

# ON THE ROAD

## to convenience

In the first of our two-part series on self-service, *Andrew Rhodes*, Head of Electronic Services at DVLA (Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency), reveals how giving customers the tools to self-serve is being applied successfully in the UK public sector.

Each year, the DVLA issues 44 million tax reminders and 6.8 million driving licences. The agency also collects around £5 billion in tax, receives 20.2 million items of mail and carries out 80 million outbound transactions. Despite this workload, the association has a 3% year-on-year budget cut to contend with, which is why the introduction of Electronic Vehicle Licensing (EVL) has proved so invaluable.

EVL allows customers to relicence vehicles or make a Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) online or over the telephone. This can be done 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The result? EVL is saving 33% on every transaction, equating to £21 million over three years and £50 million over the next eight. At peak times, DVLA can now process up to 86,000 transactions a day – all the more impressive when you consider 86,000 were processed in a month in 2005. When EVL was introduced, the DVLA set a target of 39% take-up by 2015. Already, 36% take-up has been achieved, but there are still a number of challenges to overcome.

“We deal with everyone in the UK, not just with the early adopters of technology,” Andrew Rhodes points out. “One of the big challenges is how to tailor the message,” he adds.

With this in mind, the DVLA segmented its audience into five main groups: early adopters, busy professionals, security-conscious, technology-resistant and hard-to-convert. People in the earlier groups are likely to receive email reminders about forthcoming deadlines. Those who are less convinced by the new approach will instead receive postcards.

### Ready when you are

Tracking the early adopters showed the DVLA its peak transaction times – during the morning and again after work – and systems were adapted to cope accordingly. Embracing electronic self-service in fact revolutionised the DVLA’s outlook – and its budget – and provided almost a first in government thinking: not everything must be 9–5.

“There is huge demand outside business hours for people to use electronic services,” says Rhodes. “This is something that had not always been recognised. In 2006, 2,199 people could think of nothing better to do on Christmas Day than tax their car!” he adds. This number increased by over 50% in 2007, with 3,464 people taxing their vehicles on December 25. >>

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### **Service or savings?**

So was EVL designed to improve customer service or generate cost-savings? For the DVLA, self-service has had a positive effect on both, but there is no doubt that finances were a particular area of concern.

“Customer service is certainly part of it, but we do not do things solely for this reason – we are primarily there to collect tax,” Rhodes notes. On the flipside, he acknowledges that better service promotes a healthier customer relationship. With the DVLA’s cost-saving targets, it can’t afford to miss out on any tax receipts. For that reason, a good self-service offering that makes the payment experience as smooth as possible is important. “In December 2005, 70% of respondents to one of our surveys admitted they had delayed taxing their car or had not done so altogether because they could not find the relevant paperwork. With electronic licensing, this should no longer be a problem,” Rhodes asserts.

### **Awards and feedback**

In July 2007, EVL won the Orange Award for Best Use of Technology in Business and also received the inaugural Chief Information Officer Council Award for Best Example of Transformational Government in Action.

Customer feedback has been equally positive: “98% come back a second time and a lot of people tell their friends about the great service they have encountered. In truth, many are surprised about how easy the system is to use. They expect things to be much more complicated and are surprised there are so few hurdles to overcome.”

Rhodes predicts a bright future for similar self-service initiatives in the public sector.

“If you look at the growth of EVL it is clear that the trend is in this direction. Quite simply, customers expect to be able to self-serve. Not only this, but they expect to do so in a manner of their choosing and at a time that is convenient to them.”

With such a simple business case, self-service becomes hard to ignore.

### **WHAT NEXT?**

To find out more about the DVLA and EVL, visit:  
[www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk)