

RESULTS WASHINGTON CASE STUDY: Licensing Procedure Overhauled

Faster, simpler licensing. With a customer-focused revamp of key steps toward getting a liquor license, the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board simplified and streamlined the process, dramatically reducing customer complaints and queries.

In Washington, everyone who applies for a liquor license — such as restaurants, grocery stores, taverns and convenience stores — must complete a briefing before getting the license. It's the final step in the process.

The briefing covers things such as checking ID cards, record keeping and how to work with the state Liquor and Cannabis Board.

Until recently, these briefings consisted of lengthy online slide presentations.

“These PowerPoints could be anywhere from 20 to 80 pages,” said Leticia Mendez, program manager for the Enforcement Division.

There were also 13 versions, depending on the type of license requested. It would take 30–90 minutes to watch one, which was often precious time for small business owners. Applicants also kept complaining that the online presentations would freeze halfway through.

“Our customer service desk received a lot of phone calls, sometimes more than 150 a month,” said Monika Taylor, administrative assistant.



After watching the briefings online, applicants would have to print out a form. Then they'd sign it, and fax, scan or mail it to the board. It was a cumbersome step that applicants often forgot or thought they'd done online already. Missing this step delayed their licenses, sometimes by weeks.

“Since this is the last step in the process, the customer really wants to go by then,” said Taylor. “We were getting hit through the public feedback as well as the internal staff being frustrated.

“It was everything we expected: The presentations were too lengthy and too cumbersome.”

- Monika Taylor



A team of subject matter experts, comprising of Sgts. Robert Knowles, Jackie Eliason and Steve Telstad, Officer Kevin Russom, Lts. Kandra Tinnerstet, Joshua Bolender and Kate Miyasato, and staff members Gra`nt Bulski and Katie Boyce, went to work streamlining things.

They pulled in key stakeholders, including enforcement officers and customer service-, licensing- and information technology staff to “plain talk” the briefings and condense them down to key information. (Gone, for example, are the multiple links to full-text state laws.)

“It was an eye-opener, going through this process,” Taylor said. “We were putting so much information out there that we were losing the customer.”

The team also surveyed applicants.

Improvements: “It was everything we expected: The presentations were too lengthy and too cumbersome,” Taylor said.

With Enforcement Chief Justin Nordhorn’s approval, the group pared the information in the 13 briefings to just two YouTube-style videos. Applicants have to watch only one nine-minute-long video. The agency started using them in January 2015.

The team also automated the signature process, so applicants can electronically sign and submit the form online after they watch the video. The process works so well that the agency is considering expanding it to other agency business.

Outcome: Calls from customers frustrated with the process have dropped from about 150 a month to virtually none. That’s freed up a staffer to help out with additional work related to the agency’s regulation of marijuana.

“It’s a year later, and we don’t get calls about our process,” Mendez said. “Prior to this, we were getting 150–175 calls a month about the form, the information or what to do. Any one of those queries would be three to five minutes, or more if the customer was irate.”

The videos have also helped with the relationship between licensees and officers in the field, said Tony Masias, a Liquor and Cannabis enforcement officer (and one of the key “actors” in the videos).

“Getting the license is often the start of a long-term work relationship, and enforcement officers are an ongoing resource who can help licensees get training,” he said. “With these videos, they see the person as a resource, not just as enforcement.”



Washington Liquor and Cannabis Board Lean project team