

Contact Data Quality Modernization for Government Agencies

An Experian QAS white paper



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1. Executive Summary

Government agencies as a whole are going through an extraordinary period of technical modernization. Large projects are being put into place to update systems from “green screens” to more robust and sophisticated centralized databases. In fact, a recent Experian QAS survey revealed that 93 percent of agencies are currently involved in such modernization efforts.

In this information age, agencies need to be able to share constituent information easily with one another in order to provide better, more efficient services. However, this information is worthless if it is not correct and complete.

Contact data is of particular importance to government agencies. Not only does it control a citizen’s tax rate and voting district, but contact data also dictates which services constituents may be entitled to, or whether law enforcement has the authority to issue a summons or a warrant if needed. Without an accurate way to reach citizens, government agencies are unable to supply necessary services. Further, agencies also incur wasted costs by trying to reach constituents based on inaccurate or incomplete contact information.

According to the new Experian QAS research, agencies find value in having accurate contact data, but errors are still prevalent throughout government databases. Some agencies may think this is just a standard operational challenge, but these errors can be cleaned up relatively quickly with the right tools.

While modernization is a vast topic with many different components, contact data should be one area of focus. Accurate contact data assists government in fulfilling basic civic duties to constituents, while enabling agencies to perform tasks as efficiently as possible.

Thomas Schutz
SVP, General Manager
Experian QAS



2. Introduction

2.1 Research Overview

In November 2010, Experian QAS conducted a survey to better understand contact data practices and accuracy levels for state and local government agencies. The report, *Contact Data Quality Modernization for Government Agencies*, reviews current thoughts on contact data and provides recommendations for government agencies to modernize their systems to improve data quality.

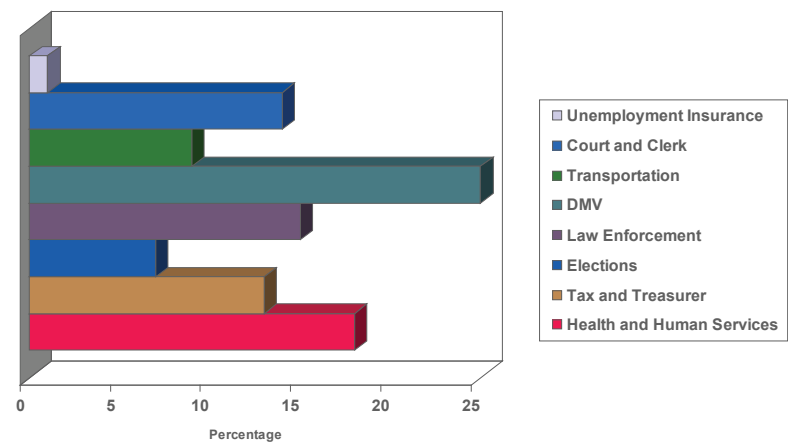
2.2 Research Methodology

200 respondents from state and local agencies across the United States took part in the survey, produced by Global Market Insight, a provider of technology-enabled solutions for global market research, for Experian QAS.

Respondents included decision makers connected with data management in a variety of departments like IT, Operations, Administration, and Finance. In addition, agencies sampled included: Health and Human Services, Tax and Revenue, Elections, Law Enforcement, DMV, Transportation, Court, Clerk, and Unemployment Insurance.



Government Agencies by Participation



3. Key Findings

The Importance of Contact Data

Modernization efforts continue to be prevalent throughout the government space, with 93 percent of agencies currently involved in this type of initiative. As part of this project, agencies should implement tools to ensure contact data accuracy.

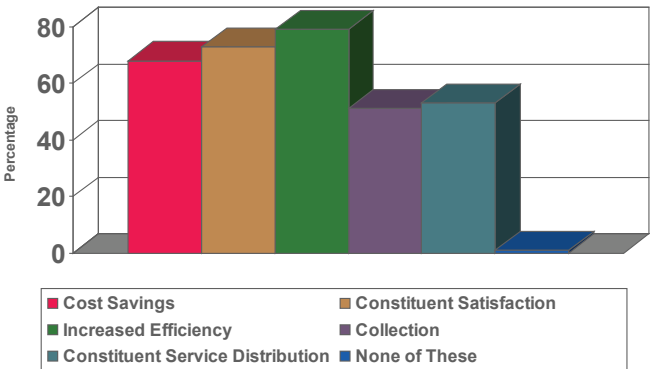
But agencies already understand the importance of contact data. 84 percent of agencies stated that they recognize data management as an essential issue and enforce it as such. In addition, 90 percent of agencies surveyed said that they have, or are currently working on, a contact data management strategy. This percentage gets even higher within Health and Human Services, DMV and Elections.

These statistics are not surprising when one considers why agencies maintain contact records. According to respondents, agencies maintain contact records to improve efficiency, increase constituent satisfaction, and save costs. Another specific benefit associated with revenue included growth in collection rate.

Inaccurate contact data impacts an agency's ability to provide services, collect revenue and enforce local laws. Therefore, if contact data is inaccurate, staff members spend unnecessary time and resources trying to reach citizens. This situation not only affects overall budget, which continues to shrink on the local level, but also decreases constituent satisfaction.



Reasons for Maintaining Contact Data



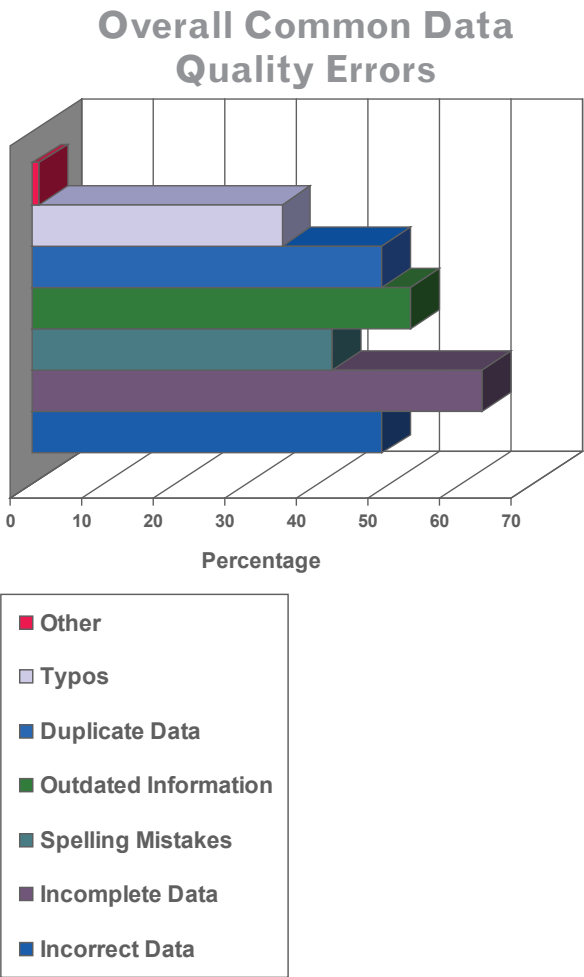
How Accurate is Contact Data?

Despite the strong focus on data accuracy, there are still many errors within government databases. The most common errors reported in the survey were missing or incomplete data, outdated information, incorrect data and duplicate data.

These issues may be occurring because of antiquated contact data management practices. Currently, staff training and staff measurement are the top methods for improving contact data. Government agencies also said they use email verification as part of a data management strategy. But unfortunately, five percent of agencies still have no solutions in place to manage contact data. This number actually went up for Law Enforcement, Court and Clerk respondents, to over 10 percent.

Government agencies are relying heavily on manual processes to clean contact data. These manual processes are partially to blame for the common errors reported above. Over time, information grows outdated, because there are no processes in place to update data. Duplicate removal can be handled automatically with software tools, but duplicate data continues to pervade government databases. In fact, survey respondents in Health and Human Services agencies identified duplicate data as the most common data error in their systems.

As always with any technical project, there are road blocks that need to be overcome before a solution can be put in place. Lack of budget was the top barrier reported across all state and local agencies surveyed, which is not surprising, considering the drop in state and local tax revenue. Additional barriers reported included awareness of changes, staff errors and time and internal resources.



4. Incorporating Contact Data Tools into Modernization

With extensive lists of modernization tasks, it can be overwhelming for agencies to take on additional projects. However, cleaning up contact data can be simple if government agencies follow these steps:

1. Understand your database:

Administrators need to analyze data to determine common issues and the types of data that are used most often in operations. Tax agencies may use addresses most often as they mail tax bills, but Health and Human services may use phone numbers most frequently to call beneficiaries. After this information is determined, it is easy for agencies to prioritize projects.

2. Clean existing data:

Existing data can be cleaned by utilizing 3rd party resources or back-end software tools. These tools can quickly improve existing data, but may also be used to clean up data collected from other agencies that may not have data cleaning processes.

3. Remove duplicate records:

Duplicate records are common for government agencies, with 50 percent of respondents stating that duplicate data was a top data quality error. Depending on database size, sometimes looking

through records manually can be enough to consolidate records. However, with larger counties and state governments, software tools can scroll through large files to identify duplicates.

4. Verify data during all capture processes:

Once existing contact data is cleaned, put tools into place to verify data before it enters government operations. Agencies can determine which tools to implement at the point of capture based on the data analysis done earlier. This will also inform prioritization of projects, allowing agencies to implement smaller, more effective solutions, rather than broad solutions that may not solve the most pressing issues.

5. Enhance and update data:

Enhance and update data on a frequent basis. 55 percent of agencies surveyed stated that outdated information was a common data error. Agencies can update information by working with 3rd parties or verifying contact details each time they speak with a constituent.



5. Conclusion

Contact data quality remains an important issue for government operations. With modernization efforts in progress, government agencies should work to incorporate data quality verification tools and practices into those plans. This will ensure the accuracy of constituent information moving forward.

As part of these roll outs, government agencies are beginning to use software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions. In fact, our survey found that 65 percent of agencies are currently using SaaS solutions. While these services are often convenient because they require fewer internal technical resources, agencies should carefully consider both positive and negative aspects of such solutions. When reviewing SaaS solutions, respondents stated that they review performance statistics and service level agreements before committing to the service.

Whether you are rolling out a cloud-based solution or hosting software in house, pay close attention to how information is being collected and cleaned before entering operational processes. While these results can serve as a starting point for reviewing contact data quality, it is important for every government agency to look at their own data to identify common problems.

Depending on budget, data quality initiatives can be prioritized based on projects that will provide the greatest return on investment. Ultimately, cleaning contact data will result in better constituent satisfaction and more efficient operations, the ultimate goals of any modernization effort.



Experian QAS
125 Summer St Ste 1910
Boston, MA 02110-1615

T: 1 888 322 6201
info@qas.com

www.qas.com

