



The Official Newsletter of NYC 311
New York City's source for government
information and non-emergency services.

Buzz

Volume One/Issue One

March 2015



THANK YOU! To ALL the staff — past and present — who work so hard for 311 and New York City. We wish we could show you all the faces of the dedicated folks we've had the honor to work with since 2003.

Here are just a few:





EVOLUTION

From Call Center in 2003 to Multi-Channel Contact Center in 2015

Before 2003, navigating New York City services and finding non-emergency government information could be like going through a maze. Even if you thought you knew where to go, you could still encounter roadblocks along the way. When NYC311 launched in March 2003, more than 40 agency call centers were consolidated into one – instantly making 311 the single source for all non-emergency government information and services. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 180 languages, 311 has become a staple for New Yorkers. Since its launch, 311 has received over 200 million calls and transformed the way City services are delivered to New Yorkers.

Known for its drive to innovate, 311 has evolved over the years from a just a phone number into a multi-channel Contact Center. In 2009, 311Online launched on *NYC.gov*, allowing users to access information, report problems, check the status of previously-filed inquiries, and request City services. 311 also launched its Twitter account — @NYC311 — that same year. Since then, 311 has expanded its social media presence to include Facebook and Instagram. With more than 160,000 total followers, 311 Social Media provides immediate information about Alternate Side Parking status, school closures, and other Citywide events, as well as answers customers' queries on Twitter and Facebook. Following a pilot program last year, customers can now report service requests for heat and hot water, street potholes, streetlight conditions, and Parks maintenance requests through Twitter and Facebook.

NYC311's Mobile App debuted in 2009, allowing our customers to access information about City services on the go. Since 2011, customers have been able to text their inquiries to 311-NYC (311-692). 311 has indeed embraced meeting our customers where they are and providing equitable service for all.

As we celebrate our 12th Anniversary, 311 remains an international model for delivering non-emergency government services. We serve more than 67,000 customers a day through phone, online, mobile app, text, social media, and chat.



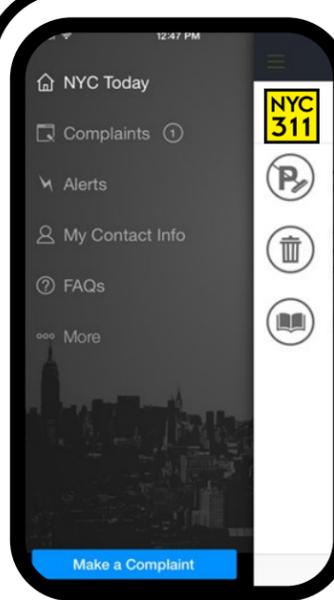
TECHNOLOGY

From one point of contact by telephone in 2003 to meeting our customers across eight channels in multiple languages today, here's a look at some of the ways we've advanced through the years.



12 years ago, when 311 began, we used an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to communicate simple messaging to customers before they reached a representative. As the years went on, we added press options to allow the caller to choose how their call is directed, and developed more robust and nuanced messaging. In just the last year, our IVR system has been revolutionized by the addition of a free speech solution, the *Natural Language Understanding* or NLU.

In the updated system, Customers speak their intent and the NLU either figures out how to route the call, or it provides the requested information without the customer ever having to speak with a representative. This latest addition has seen great results, with increased capacity and improved call experience for both the customer and the representative.



311 Mobile App allows iPhone and Android users quick and easy access to a subset of services on their mobile devices. Available since October 2009, the App was significantly upgraded in January 2014. The new functions, along with heavy promotion, have increased the Mobile App's popularity. In February 2015, the App experienced record high activity with over 88,000 active users and 900,000 individual interactions.



We've come a long way with social media, since our first tweet about residential BBQ regulations way back in July 2009. Our social media channels have grown to include Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. With increased engagement from over 160,000 followers across all channels, we have started accepting Service Requests on Twitter and Facebook. 311 social media can now take complaints about potholes, park maintenance, streetlights, and heat and hot water, and we have plans to add many more services in 2015.



311 is always trying to find new ways to meet our customers' needs, so it was no surprise when we launched a Live Chat program in 2013. The program, which supports 311 Online customers, started with 5 topics and has now expanded to over 55. Available Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm, the Chat program allows customers to learn more about services in a wide range of subjects — from birth certificate information to affordable housing — by chatting with a live agent. Live Chat makes services more accessible and the online experience better for customers. In 2014, agents answered more than 10,000 chats, a number that is only expected to grow.



STACEY-ANN
TEAM SUPERVISOR
10 YEARS WITH 311

What is one of the most memorable things that has happened at 311 while you were here?

The most important thing that happened to me was being one of two selected representatives to be shadowed by the Mayor while taking calls. It was about a year and a half into my career, and I got called into the office. I thought I was in trouble at first, but it turned out to be good news. They told me that the Mayor planned to visit the Call Center that day, and he wanted to sit down with some reps. It was nerve-wracking, but it also was actually pretty fun.

What do you remember about your first day?

My first day, I was very nervous and excited to actually come here and work. At orientation, I remember meeting new people, learning as much as I could, and wanting to do my best at this new job.

What was the toughest challenge the City and 311 have faced in the last decade? How was 311 able to take care of New Yorkers?

Having been here for 10 years, I've seen so many different things happen to NYC. The hardest thing we dealt with was Hurricane Sandy. People didn't know that we were here. Some people on staff were here for 2-3 days in a row to make sure that when someone called, we were here to answer their questions and give them updates.

Why is 311 so important to NYC?

311 is important to NYC because having that one number that you can call 24 hours a day, any day, anytime, is invaluable. Before people didn't know who to turn to when something was happening, now if you have a non-emergency situation and need help, you can just call 311.

What has been your craziest experience working at 311?

It actually didn't happen here at the Call Center, it happened when I was on my way to the Call Center. It was the snowstorm of 2011, and I had to take my son to daycare. The snow was really piled high that day, and I remember when I was dropping him off, a man yelled at me, "How dare you take your child out in these weather conditions!" I turned to him and told him that I work for 311, so I have to go in and answer phone calls. Once I told him that he said, "Okay, it's fine, go into work." No matter what, we have to come in and serve the public. It's great that people actually appreciate that.



NICOLE
TEAM SUPERVISOR
12 YEARS WITH 311

What is one of the most memorable things that has happened at 311 while you were here?

We've had quite a few things that have happened. We've had transit strikes, the blackout, snowstorms, quite a few different tragedies.

However, the most memorable might have been during the 2005 transit strike. We had to work 12-hour shifts, and we were picked up in correctional facility buses. It was pretty intense, we had people asking different questions about how they can get around NYC. As usual, we all pitched in and were able to help the City.



What do you remember about your first day?

I've been working with 311 since its inception. My first day I was just learning the different services that 311 would offer and the different things that the City offers. Learning more about the City was pretty cool.

What was the toughest challenge the City and 311 have faced in the last decade? How was 311 able to take care of New Yorkers?

One of the toughest things had to be the blackout. People had no idea what to do or where to call. 311 was really able to help them and provide them with information about where they could go.

Why is 311 important to NYC?

I think it's important that residents have somewhere they can call. People need to be able to call somewhere where they can get the answers they need for questions that they have. Instead of calling all these different numbers, they're able to call 311.

What do you love most about working for 311?

What I love the most about working at 311 is helping people. Helping them get the information that they need, when they need it, and directing them to different places that can help them.

225,706,752
TOTAL CONTACTS
ACROSS CHANNELS
2003—2015





RICH
PROJECT MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR
2 YEARS WITH 311

What is one of the most memorable things that has happened to 311 while you were here?

For me, it is the technology.

The Natural Language Understanding Interactive Voice Response allows customers to self-serve in their own way, so that they can access information more quickly and efficiently.

The NLU IVR sounds like an interesting and innovative project. What was it like to work on that?

The NLU IVR is the most compelling project I have worked on since joining 311. Everyone worked hard on it for a year, and it involved collaboration from many teams within 311 to be a success. The project transformed the way that we serve customers, as well as 311 as an organization.

What was the toughest challenge the City and 311 have faced in the last decade? How was 311 able to take care of New Yorkers?

One of the toughest is always any weather-related incident. Hurricane Sandy, the winters we've had the past couple of years — at that point 311 becomes a lifeline for people. It's the one place they can go where they can really get all of the information they need when they're in desperate situations.

Why is 311 so important to NYC?

It's the one-stop shop. A lot of times, people know what they're looking for, they just don't really know how to get to it. So we are that destination where you can go for all City government information. We can provide you the information or get you to the person that can. That's a huge benefit in such a large city.

What do you love most about working for 311?

The people. From all levels, top to bottom. The dedication and the skill sets are second-to-none. This is one of the most impressive places I've worked. It's unbelievable.

4,164,073
 Number of calls
 handled in languages
 other than English
 (since 2003)



The Content Team

2006



Times Square billboard

2010



**THROUGH
THE
YEARS**

**Empire State Building
311's 10th Anniversary**

2013

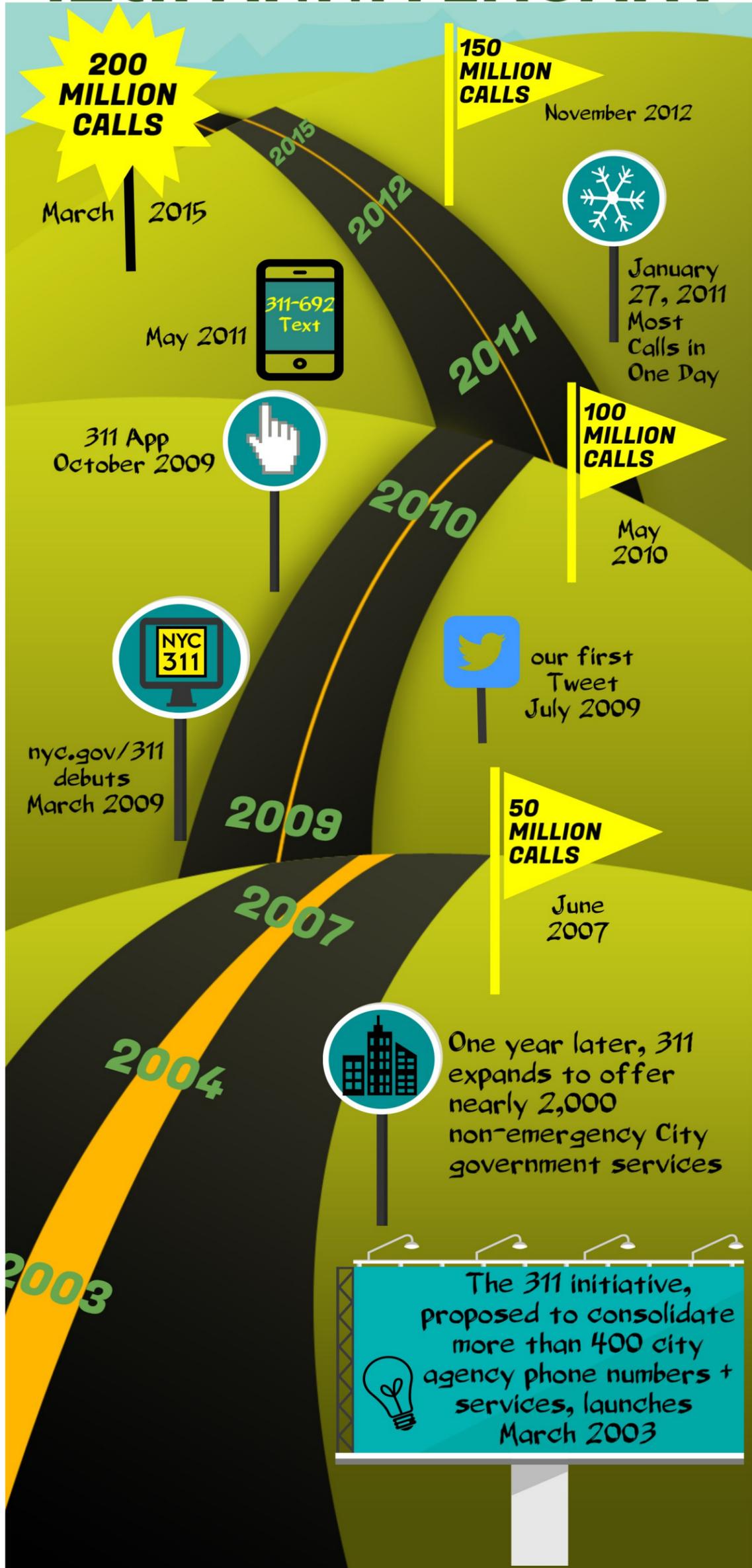


**Call Center
Representative Quintin
Rudd took
our 200 Millionth Call
March 6, 2015**





celebrates our 12th ANNIVERSARY



FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Looking back on when 311 launched in March 2003, who would have predicted then how prevalent and portable technology would be today, and how it would transform the way we all communicate? Just a dozen years ago, smartphones, tablets, touch screens, apps, and social media were all rare or on the horizon.

That provides some context on how rapidly technology enables change and our behaviors then adapt. It reinforces the idea that predicting the future is not easy, often inaccurate (I'm still waiting for that hover car I was promised), and sometimes scary. Predicting the future for 311 is no less challenging, but not impossible. By examining the past and present, there is a roadmap, even if it doesn't come with GPS turn-by-turn directions.

I'm not advocating holograms that would create service requests or representatives who would navigate drones to prune trees. At least, not yet. Maybe soon. But when I think of the future of 311, I start with three foundations that mark the past 12 years of outstanding service delivery.

- **Technology** — 311 constantly evolves by driving and adopting technology to meet our customers where they are.
- **Employees** — The annual CFI Group survey confirms that 311 customers are more satisfied with our service than that of the best private sector companies. When rating representatives, 9 out of 10 New Yorkers surveyed gave them the highest scores possible. Try to get 9 out of 10 New Yorkers to agree on anything – let alone give top scores – but every year the CFI Group survey confirms 311 delivers outstanding customer service.
- **Customer-focus** — While each customer's needs and expectations vary when they come to 311, we want to be certain that we deliver equitable service to all and meet everyone's needs.

Building on those three foundations, what does the future look like?

Get Ready For Your Close-up Face-to-face or in-person contacts at 311 kiosks or walk-in centers may be an option. Another possibility would be for our representatives to use a webcam and app to interact with multiple customers simultaneously.

Collaborate, Collaborate, Collaborate The combination of open data tools, technology, and the expertise of professionals across all City Agencies affords an unprecedented collaboration of service plus fulfillment. Individuals, communities, and organizations will work in tandem with 311 staff and agency personnel to enhance service delivery. Instead of taking a service request for a downed tree, 311 will pinpoint the location, a nearby crew, and business rules to address the problem, then post progress on a community-of-interest portal.

Customer Account Management This is industry standard in the private sector but less so in government. A new customer relationship platform will deliver account management, and customers will be able to opt-in to create their own account and customize information they want to share. 311 will be at the heart of this evolution, from designing the functionality to demonstrating to customers how to build a profile in three easy steps, either online, through a mobile app, on a watch, or on a TV screen.

Serving Those in Need Identifying and serving the needs of diverse communities will require constant examination and enhancement of service delivery techniques. The need for a conversation, that person-to-person touch, will continue and improve with stronger, faster, better tools that return real-time options, locate resources, and direct outcomes.

These are my predictions. What do you think?

I would love for you to share your ideas and suggestions.

Please write to me at jmorrisroe@311.nyc.gov.

