

Citizen Centric Government
the changing face of government customers.
By: Des Vincent

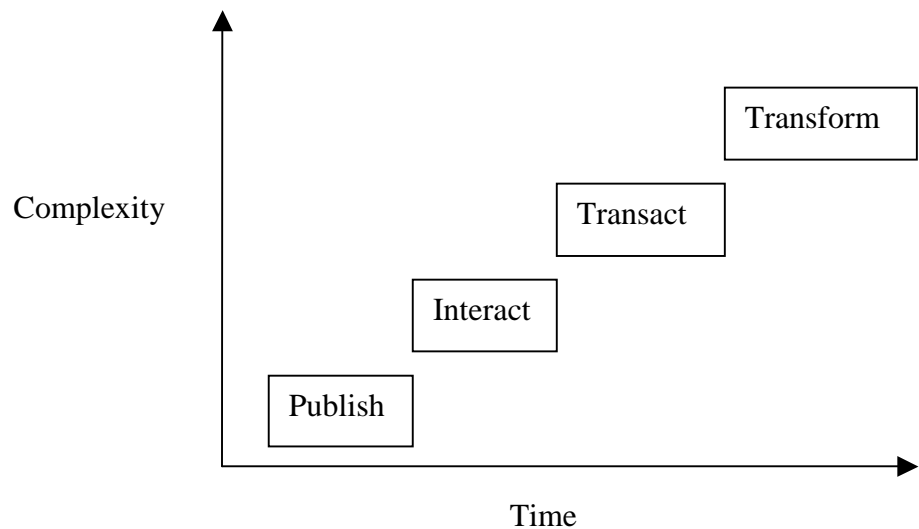
In addressing the current and future trends in government service delivery, it is worth reflecting on how we got to where we are today and in particular on the lessons learnt from this brief period in our history. This provides a useful context for addressing future requirements.

The process of transforming government services in administrations around the world predicated by eGovernment programmes, has been focussed largely on two main issues i.e. technology and information.

(i) Technology

The key drivers for modernising government have included choice, convenience and simplicity for the citizen. Choice in terms of having available, alternative service delivery channels to complement the traditional channels of walk-in office visit, written communications and telephone calls; convenience concerning when (and how) citizens could interface with government i.e. anytime, anywhere; and simplicity relating to the interactions between citizens and government. This is particularly important around the complexity of government forms and the amount of information which is asked for even though some or all of this information may have previously been provided to government.

In the main, first generation eGovernment programmes focussed on using the Internet; and one of the most popular (theoretical) implementation plans was the following:



The first yardstick in terms of the 'e' programme was the availability of a website; and as each government business developed its own online presence, the number of government websites multiplied. This in itself became a major problem. In the UK for example, there were more than 2500 government websites; therefore trying to find information about a particular service became a time-consuming task for citizens. So while they had an alternative channel (i.e. choice) which was available 24/7 (convenience), the third criterion (i.e. simplicity) did not feature prominently.

Second generation programmes have addressed this particular problem by implementing for example government portals including appropriate search facilities. The metaphor 'no wrong door' has been used by some administrations to describe this access method.

Government administrations have progressed at different speeds in terms of providing online transactional services. In the UK, the Prime Minister set a target that by the end of 2005, all government services should be available online; and this target was largely met. Other administrations set similar targets.

Steps are now in hand towards the third phase of 'transforming' government services; and this paper highlights some of the requirements and some of the challenges.

However, while the technology aspect was being progressed, an additional factor was emerging. Despite the hyperbole surrounding the emergence of the Internet and the worldwide web, it was recognised that access to this new technology was far from universal. To address the so-called 'digital divide', complementary programmes were put in place. In some cases these involved providing free Internet access from public buildings such as libraries; others installed kiosks in public places while some programmes distributed computers to community groups and citizens with special needs. However, in some administrations the 'digital divide' remains an issue; for example there is a major European Union initiative focusing on the problem.

Furthermore, research papers have indicated that although accesses to government websites continue to rise, from the citizens' perspective, the most popular technology remains the telephone. As citizens become aware that government business can be transacted by telephone, the volume of telephone calls increases significantly, an example is the implementation of the 311 telephone number for non-emergency services in New York to complement the 911 emergency services number. Some New Yorkers phoned 911 because they did not know who else to phone.

A poll conducted prior to the launch of the New York City **'One Call does It All'** 3-1-1 service showed that:

- 52% of callers had to make 2-10 calls before reaching the appropriate government agency;
- 37% of callers spent 20 minutes or longer trying to get through to the right agency (sadly 60% of these callers said that this was what they expected from government!)

(ii) Information

'If only we knew what we know.....'

Jerry Junkins, CEO Texas Instruments

The second main issue which has been receiving attention in the modernising government programmes is information. While there have been a number of initiatives focusing on the coordination of information about policies and policy developments – such as the Knowledge Network in the UK – from the citizen's perspective, their primary focus has been and will remain on information relating to their person or their personal circumstances.

'Tell government once' has been the war cry for many years. In some administrations significant progress has been made in creating the citizen account (e.g. Ireland and Scotland). In other cases the concept has been agreed but legislative difficulties around data protection militate against real progress.

At local government level in the UK, significant progress has been made in implementing Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The resultant joined-up and responsive service has been well received by citizens. Obviously the vexing issues of personal health or income tax are not within the bailiwick of local government, so sharing information across organisational boundaries at this level is less contentious.

Lessons learnt

From this brief look back at eGovernment programmes, a number of key lessons can be drawn from the experiences and these are included in Appendix 1.

Perhaps the most important lesson learnt thus far is that while the primary focus of the eGovernment programmes was on improving the electronic interface between citizens and government, the principal challenge for transforming government is likely to be in 'transforming' the back office systems.

Serving citizens of the future

But will this incremental pace of change be sufficient to address the needs and expectations of tomorrow's citizens? The latter are likely to be those who are today in school or college and are the first generation to grow up with new technology. During their entire lives they have been exposed to and used computers, videogames, digital music players, cell phones and all the other toys and tools of this digital age. It has been estimated that pupils emerging from secondary education today will have spent less than 5,000 hours reading but over 10,000 hours playing video games – and about 20,000 hours watching television. Computer games, cell phones, the Internet, email and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives. This is not to imply that every young person is doing everything online. Many still only do a few; but the possibility of what they can do online is growing exponentially.

In essence the citizens of tomorrow will not just have changed incrementally from today's citizens. They will not just have changed their slang, clothes, music, body adornments or styles as happened in the past (e.g. the 60s 'flower power' generation). A really big discontinuity is taking place and this has been precipitated by the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology particularly in the last 10 – 15 years. One of the conclusions of a study of college age kids in the USA (Net Day) was that tomorrow's citizens are not just using technology differently today but they are approaching their life and daily activities differently because of technology – and even the term online is becoming dated because of wireless.

It is highly likely therefore that the two key issues of technology and information will continue to be relevant in terms of addressing the needs of tomorrow's citizens. While the work which has been done in addressing the presentational issues of web services addresses one aspect of the demands likely to be made on government by a new breed of customer, it is obvious that the added dimension of rationalising back office systems and procedures will be a key enabler to delivering more efficient and more effective services.

Experiences with current telephone services demonstrate that citizens firstly want to be able to telephone a 'government' number to access any government service and to do so at a time convenient to them – the New York 311 telephone services is a prime example. Secondly citizens want to be able to 'transact' with government at their 'first point of contact' whether that be telephone, Internet or walk-in centre. This presents major challenges to the current organisational arrangements in a number of administrations; for example for telephone services, the operatives will need firstly to have some knowledge about the various services that are provided; secondly they need to have the technology available to enable them not only to provide comprehensive information about the various services but also to conduct transactions with the citizen; and thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, they will need to be empowered to conduct transactions on a 'whole of government' basis (rather than purely for a single agency). In a nutshell, operatives will need to be:

- educated – in terms of the services which are provided;
- enabled – in terms of having access to a comprehensive and intelligent source of information about the services provided; and
- empowered – in terms of being able to conduct transactions for any part of government (federal, municipal or local).

Interestingly the New York 311 service is manned by telephone operatives on a 24/7 basis and has capability to expand its services in the event of a major incident. This voice-to-voice service is much welcomed by citizens many of whom object to the current trend of interactive voice response (IVR) i.e. 'if you want this service, press 1, if you want this service, press 2' etc. However given the convergence of Internet technologies, mobile devices and rapidly maturing voice recognition technologies, Singapore is embarking on 2 pilot projects in this emerging e-service delivery channel. The pilot projects will utilise the integration of speech recognition technology and database/knowledge-base query languages to provide responses (including transactions) to citizens via the telephone on a 24/7 basis. It is expected that this new technology will replace IVR.

However, looking to the future one of the major potential challenges will be in the 'relationship' between citizens and government – and in particular how such a relationship would be managed. Ideally, CRM principles would be implemented such that when a citizen contacts government for a service (as distinct from merely seeking information about a service) and confirms their identity, the 'system' would have access to the relevant personal details relating to the individual and the service in question. Such personalisation of services is the manifestation of the principle of 'tell government once'.

Implementation Challenges

This of course raises a number of serious issues not least of which is identity management; together with the other related issues of authentication and non-repudiation. How can the citizen be sure that they are dealing with government? And how can government be assured of the bona fides of an 'e-customer'?

But are these issues unique to government? The financial services sector is continuously addressing these critical issues. Millions of bank customers now conduct financial transactions using a number of different channels including the telephone and the Internet. There have been problems some of which have received very negative press coverage; but in the main the institutions accepted responsibility ensuring no damage to the customer. Typical of the steps taken by the financial services sector is the following guarantee:

'As a xxxx Cardholder, you need not worry about card crime. In the unlikely event that your account is compromised, we guarantee that if you are a victim of fraud, and have taken reasonable care to protect your account details and PIN, you will not be held responsible for any fraudulent charges. Moreover, as soon as we are alerted to the fraud, we will do all that we can to resolve the matter and return your account to normal.'

Such measures not only help to build confidence in the customer base but also maintain a level of trust between the banks and their customers. So despite the negative press, alternative banking channels continue to increase in popularity as firstly they meet a genuine need; secondly they are simple to use; and thirdly they are more convenient in that they are available 24/7. The customer is provided with choice, convenience and simplicity and of course 'walk-in' facilities continue to be provided for those who want them.

The under-pinning principle in the successful implementation of these new channels was the development and maintenance of a trust relationship between the service provider and the customer. A key enabler was also the re-assurances around security. In the current climate of identity theft, this is a critical issue for government. Traditionally security was based on 3 factors i.e.

- something you have (a token or card);
- something you know (a password);
- something you 'are' (a fingerprint or iris scan)

and experts were confident that if 2 out of 3 of these factors were available, the transaction would be secure.

'We see the future of security as encompassing a combination of several factors. Good security is about processes not devices. Users will have multi-functional passwords based on something they know, something they have, and something they are; such as a password and username combination, an authentication token and a fingerprint [or iris scan].'

ITNow. The British Computer Society. May 2007

Furthering this principle, the most recent innovation in this area in the European financial services sector was the 'Chip and Pin' programme which included not only a significant technology upgrade (on a global basis), but also a major marketing campaign. This replacement for the simple swipe card with a smart card was exceedingly expensive but was driven not solely by available improvements in technology but rather by the significant increase in fraud using the original cards. Instead of signing an authorisation slip as before, the customer must use a small keypad to key their PIN number. The combination of card (Chip and PIN) is checked online before the transaction can be completed.

So could and should government follow the example of the financial services sector? The answer is yes where it is feasible; and indeed some administrations have or are using the same techniques – and that includes marketing programmes for current or new initiatives. Of course, the 'where feasible' caveat is critical. While banks and other financial institutions provide a limited range of services, the scope of services across central and local governments is counted in hundreds and includes aspects such as health and education. However, from a young person's perspective, the high volume – and potentially high value – government services could probably be categorised as follows:

- i. Payments to government – such as taxes, licence fees etc.;
- ii. Payments from government – such as benefits, grants etc.;
- iii. Scheduling appointments – such as doctors, medical specialists, government advisers etc.; and
- iv. Personal health.

The first two categories mirror the requirements of the financial services sector and to this end a number of administrations have implemented similar systems or have plans to do so. Furthermore, some administrations have implemented a pro-active, joined-up approach in that by examining information already held about a citizen, they confirm entitlement to particular allowances or benefits and issue them automatically. The onus on the citizen to apply for these payments has been removed.

The third category (Scheduling Appointments) seems like a 'no brainer' to most of today's IT-literate citizens. Certainly those who use or have used electronic diary facilities would have an expectation that a modern government office would employ similar technology. This facility will become commonplace in due course. In the main, the challenge for government administrations has not been the technology but rather getting key personnel to commit to using the technology.

However just as a new breed of citizens is emerging, equally a new breed of public sector official is also emerging; one that is very comfortable with technology and the benefits of its use to provide quality services.

One of the likely expectations from tomorrow's citizens, and indeed for some of today's citizens, is for government to embrace 'push technology'. The appointments service provides an excellent example of how this could be implemented; for example where a forward appointment has been arranged, the appointment system could issue a message at an appropriate time, to remind the citizen of the appointment. The message could be for example an email or a text message to a mobile phone. Such a system has been implemented successfully in the UK to remind patients of hospital appointments.

Another illustration of where push technology could be used effectively to improve the quality of service and in so doing to help build the trust relationship between the government and the governed (i.e. citizens) is in the area of so-called public works. For example if a householder phones to report that a street light is not functioning, the agency would advise the resident of when the problem would be repaired. Furthermore, the agency would advise other householders in the vicinity of the broken street light that (a) the problem had been reported and (b) when it would be repaired.

Push technology could also be used in the domain of public announcements/emergency services. For example in the event of a major incident, the appropriate agency could 'broadcast' to various technologies (including texts, emails, navigation systems etc), details of diversions in place and contact numbers to obtain more detailed information.

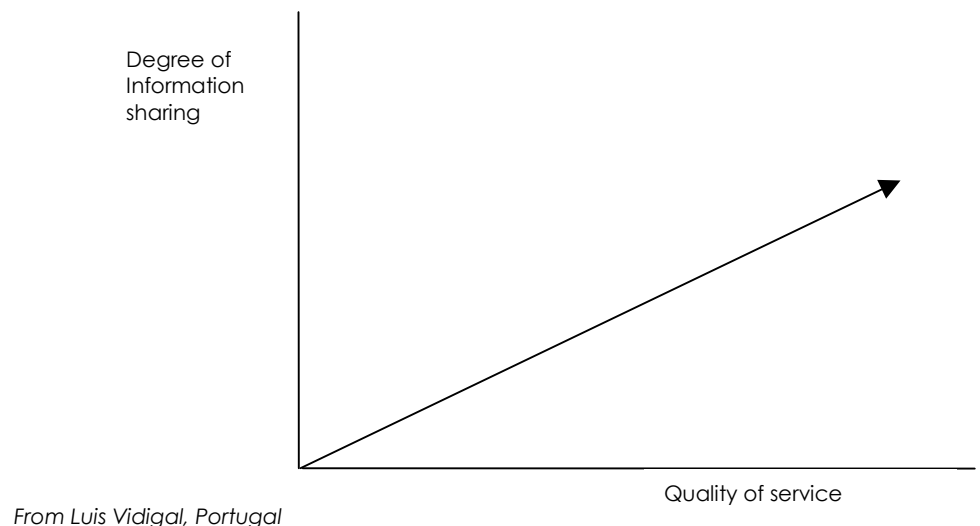
While these examples may not be particularly relevant in terms of tomorrow's citizens, they are illustrative of the types of service that could and possibly should be considered.

The final category (Personal Health) brings with it the expectations of shared information, confidentiality and joined up government. Returning to the principle already articulated of 'satisfaction at their first point of contact with government', probably nowhere is this more applicable than in the field of medicine? While most if not all General Practitioners/Family Doctors in the UK now have IT systems in place holding citizen/patient records, little or none of this information is currently shared across the health service. This means that a patient attending

hospital is required to provide their personal details again and sometimes as much of their medical history as they can remember! Furthermore, it is not uncommon that this information may have to be provided again within the same medical establishment. For the new breed of citizen this 'legacy' system will not be acceptable.

Of course there are issues around confidentiality and security but while these are important and have to be addressed, they have to be balanced with the provision of a quality service to the patient. In Scotland the Citizen First programme is introducing a voluntary National Entitlement Card to enable secure access to particular services such as free public transport for the elderly. The enrolment process for this card creates an electronic Citizen Account and the citizen has the option of deciding whether or not to share their personal details with other government agencies.

There is an obvious trade-off in the decision to share information in that those who decide not to share their personal details will have to provide them again at different agencies when they are applying for their services.



Portugal is introducing a single Citizen Card which is replacing 5 separate cards:

1. Identity card;
2. Tax card;

3. Social Security card;
4. Elections card; and
5. Health card.

This unique identifier is a model that could be replicated in administrations which do not currently have such a system.

A recent survey (Pew, April 2007) reported that many of today's teenagers, who are avid users of social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, employ a variety of tools and techniques to manage their online identities. The survey indicates that many youth actively manage their personal information as they 'perform a balancing act' between keeping some important pieces of information confined to their network of 'trusted friends' and at the same time, participating in a new, exciting process of creating content for their profiles and making new friends online. According to the report most teens believe some information seems acceptable – even desirable to share -, while other information needs to be protected. The bottom line is the requirement for a trust relationship.

Emerging technologies

The foregoing paragraphs have focused mainly on the delivery of government services and in particular on the new breed of citizens for the 21st century. Mention was made earlier in this paper for example to the e-voice pilot projects in Singapore and other emerging technologies are being piloted.

However, in a number of administrations one of the major challenges is to engage (or re-engage) the populace in the issues of government. Today's generation is already comfortable with social networks and social collaborative tools (chat rooms, blogs etc). Some administrations like Singapore, are piloting the use of emerging technologies such as Web 2 and blogging to add 'richness' to their service offerings. One of the major potential advantages of this type of innovation is the opportunity to learn by listening to feedback from participants.

As other technologies emerge it is anticipated that their relevance to government services will be assessed and if confirmed, piloted for an appropriate service.

Conclusions

While the 2 key issues thus far may have been technology and information, going forward the key issue is likely to be responsive service delivery. The principles of choice, convenience and simplicity are still relevant. This includes communicating with customers in a language they can understand and in particular providing a mechanism for listening to the changing needs. The lessons learnt articulated in Appendix 1 also need to be considered when designing future programmes.

For tomorrow's generation technology is expected to be ubiquitous and probably not an issue in terms of their dealings with government. The challenge will be to develop an appropriate trust relationship between the citizens of tomorrow and their government such that services can be delivered which meet their real needs and in ways that match their lifestyle.

Actions going forward

1. Citizens will be able to phone a government number for access to information about all public services.
2. Citizens will be able to transact with government at their first point of contact whether that be telephone, online or walk-in centre.
3. Integrated speech recognition technology coupled with database/knowledge-base query languages, will replace IVR services.
4. The relationship between citizens and their government (in terms of service delivery) will be improved not least through the implementation of Customer Relationship Management technology.

5. Government will adopt a more pro-active approach to paying benefits, grants etc. Using the personal information already available, the department or agency will automatically transfer funds to the appropriate bank account and advise the customer electronically of the transaction details.
6. Governments will have solved the challenges relating to (secure) unique identifiers.
7. Electronic diary facilities will be available for scheduled appointments.
8. Where appropriate the government will adopt push technology.
9. For health services a patient record will be created, maintained and appropriate details shared as required (within the law).
10. Some administrations will seek to exploit the opportunities provided by social networks to engage or re-engage their citizens in the political process.
11. Governments will continue to explore the appropriateness of emerging technologies for service delivery.

D. D. Vincent

APPENDIX 1

Lessons learned from early e-Government programmes

- 1) A potential time-lag in terms of critical mass/universal access for any new channel. While it is likely that there will always be early adopters, at the other end of the scale some citizens may never use the new channel. (It has been estimated that up to 10% of citizens will always be 'out of reach' for eGovernment.)
- 2) Unlike traditional back-office computer systems, the approach to development and implementation of e-enabled services should include a 'build and learn' strategy; for example the developers should be prepared to make changes to a particular interface based on feedback received from citizens or from specialist tools which track a user's navigational progress.
- 3) Marketing techniques should be used to influence citizens to migrate to a preferred channel. It is worth noting that certain marketing programmes include incentives such as speedier repayments from government to citizens or businesses.
- 4) Continuously monitor the use of particular channels for specific services and take whatever steps are necessary to respond to unexpected trends. In some instance the objective is to change customer behaviour i.e. to move them from a traditional channel to a new e-channel. However, each alternative channel has a cost implication and all services on all channels is no longer likely to be economically feasible; the cost per transaction is an effective measure of efficiency. Given that in most administrations the highest volume of interactions is likely to be with those citizens in the lowest socio-economic bands, selection of channels for service delivery is extremely important.

Each of these lessons needs to be considered in terms of the on-going innovations in government service delivery.