

COURT APPEARANCE REMINDER SYSTEM (CARS)

SUMMARY

Each week thousands of traffic cases that are in collection status are scheduled for court appearances by the court's collection vendor, GC Services. Historically, approximately one third of the defendants fail to appear on their scheduled court date. As a result, additional work and expense are required of the court and GC Services to either collect the amount owed or to reschedule another court date.

The Court Appearance Reminder System (CARS) was implemented to remind defendants of their scheduled court dates. The goal of CARS is to reduce the number of defendants who fail to appear on their scheduled court date. Increased appearances decrease the workload of court personnel and provide cost savings. CARS not only reminds defendants of their scheduled court dates; it also offers the vital option of paying the citation in lieu of appearing in court. CARS provides a higher level of customer service to defendants.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Program Description:

CARS was implemented to decrease the failure to appear rate on delinquent traffic collection cases. Each month approximately 9,000 court appearances are scheduled for defendants on their delinquent traffic collection cases. Nearly one third of those defendants fail to appear on the scheduled date. As a result, the Court and GC Services must expend additional efforts to resolve these cases. This effort includes; mailing new notices, attempts to contact the defendant (usually via telephone), scheduling additional court dates, preparing court calendars for these cases and updating the court's case management system to reflect these changes. The additional work required to pursue these cases increases the daily workload of staff significantly. The extended process requires costly hours of staff time each month. Rescheduled cases congest an already drastic waiting time for court dates. The wait for a court date can be up to six months at some court locations in our county. The delay in getting a court date increases the likelihood that defendants will fail to appear. It also decreases the amount of revenue collected.

Inception of Program:

The program became effective on March 5, 2009 and took approximately one year to develop and implement. The program used an existing telephony infrastructure used by the Juror Services Division.

COURT APPEARANCE REMINDER SYSTEM (CARS)

Desired Goals:

The desired goals of this program are multi-fold: To decrease the failure to appear rate, increase court revenues, decrease repetitive work for the court, and enhance customer service.

To achieve the desired goals, CARS contacts the defendants who have scheduled a court appearance on their delinquent traffic citation via the court's collection vendor GC Services. Two automated reminder calls are made to the defendant prior to their scheduled court dates reminding them of their scheduled appearance. CARS contacts the defendants fourteen (14) days and four (4) days prior to their court date.

The reminder message provides pertinent information including the: appearance date and time, court address, main cross streets and parking information, courtroom department and floor number. CARS also offers a payment option for those that wish to pay the traffic ticket in lieu of appearing in court. If the defendant chooses to pay the traffic ticket in lieu of the court appearance, the defendant is connected to a GC Services representative for payment options. After researching Serranus web site there are no other courts in California that offer this level of customer service.

Program Cost:

The start-up cost and first year of service for this program was \$29,568. The annual system maintenance cost is \$12,672. Because the Los Angeles Superior Court qualifies as a comprehensive collection program pursuant to Penal Code §1463.007, the costs for this program can be recovered.

Courts using a collection vendor or that can obtain a defendant's telephone number can easily replicate this program. Depending on the Courts' telephony infrastructure, estimated start-up costs could range from \$29,000 to \$39,000 with an average monthly cost of approximately \$1,200. Because traffic citations do not have the phone numbers, the biggest obstacle is obtaining the number. However, as stated above, if the Court already contracts with a collection vendor or has an in-house program, that information would be available.

Program Impacts:

A 22% decrease in traffic failure to appearances resulted in an increase in revenue while avoiding costs associated with duplicative efforts by the clerk's office. For example, many defendants who appear in court end up paying a fine. Because more defendants are appearing at their first scheduled court appearance, additional up-front revenue (i.e. first payments) have increased. For instance, at the Metropolitan

COURT APPEARANCE REMINDER SYSTEM (CARS)

courthouse, there was an approximate 13% increase in revenue collected when comparing months prior to the program to after its implementation.

More defendants appearing in court result in a decrease in the time and cost to the clerk's office and courtroom in handling a case more than one time. For example, when a defendant fails to appear the clerk's office must manually issue another hold against the defendant's drivers' license. Additionally, once a new court date is set, the clerk's office must spend many hours preparing and printing out a new court calendars. Further, a new court delinquency letter must be mailed to each defendant.

By reducing the failure to appear rate on court appearances, the yearly cost saving is over \$30,000. This includes money saved on postage, envelopes, paper, and the staff time that would be required to perform the tasks mentioned above.

CARS program is innovative because it allows the Court to enhance customer service to the defendants seeking to resolve their delinquent traffic matters in our court. This enhancement was inspired by the similar levels of customer service that the private industry offers. Today people are accustomed to receiving courtesy phone calls that remind them of a doctor's appointment, a scheduled bill payment, or a package that has been delivered. Businesses in the private industry offer these high levels of customer service and we believe we have taken this concept and introduced this type of service to the public sector. The Los Angeles Superior Court is currently the only court system in the state that offers this innovation.

CARS also supports the ideals set forth in procedural fairness. Because there is often a long delay between the scheduling and actual court date, many individuals forget their appointment. We believe this program demonstrates respect for the defendant's time by reminding him or her of their court appointment. Further, it shows the Court's sincerity in being sensitive to the person's time and effort in resolving his or her citation.

Program Non-Court Partners:

There are two non-court partners that are involved in the CARS program. IntegraVox monitors the InterVoice units and provides a special report web site that allows the court to run call activity reports. GC Services provides the phone number information and also assists the defendants who are directed to the collection call center.

Program Measurements:

The success of the program is measured by the number of successful calls made to the defendant and the decrease in the failure to appear rate.

The major beneficiaries of the program are the public, the court, and the state.

COURT APPEARANCE REMINDER SYSTEM (CARS)

There are various reports generated by the Court, GC Services, and IntegraVox that reflect the overall performance of the program. The most significant benefit of CARS program continues to be the decrease in the number of defendants failing to appear for scheduled court dates. Overall, failure to appear rates have decreased by 22% since the implementation of CARS with over 80% of calls made by CARS result in successful contact with the defendant.

Additionally, CARS enhances customer service with no cost to the Court's operating budget. Pursuant to Penal Code §1463.007, the Court can recover the cost of CARS as part of enhanced collection efforts.

CARS provides distinct, positive impact on the Court System by enhancing the level of customer service, reducing the number of failure to appear cases and decreasing the workload of court staff.

Since the program began, CARS has steadily decreased the failure to appear rate which increases the likelihood defendants will appear and pay their tickets. These positive results result in an increase in revenue while decreasing duplicative work for the court.

In addition, CARS won the 2010 National Association of Counties Award and also recognized at the 23rd Annual Productivity and Quality Awards program.