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# REVE NEWS

FINANCE'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER • NOVEMBER 2007 • VOLUME 4, NUMBER 11

## Divisional Corner

Rachel Boschen, Assistant Commissioner, Customer Relations



**"Treat your customer, as you want to be treated as a customer."**

– Catherine Pulsifer

This is my mantra in life and labor. I am very excited about working with the NYC Department of Finance and particularly within Customer Relations. Prior to my arrival at the agency, I worked for The New York Times as part of the Customer Order Fulfillment Department, and before that I worked for Clairol Inc. in the Consumer Affairs Department. Although both were customer service environments, they were very different types of organizations. It is this diverse and successful experience that I bring with me to the Customer Relations Division at Finance – which currently includes the Telephone, Correspondence and Refunds & Adjustments Units.

Along with my team, I am looking forward to contributing to the goal of helping people pay the right amount on time. To that end, the Customer Relations Division will undergo a transformation to improve customer response, service and feedback. We are reorganizing the unit to provide customer service training for the representatives who work hard to serve the customers, and technology to operate efficiently and allow us to make

data-driven decisions. This will impact the way we treat our customers – fairly and satisfactorily.

This is not the sum of all my parts. I graduated from Herbert H. Lehman College where I majored in Mass Communication and minored in Theatre. Communication, in its various forms, has always been important to me. I am probably one of the few who actually enjoyed Speech 101 and approach the mechanics of communication with as much enthusiasm. But communication is important because it doesn't matter what you know if you can't communicate it. I also enjoy theatre. Not simply as a spectator. In fact, I probably enjoy it less as a spectator and more as a participant. I have worked in theatre on stage as an actor and behind the curtain as a production stage manager. Once you go behind the curtain, theatre is never a spectator sport again. In my spare time, I love to spend time with my fiancé and my two dogs and as a big-time animal lover; I also do dog grooming just because it is a lot of fun. My newest interest is in gardening but I won't know until next summer how successful I am.

The effort I put into my personal activities perfectly complements the amount of hard work I've continued to do throughout my professional career. So not only am I looking forward to seeing what comes out of the ground from my garden, but I am also anticipating great things coming from the Customer Relations division as we grow and evolve together.

## SMART CORNER

### SMART Results for July-September Quarter

October was a busy month for Finance: we had the quarterly Operational Reviews in all divisions during the week of October 22nd, the agency-wide meeting on October 31st, and we launched the new Gallup Q12 employee engagement survey to gather employee feedback. But the month was also a time of reflection and learning as we reported, shared and discussed the results of our work from July to September. When this newsletter went to press, the data for Agency and divisional SMART Card results were just finalized and posted online. The following are some highlights from the Agency SMART Card and a review of how divisions contributed to the overall results achieved.

### Voluntary Compliance

We measure how Finance helps people pay the right amount on time by the "Percent of Voluntary Compliance." In essence, this is the dollar amount of voluntary payments (such as parking tickets paid off the windshield, property taxes paid by the due date and business taxes paid by the filing date, etc.) divided by the total dollar amount of all payments due (which includes current balance due and any outstanding debt). For the 12-month period ending on Sept. 30th, this rate was 69.42%, which means that more than 30 percent of the revenues we collect were not paid on time. This number tends to fluctuate, depending on the month, because of the cyclical nature of tax payments. Property taxes, which account for nearly half of our annual revenue, are particularly prone to variation. For

example, in the prior quarter for the three months ending June 30th, the voluntary compliance rate was 84.68%. This number will be more meaningful over time as we collect more data and can compare one period this year with the exact period last year. So we should be able to learn more from this number and eventually see the impact of our strategies to improve voluntary compliance as we monitor the numbers in the next several quarters.

### Customer Satisfaction and Complier Treatment

We continued to make good progress on Customer Satisfaction and Complier Treatment, by collecting feedback from customers and compliers. Many of you may know that last quarter, the agency as a whole reported a significant increase in the number of responses to our survey cards (5,847 from customers and 7,531 from compliers). During the July Operational Review, the Leadership Team was charged with leading their divisions to further increase the number of feedback responses, because we believe the more customers and compliers we hear from, the closer the rating is to a true assessment of our service quality. This quarter, we received 10,341 responses from our external customers and 6,593 responses from compliers. While we fell short of our target to double the number of customer and complier responses, we made significant progress on the customer side. And we learned that we have room for improvement on the complier side. *(Continued on page 2)*

**GOVERNANCE MAKES A GOOD FIT**



How does FIT ensure that the day-to-day process of managing its many project requests is aligned with the agency's needs? How does this division find the best use of IT resources in ways that are fair and transparent? Those are the questions addressed by the new IT Governance process, which was launched in September. It will ensure that all IT project requests are created, reviewed, evaluated, and prioritized at multiple levels.

The Governance process will help maintain priorities by requesting that each division participate in IT's project decision process. Having this open evaluating process will allow for a standardized approach to decision-making, increased visibility of IT project ranking, and an objective exploration of project risks while also contributing to more accurate and timely data.

Here's how it works: FIT will review all requests and if approved will forward the requests to Governance. Governance will place the requests into one of three size categories: small (one/two-day work effort), medium (up to three months of work effort and less than \$100,000 in cost), or large (longer than three months of work effort and/or more than \$100,000 in cost). Governance then forwards the request to the appropriate division/unit, and sends an acknowledgement of the status.

Each request, depending on its size, goes through a different process. For small requests, FIT schedules and assigns work on the request. The requestor is then notified of the anticipated delivery date. For medium requests, a weekly meeting of mid-level managers called a Function Council performs an approval process based on several criteria including risk, value, impact and other factors. For large requests, a monthly meeting of executives (Selected Leadership Team Members) is convened to evaluate the projects and determine the next steps.

This Governance process allows divisions to objectively evaluate IT projects and contributes to how FIT utilizes its resources. This internal transparent communication process between FIT and its customers ultimately gives all Finance divisions the knowledge to work more effectively and to achieve their results.

*(Smart Corner continued from page 1)*

The Leadership Team was also charged with achieving a specific rating from customers and compliers. In particular, all divisions were challenged by the Commissioner and the First Deputy Commissioner to achieve a 3.75 (out of 5) rating for customer satisfaction and 3.40 for complier treatment. This quarter, we exceeded those targets by a respectable margin! Our external customers gave us a 4.14 rating while compliers gave us a 3.83. In the prior quarter, our customer and complier ratings were 3.78 and 3.32, respectively.

Each quarter, Internal Support Divisions (such as Budget and Employee Services) also collected feedback from their customers – i.e., Finance employees and managers – on the quality of services they provide. In the last two quarters, Finance has reported this number separately from the external customer rating. In the quarter ending Sept. 30th, they gave the internal services divisions 3.66 out of 5 for their services, slightly higher than the 3.61 in the prior quarter. However, the employee response rate was lower, averaging less than 50% compared with over 60%, than in the previous quarter.

**UNIT COST**

Finally, our efficiency measure continues to evolve. In this quarter, Budget and Financial Services refined the way we calculate the agency unit cost. We looked at how much it cost to collect \$1,000 in voluntary payments when excluding the cost of enforcement actions (such as audits and collections). Well, when people pay the right amount on time, it cost us about \$4.95 per \$1,000 in revenue. That number rises to \$8.27 per \$1,000 on average when we expend additional resources to audit files and take other action to collect outstanding debt.

*Looking for your division's SMART Card results? Check out FIT's Business Scorecard Manager (BSM), which you can access through the SMART BSM icon on your computer or through FinanceNet.*

**MAKING STRIDES AGAINST BREAST CANCER 2007**

**Thank you to the top 12 walkers who raised more than \$300 each.**



**Pictured left to right:** Susie Yuen, Stephanie Mitchell-Cloud, Reasa Semper, Flo Miller, Commissioner Martha E. Stark, Portia Perkins, Gail Gist and Pamela Parker-Cortijo.

**Top walkers not in photo:** Linder Hampton, Jackie Applewhite, Cassandra Stevens, Robert Y. Lee, and Daphne Harris.





## HOW DIVISIONS ARE HELPING PEOPLE PAY THE RIGHT AMOUNT ON TIME

• *Adjudication:* After collecting data on average turnaround times for several quarters, **the division this quarter set a target for each of its turnaround times:** 36 days for hearings by mail/web, 25 minutes for in-person hearings, 12 days for appeals and 10 days for commercial hearings. Performance is now reported in percentage of days that meet turnaround time targets.

• *Audit:* **For the first time the auditors reported this quarter how long on average it takes them to complete a field audit of a tax return** as measured from the date the audit case is initiated to the case closing date. That number is 512 days (about a year and five months). The division has also added a measure for how long it takes to initiate an audit from the date the return is filed. No data is available yet for this metric.

• *Budget & Financial Services:* **The division made significant improvement this quarter in the average turnaround time for new hire and promotion processing.** A new hire is completed in 45 days now compared with 73 days in the previous quarter, and a promotion is processed in 50 days compared with 86 days previously. Budget coordinates these metrics with Employee Services.

• *City Register:* **The most noteworthy development is the division's addition of unit-level SMART cards** for the borough Business Centers and the Surveyor unit. Each of the City Register's units now reports their performance on two divisional metrics and two of their own (Average time to return documents and percent of documents rejected during examination).

• *Collections:* **The division made significant progress in reporting data for its metrics.** For the first time, Collections was able to report the debt resolution rates for all City debt (4.18) as well as the debt that makes up that number: debt collected directly by Finance (5.71%) and debt that Finance collects on behalf of other agencies (0.32%). The same data are reported for one-year-old debt and three-year-old debt.

• *Communications & Government Affairs:* **The division began surveying its external customers** (taxpayers at outreach events, elected officials, members of the press, etc.) on the quality of its services. A new survey

card was developed and distributed in October. Survey results are expected starting in November.

• *Customer Relations:* **Customers who called Finance on our help line and through 311 waited over 9 minutes on average this quarter,** significantly longer than the 2 minutes they waited in the previous quarter. Representatives took more than 131,000 calls this quarter compared with 127,000 the previous quarter.

• *Employee Services:* **The division reported data for the first time this quarter on all of its new measures:**

Finance employees can now see on average how long it takes Employee Services to complete a range of services such as warehouse deliveries, training requests, purchases for \$25,000 or less and pay-related inquiries. Employee Services also

shares responsibility for two metrics monitored by Budget on new hire processing and promotion processing. These metrics measure processes handled by both divisions.

• *Enforcement:* **The division refined its mission of how Enforcement helps people pay the right amount on time and proposed a new set of metrics.** Given the intangibility of enforcement outcomes, the division decided to focus on immediate results such as the amount of investigations and inspections conducted, cases referred for prosecution, and arrests made.

• *Finance Information Technology (FIT):* Like Employee Services and Enforcement, **FIT also reported data on its metrics for the first time this quarter.** Among the metrics that may be of interest to many agency employees is the helpdesk call turnaround times. FIT reported that 33 percent of 6,020 helpdesk calls received during the quarter were closed in one day. For the 994 calls from Finance's business centers, the percentage closed in one day was more than 52 percent.

• *Legal Affairs:* The division continued to rely on results from the Complier Treatment survey (administered for operating divisions with compliers) and the Internal Services Customer Satisfaction survey to measure how it helps people pay the right amount on time. This quarter, **Legal Affairs took efforts to actively impact the Complier Treatment rating by**

**offering training and briefings to employees of operating divisions so they can improve the complier rating.**

• *Payment Operations:* **The division began reporting data this quarter on one new metric – the wait time at Business Centers.** The number is now 6.30 minutes on average. Other measures finalized last month that Payment Operations have not yet been able to report data for are payment processing times and percent of electronic payment transactions.

• *Property:* **The division refined the groups of properties for which assessment measures will be reported.** Market value to sales price ratios will be reported for 1-3 family homes, 4-5 family homes and rental and commercial properties separately, along with a coefficient of dispersion for each category. Property will also report separate property tax to gross income ratios for rental and commercial property owners who file Real Property Income and Expense (RPIE) forms compared with those that do not file. The overall RPIE compliance rate will also be reported.

• *Sheriff:* **This quarter, the division broke out the court order servicing rate for child support orders versus all others** such as arrests, seizures and evictions. This shows about 60 percent of 4,497 child support orders received during the quarter were served compared with 75 percent for 1,754 court orders in the other categories. After surveying its partner agencies for two quarters (and receiving a near perfect rating), the Sheriff revised the survey questions to collect more detailed data that will help them focus on how to improve specific aspects of their services.

• *Tax Policy:* During this quarter, **the division launched the survey of external customers on Finance's website to collect feedback on the usefulness of its published reports.** The results from this survey will be reported starting in November. Tax Policy continued to improve performance on its other two metrics, which measure turnaround times for information and data requests from internal customers.

• *Treasury:* The division earned more in interest on City deposits than U.S. Treasury Bills by a wider margin this quarter (19 percent compared with 10 percent in the last quarter) and introduced a new interest rate against which Treasury will measure how effectively it is earning a return on City money. **Treasury is also working to develop new metrics to measure the performance of the Bail Unit and the Vendor Check Processing Unit.**



**ENTER! NOVEMBER 2007 CONTEST**



**GOBBLE! GOBBLE!**  
Yes, it is time for

**Thanksgiving and the delicious meal we share with family, friends and neighbors. But how much do you really know about the famous holiday? Find out now!**

- 1) In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving from the last Thursday to what date?
- 2) The first Thanksgiving celebration was in what year?
- 3) In what year did New York State adopt Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom?
- 4) Thanksgiving is sometimes referred to as what day?
- 5) What are three foods commonly associated with Thanksgiving?
- 6) In 1863, which President issued a White House proclamation calling on the "Whole American People" to unite "with one heart and one voice" in observing a special day of thanksgiving?
- 7) Every year the President of the United States pardons what/who before Thanksgiving at a White House ceremony?
- 8) Football is a modern Thanksgiving Day tradition. Which two NFL teams always play home games on Thanksgiving Day?
- 9) What immigrant group did the Patuxet tribe help with their harvest in Plymouth Colony?
- 10) What department store sponsors the annual Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City?

Please submit your answers on a separate sheet of paper (numbered 1-10) and fax to **Thanksgiving Contest at: 212-232-1890**. You must print your name, work location, and work phone number on your answer sheet. The first three entries with the correct answers will receive a prize...Good Luck!

**POWER TO STOP SMOKING IS IN YOUR HANDS**

*"The trip of a hundred miles begins with the first step."*

- Chinese Proverb

**Making the Decision to Quit**

With the end of the year fast approaching, one common resolution people have is to stop smoking. Researchers have looked into how and why people stop tobacco use. They have some ideas, or models, of how this happens. The Health Belief Model (a behavioral model developed by social psychologists) identifies the factors that will drive a person to stop tobacco use:

- Believe that you could get a tobacco related disease and this worries you,
- Believe that you can make an honest attempt at quitting,
- Believe that the benefits of quitting outweigh the benefits of continuing tobacco use,
- Or, know of someone who has had health problems as a result of their tobacco use,

The decision to quit tobacco use is one that only you can make. Others may want you to quit, but the real



commitment must come from you. If you are thinking about taking action for quitting, choose from the websites below to set a date to quit and decide on a plan that will bring you to a smoke-free life.

Take the American Cancer Society's **Great American Smokeout Challenge** (Smokeout Day is the 3rd Thursday in November)

Also visit **Centers For Disease Control and Prevention** and the **American Cancer Society**

**NY State Quitline**

**WINNERS! TRICK OR TREAT CONTEST WINNERS:**

*Anthony Fung Quee, FIT-TSG and Barbara Banks, Collections*

**CONTEST ANSWERS**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Black Cat   | 6. The Irish   |
| 2. This Question Was Eliminated  | 7. The Day Of The Dead                                 |
| 3. Ireland   | 8. Salt  |
| 4. Anoka, Mn. In 1921  | 9. Trick Or Treat Or Knock And Run                     |
| 5. The Celts Observed The Event By Buring Crops And Sacrificing Animals To The Celtic Gods In Bonfires | 10. New York City's Greenwich Village Halloween Parade |
|  | 11. All Hallows Eve                                    |

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