



How the California DMV implemented a faster, more customer-centered contact center

About 45,000 calls flow into the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) contact center every day. The most populous state in the U.S., California issues more than 33 million driver's licenses or ID cards and regulates more than 35 million registered vehicles.¹ When Californians call the DMV with questions about driver's licenses, vehicle tags, inspection rules, and more, they want fast, accurate answers.

The DMV began seeing an increased need for an upgrade to its call center in 2019, partly because it started receiving an influx of calls from Californians updating their licenses to meet federal REAL ID requirements. The upgrade had to satisfy two key groups: California drivers and DMV contact center agents. The DMV's needs grew even more challenging when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of local offices in 2020 and many DMV workers to start doing their jobs from home. During this time, residents were waiting up to two hours to get through to DMV contact center agents.

"There is no reason that someone should have to wait on the phone to get general questions answered," says

Sonia Huestis, deputy director of the DMV's Customer Service Division. "We understand our customers' time is valuable, and we want to shorten their interaction with us."

Though many DMV staffers took the shift to remote work in stride, some remained anxious about how their tools would perform in the new virtual setting. "I was excited to work from home but worried about not having full use of my systems," says Holli Brzezinski, who works in the DMV's Riverside Contact Center.

A bot named Miles, Whisper mode, and real-time chat

To address DMV agents' work-from-home concerns and better serve California's drivers, the DMV partnered with [Amazon Web Services \(AWS\)](#) to implement [Amazon Connect](#), a cloud-based contact center solution. The DMV also implemented a host of advanced technologies, including Amazon's QnABot chatbot, which the DMV named Miles. The chatbot uses natural language processing to answer basic questions automatically — giving DMV contact center agents more time to handle complex questions.

Making this work — understanding which questions to automate and which to send to a live agent — requires deep insight on callers' motivations. Most users are happy to click on a link from a chatbot for easy-to-answer questions, but they want to talk to an agent for more complicated queries. An easy question might be the address of a nearby office or its hours of operation — facts that rarely change and that an automated script can easily access and reveal to a caller. If a caller wants to know why they didn't receive their new car tags, that would most likely require a human agent.

The system automatically forwards the more complex queries to live agents, who are more prepared to answer questions due to the system's Whisper feature, which briefly tells the agent what the customer is calling about before the customer is added to the call. This gives agents a few seconds to prepare for the topic and reduces call handle time by up to 30 seconds.

The system also uses advanced data analytics to discern user intent. "You first have to know the biggest reasons people are calling in so you don't make a self-service tool that nobody uses," says David Pizzo, senior account executive with AWS.

What's next for the California DMV?

Sonia Huestis, deputy director of the DMV's Customer Service Division, says the agency is working on advances like allowing agents to take credit card payments over the phone and adding screen sharing to give helpdesk agents tools for more engaging technical support.

Jeff Spronk, the Amazon Connect specialist who worked on the DMV project, says the first stage of the project was to use Amazon's speech-recognition technologies, whose machine learning algorithms scan call transcripts for key phrases like "renew my driver's license" and other data revealing user intent and agent service habits.

"This helped us answer those questions around why people are calling and what the agents are telling them," Spronk says.

They also designed the technology to anticipate the everyday needs of call center agents.

"Amazon Connect allows me to view records, review fees, and process my own work," Brzezinski says. "It's a good feeling to be able to assist customers with all my resources. It makes our interaction smoother for the both of us."

Angel Jimenez, who also works in the DMV's Riverside Contact Center, says the system's real-time chat streamlines the call experience. "Previously, when working on a call, it was taking additional time to walk the customer through the website to get to the forms or website pages. While working on Live Chat, I can send links to forms or information on our

website. I can also send them an email from a do not reply email box, if they prefer that method."

Happier customers, less-stressed agents, lower costs for the DMV

California drivers appreciate the contact center improvements, DMV officials say.

"All of these improved digital services are working together to reduce field office wait times and offering customers convenient options to complete DMV transactions," says Derek Chan, chief of the agency's Customer Information Branch. "In fact, 90 percent of customers we surveyed gave the DMV 6 out of 7 points for their experience. This tells us the technologies we are incorporating to provide superior customer service are being positively received by those we serve."

One half of callers are using self-service applications like Miles the chatbot, Huestis says. This gives human agents the freedom to help more customers, and it's paying off.

The DMV is making progress on reducing hold times — a significant challenge for an agency overseeing drivers and vehicles numbering in the tens of millions. "In November and December of 2021, more than 55 percent of all calls were answered

within 30 minutes on average," Huestis says. Callers can also use an automated call-back feature so they don't have to sit on hold for a long time.

Rapid implementation is the hallmark of cloud-based software-as-a-service offerings like Amazon Connect. AWS, AWS Partner Aspen, and the DMV were able to go from signed contracts to more than 250 agents in production within 90 days.

This rapid time to value allowed the DMV to start saving on call center expenses far sooner than anticipated. The implementation team from AWS projected that the new system's automation and other efficiencies would generate significant cost savings within 24 months.

In the end, they didn't have to wait nearly that long, says Pizzo. "We hit that goal two months after go live."

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¹ <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/news-and-media/dmv-statistics/>

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