

Attention to detail



CEO of VFM Services, Bill Jackson speaks to moderngov on the practical application of their methods to the public sector in identifying fraudulent claims and ensuring that money goes to the right people

Set up in 2000 by Bill Jackson, ex Hertfordshire Police, VFM Services is responsible for the introduction of Conversation Management into the commercial world. The technique has proven results and provides a customer-focused solution to the claims process which is both quick and effective.

MG: How does Conversation Management work?

BJ: It is an interviewing technique which enables the assessor to empathise with the claimant and build a rapport by demonstrating listening skills and asking productive questions. What a trained assessor is able to generate from such questions can be just as effective in identifying a genuine customer and the real issues in benefits claims as it is for detecting anomalies in the story of someone who is fraudulently trying to pursue a claim.

MG: How can your techniques be transferred to the public sector arena, specifically benefit claims?

BJ: In any claim scenario, genuine claimants tend to give lots of details. Those making fraudulent claims don't, it's like pulling teeth.

However, it's not just about identifying fraud; it is also a quick and effective way of getting to the real detail of a genuine claim over the telephone. With the increasing use of call centres to manage benefit claims, assessors will need training in both fraud awareness and information gathering skills to elicit the correct information from the claimant so that the right benefits can be paid.

MG: How do you ensure that genuine customers are looked after?

BJ: Our process begins with telling the claimant what will happen during the call, therefore there are no surprises. All customers are encouraged to relax and to talk about their claim and their entitlement; there is no intention to trick them into making mistakes. Genuine customers feel looked after because they have a dedicated assessor helping them with their claim. Interestingly, this special attention makes a fraudster feel uneasy and pressured.

MG: How is what you do different to the use of Voice Risk Analysis software, the so called 'lie-detector' technology?

BJ: VRA has been trialled by a number of local authorities but I understand that many have now abandoned it. We have been aware of this technology for some time; it has been the holy grail for investigators to find a technical solution that comes up with a green or red light.

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A number of insurance companies have used software like this which is good for analysing data. In our view, however, a basic claim might be a basic claim for a benefit but the detail behind it varies in every single circumstance. Some issues require people skills and the human touch is far more conducive to customer care and empathy.

MG: Why do you think that your service can be of benefit to the public sector?

BJ: The process is extremely versatile and can be adapted to work from authority to authority and across different types of benefit. Our aim is to produce an effective model which slots seamlessly in to existing processes.

There are lots of similarities between the public and private sector, not least of all treating customers fairly but in the public sector, it is vital to ensure that the benefits go to the right people. This is where we feel that our techniques would be of enormous value to the public sector, not only in terms of financial savings but also in terms of excellent customer care. ■

Bill Jackson, CEO of VFM Services spoke to Lyndsey Fall. For further information visit www.vfm-services.com or call 08445 677 677

