National Sales Manager,
Premier Contact Point

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For over 35 years, we've been helping a diverse range of organisations across Australia to deliver a better customer experience, and I'm confident that we can help your organisation as well.

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