

State Office Nominating:

Secretary of State Natalie E. Tennant
Building 1, Suite 157-K
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Charleston, WV 25305
Phone: (304) 558-6000

Title of Program

West Virginia Secretary of State Business and Licensing Online Chat

Project Lead:

Penney Barker
Manager, Business and Licensing Division
West Virginia Secretary of State's Office
Building 1, Suite 157-K
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Charleston, WV 25305
Phone: (304) 558-6000

Description of Program:

The West Virginia Secretary of State's Office is a leader when it comes to using technology to make state government more efficient, while at the same time increasing services for business owners. Business owners – especially small business owners – already have many jobs to do to make sure their business is a success. The online chat feature for these business owners means that they do not have to pick up the phone to get in contact with a Business and Licensing Specialist in the Secretary of State's Office. They can simply log on to our online chat, ask their question, and get an immediate response. Currently, the online chat feature is offered from 9am to 11am and 2pm to 4pm. However, because of high demand, it is possible that the online chat feature will soon be available throughout the work day.

General Subject Area:

Business Services

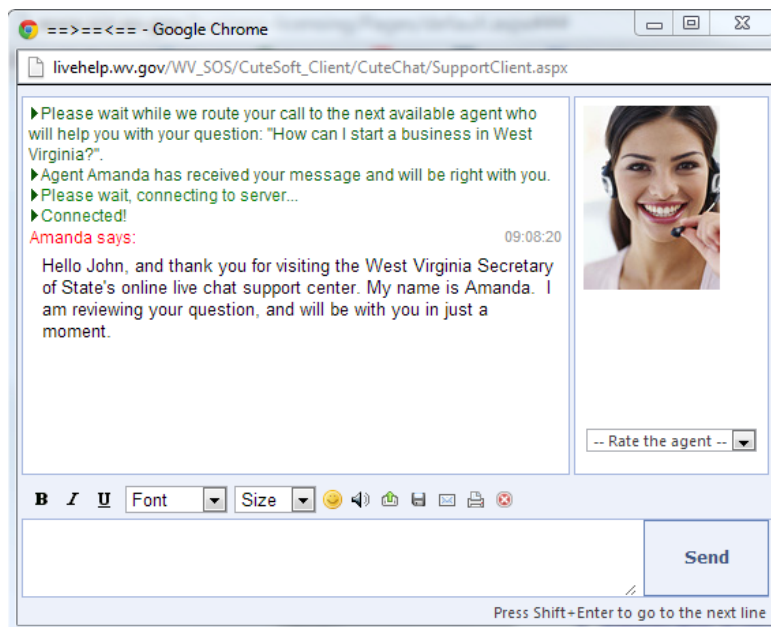
Executive Summary:

Link to Online Chat page: <http://www.sos.wv.gov/business-licensing/Pages/default.aspx###>



The screenshot shows the official website of the West Virginia Secretary of State, Natalie E. Tennant. The header includes the state seal and the secretary's name. A navigation menu on the left lists various services like 'Secretary's Desk', 'Administrative Law', and 'Business and Licensing'. The main content area is titled 'Business and Licensing' and provides a welcome message, contact information (phone numbers and email), and a list of services including Annual Reports, Authentication of Documents, and various business forms. A 'Live Help is ONLINE' banner is visible on the left, and a 'Business For West Virginia' logo is on the right.

You may log on to the Online Chat and test the response time of our Business and Licensing Specialist. If you log on during the time the chat is offline, you may leave a question and our specialists will email you back that day. Below is a picture of the online chat box that pops up on your web browser.



History

The West Virginia Secretary of State's Office is responsible for organizing the annual reports of more than 80,000 businesses. Annual reports contain information such as a business's officers, service of process address, their business address, and any "Doing Business As" names the organization might be using. While there is a wealth of information on our website, hundreds of business owners call our office every day with questions.

This office has taken the lead in state government when it comes to using technology to make our daily operations more efficient and cost effective. There is no substitute for face to face contact, but sometimes a business owner has just one question they would like answered and in the daily pressures of being a small business owner they simply do not have the time to stop what they are doing and pick up the phone to call our office.

Using the Online Chat feature, a business owner can sit at their desk at their business (or on a laptop in their home office) and connect instantly and one-on-one with a Business and Licensing Specialist in the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office. There are no delays such as being put on hold. The business owner can type their question and have an answer within minutes. More and more people are becoming comfortable with the online chat features, and many websites now offer customer support online chat. This feature is part of our vision to make it easier to own and operate a business in West Virginia by helping business owners focus on their product and not paperwork.

Significance

The significance of the Online Help Chat is that there is now no barrier between a business owner and the information he or she needs to successfully run their business. Previously, a business owner would have to call our office, and then have to (possibly) wait until a Business and Licensing Specialist became available. Now, all a business owner has to do is click on the Chat icon and type their question, and they are instantly connected one-on-one with a specialist. If they have a question during a time when the Online Chat is not available, they can still type their question and get an email reply.

But it goes further than that. Too often, government acts as a barrier between business owners and success. The West Virginia Secretary of State's Office believes that we should help small businesses grow. The way we can do that is make it as easy as possible to do business here. There will always be paperwork to file; but there is no reason it should take days or weeks to get that work done. Citizens, and business owners especially, sometimes need information quickly so they can make an informed decision.

This office wants to make it easier for a business owner to focus on their product and not paperwork. The time they save getting what they need faster means they have more time to dedicate to running their business.

Impacts/Results

There is no cost to the Secretary of State's Office or to the business owner associated with the online chat feature.

Since January 1, 2012, more than 2,500 business owners have logged on to the chat feature.

The creation of this Online Chat feature means that everyone involved saves time and energy.

The business owners get the information they need in the format in which they need it. Perhaps they don't have time to pick up the phone but do have time to open up a new tab on their web browser and ask a quick question. For the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office, our goal is not only to help small businesses, but to help them in a manner which is most beneficial for them.

This office also benefits from this feature. There is one person at a time dedicated to handling the online chat requests. Traffic on the online chat is usually several dozen per day. While this person handles online chat requests as they come up, they are performing other important tasks. They are answering the phone with called-in questions, manually entering annual reports, or one of many other duties they are called upon to perform. It is an efficient use of time and energy. Other state agencies allow citizens to email questions and wait for a response – the online chat feature is unique in that it is a one-on-one instant interaction.