



November, 2010

To: All
Fr: R.F. Culbertson, GetABBY
Re: Charlotte, N.C. to Launch Virtual Help Desk Assistant

Charlotte, N.C., to Launch Virtual Help Desk Assistance

November 23, 2010 By [Sarah Rich](#)

Many cities are jumping on the trend of building a mobile application that citizens can use to make 311 service requests. Charlotte, N.C. is now one of them, but is looking to build further on the app. My Charlotte, the free mobile app launched in November, will soon be connected to an “avatar help desk assistant” to be launched in 2011.

Charlotte officials didn’t want to only provide a mobile solution to help citizens. In connection with the mobile app, next spring the city of Charlotte’s call center will launch Ask Margaret, virtual assistance with interactive voice response.

Citizens will be able to call, text or go online to ask questions and be provided answers from the avatar. Ask Margaret and My Charlotte are both connected on the back end to [GetAbby](#), a multichannel dialog platform, according to Charlotte councilwoman Bellverie Ross.

For Charlotte, it was important to launch the technology in stages, Ross said. “Our hope was we wanted to get something out there, because the nature of that platform is change — it’s like the Web,” she said. “You don’t want to just sit and keep building and building and never release anything.”

Ross said the city decided on the avatar assistance option because it’s better for citizens. “We do know studies show that people interact better with people, so the more you can personalize it, the better. The avatar is projected to answer 100,000 calls per year, which is the performance equivalent of five call center employees. Currently it costs the city \$4.91 for call center employees to take one call, when you factor in employee salaries and other costs. With the new avatar system, it will cost the city less than 75 cents per call, she said. Although the avatar will be available for answering questions, call center employees will still be available to answer more complicated questions,” she said. In the meantime, citizens can access information using the My Charlotte mobile app.

[My Charlotte](#) provides a collection of features, including Charlotte Douglas Airport information on flights, parking and rental cards; public transportation transit; air quality; traffic accidents; weather; and 311 citizen service. Citizens can use the 311 service to report problems such as potholes and graffiti, according to a release.

