



MULTI-CHANNEL SERVICE DELIVERY

The Australian Government

Information Management Office

The Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), Department of Finance and Administration, works across government to maintain Australia's position as a leader in the productive application of information and communications technologies to government administration, information and services. For information see <http://www.finance.gov.au/> and <http://www.agimo.gov.au/>

AGIMO fosters the efficient and effective use of ICT by Australian Government departments and agencies. It provides strategic advice, activities and representation relating to the application of ICT to government administration, information and services.

A General Manager, also titled the Australian Government Chief Information Officer, leads AGIMO. Ann Steward was appointed to this post in 2005. Ann has a degree in Applied Science from the University of Canberra, and over 20 years' public sector experience in Australia and the UK most recently as General Manager, IT Planning and Refresh, in Centrelink's IT Group. Previously she has been Principal Adviser, e- Strategy in the Australian Government Information Management Office and Director e-Government in the Cabinet Office, UK. She is also past Chair and Vice Chair of ICA and in October 2004 received its Distinguished Service Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the successful development of ICA.

Introduction

Public expectations that government services can and should be more user-focused, efficient and effective are increasing in many countries. This is mainly the result of two developments: 1) the way the private sector is providing services, in particular through e-commerce; and 2) governments' own efforts to improve service delivery through e-government. In response, governments, like the private sector, are looking to improve both the quality of their services and their productivity through the application of new technologies and business approaches to their traditional activities.

An emerging approach to meeting the often-competing objectives of better quality and improved efficiency is through development of "multi-channel" service delivery. Currently in an early stage of development, this approach aims at guiding and co-ordinating agencies' use of a mix of delivery channels in order to improve and facilitate a user's overall experience in accessing public services. The types of service channels involved can range from traditional channels such as the counter and telephone to electronically enabled

channels (“e-channels”) such as the Internet, e-mail, SMS messaging, interactive voice response systems and digital television. This aspect of e-government is very challenging, pushing government agencies to accommodate and manage increasingly complex interconnections among their information resources, business processes and on- and off-line service delivery channels, within and among organisations (public and private), as well as across jurisdictions.

While there is growing evidence that countries are building the foundations for multi-channel delivery, little experience has so far been gained through full-scale implementation. This is not surprising – this is a new area of e-government and a major undertaking, with implications for diverse aspects of government operations and public management ranging from technology standards through to cross-agency governance. What is clear is the wide scope of the challenge being faced, and the need for some key building blocks on which to base multi-channel service delivery.

E-Government is a management agenda, not a technology agenda

As governments have made progress towards their early goals of placing appropriate services online, their understanding of the role of e-government in improving government has deepened. Governments are now seeing opportunities to use ICT to improve not only the way that services are delivered, but also the way that they are conceived and designed. E-government, and indeed public management more broadly, is now being informed by concepts of integration of business processes, services, information and ICTs across traditional agency and jurisdictional boundaries; user-focused services; and flexible delivery of services through multiple on- and off-line channels.

In other words, governments are now beginning to focus on the task of “service innovation”. Many early approaches to e-government appear to have been primarily technology agendas. The service innovation agenda is, however, a management agenda. It embraces what ICTs offer in improving the delivery of government services and efficient use of public resources. Service innovation is about integrating e-government with older design and delivery approaches, rather than operating a separate e-government agenda in parallel with traditional ways of delivering government.

Service innovation poses great challenges

Service innovation involves changing how services are designed and delivered based on the priorities of external and internal stakeholders. This approach requires agencies and stakeholders to work together and agree on priorities for such things as service design, business process and service integration, joint development of existing and new delivery channels, and interoperability of supporting data and information systems.

This type of collaboration allows what is desirable to be informed by what is achievable within a broadened political, managerial, technical, budgetary and stakeholder environment. In practice, this outcome is best realised by bringing together business administrators, service providers and users from programmes, agencies and sometimes jurisdictions to redesign services and programmes from first principles and enable the cultural and organisational changes necessary to deliver results. It is also vital that the right incentives, performance measures and rewards are put in place to encourage collaboration, and that the

additional up-front costs that collaboration creates for organisations are recognised and accounted for.

In designing multi-channel delivery arrangements, as well as reconsidering how to best meet user requirements, agencies may also find themselves trying to take into account the broader roles of individuals, not only as clients but also as citizens with both rights and obligations. While users want more choice plus convenient, streamlined services, citizens demand better governance, transparency, accountability, discoverability and accessibility which, as taxpayers, they have to pay for.

Juggling an individual's demand as a user and as a citizen, while mediating across competing or conflicting interest groups, is one of the greatest challenges to successful multi-channel service delivery. While it is possible to achieve these goals through initiatives such as multi-channel service delivery, it is important to see them as choices among competing ways to use public resources.

Even though the expected outcome of multi-channel service delivery is better service and better productivity, the benefits may take significant upfront investment and many years to materialise. This places heightened importance on disciplined implementation of initiatives in this area – it is important that the proposed financial, social, fiscal and organisational benefits are actually achieved for political as well as administrative reasons.

Agencies need new frameworks to assist in moving forward

One of the key observations about making progress with multi-channel service delivery is that, rather than leaving agencies to act unilaterally, it is vital to provide tools that to plan and co-ordinate their efforts in moving forward.

Service delivery architectures are critical

Increasingly, governments require their agencies to integrate their services with those of other public and private agencies. To do so, an agency needs to be able to access, understand, and adopt some kind of government-wide “enterprise” or “service delivery” architecture that can help them standardise and integrate their data, business processes, service delivery applications and channels, and supporting information systems with those of other agencies. Indeed, creating this type of architecture is widely seen as critical for the future performance of government. For example, in 2001, the Gartner Group stated that, over the next two years:

“70 per cent of governments that do not develop an e-government architecture will duplicate efforts and infrastructure, and will fail to meet constituent expectations for service delivery, resulting in complaints and wasted public funds”¹.

Architecture needs the support of other tools

The effective development and use of service delivery architectures also calls for the upgrading of existing tools, and the development of new tools such as:

- common standards for interoperability of data and information systems;

1 Kreizman, G. and E. Fraga, E-Government Architecture: Development and Governance (TG-14-6799) October 2001.

- business case development and evaluation frameworks;
- public-private provider policies and frameworks;
- frameworks for interagency and inter-jurisdictional agreements;
- revised investment and funding models; and
- better models for consultation over service development.

Arrangements for governance of cross-agency/cross-service administration and supporting models, architectures and tools must also be reviewed to meet emerging requirements.

Challenges and tensions need to be balanced and managed

In translating the dual objectives of better productivity and better service outcomes into reality, agencies encounter management challenges and tensions associated with balancing and aligning:

- different legislative and regulatory regimes;
- legacy information systems;
- budgetary constraints;
- public-private provision;
- cross-agency and cross-jurisdictional linkages;
- delivery of services through existing and new access channels; and
- equity, effectiveness and efficiency.

This last point is particularly important. In developing multi-channel service delivery governments face a tension between the desire to open up new channels in order to improve efficiency and quality, and the need to maintain the traditional ones for reasons of equity and effectiveness. When governments start to seriously seek the efficiency gains that they have seen that e-government can enable, they will need to make choices among these objectives. While these choices are inherently political, it is important to recognise the dynamic nature of this situation in order to best time decisions. For example, as time goes by, governments can reasonably assume that more users will be able and willing to use online services. In some instances, it will be possible to close down traditional channels simply through a gradual erosion of demand for them. At some point it may become cost-effective to invest in providing skill development or mediated access to online services for the small percentage of users left unable to use them without assistance. What is most important as governments reach the point of making such choices is that decisions on a common policy framework.

From multiple discrete channels to a networked multi-channel approach

Initial e-government offerings were primarily information-based providing, for example, access to publications and forms. New online and digital services complemented existing services delivered through traditional off-line channels, and were administered as a separate activity.

Today the e-government agenda is starting to emphasise the importance of service innovation, often to be achieved by moving to multi-channel service delivery. This agenda is reshaping service delivery models. Traditionally, service delivery, even for online services, has been based around individual agency functions, structures, information, systems and

capabilities. New technologies and economic pressures are enabling (and sometimes forcing) private and government organisations to use the same infrastructures to deliver multiple services through multiple channels.

This is creating a drive towards more collaborative models of service delivery, often based on a strategic rhetoric of creating “networked government”. Agency co-operation to ensure that ICT infrastructures, data, business processes and delivery channels are interoperable and can be integrated, is becoming crucial. When business processes as well as delivery channels are developed and managed in this way flexible, efficient and effective multi-channel service delivery becomes possible.

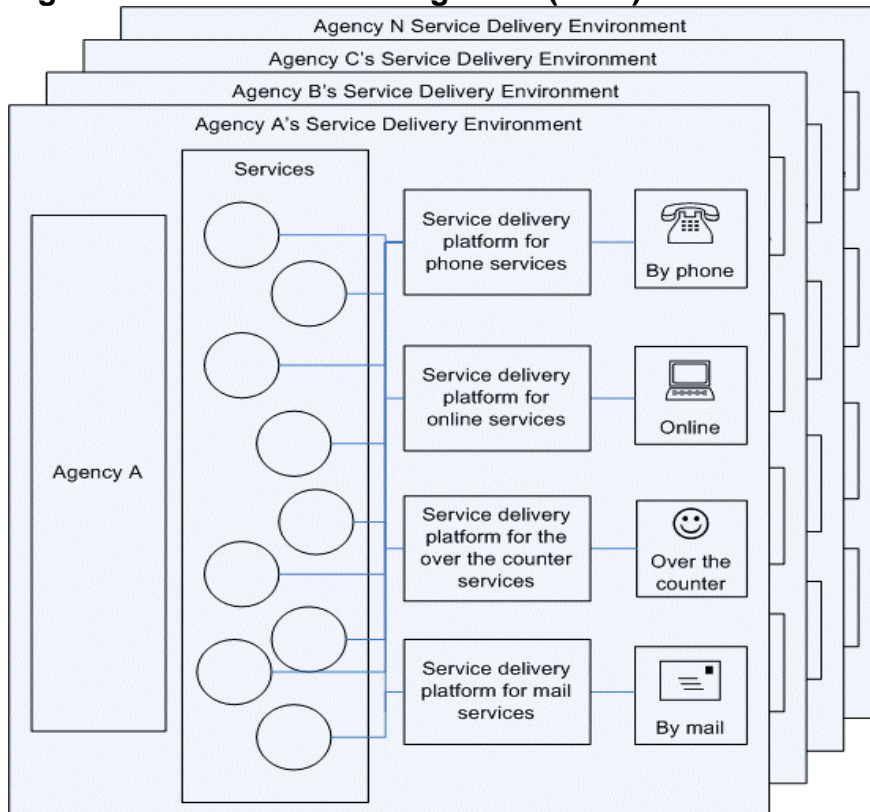
No government has realised the completely seamless and networked approach that is the ultimate vision of many national e-government visions and strategies. Rather, a range of models is being examined, and agencies’ use of multi-channel delivery will be at different levels of “maturity”. Three generic models of how government agencies use delivery channels are depicted in Figures 2.1- 2.3 below.

The first model shows the most common approach to service delivery, where agencies are maintaining discrete platforms for delivering services through different channels, and these are not integrated either within or between agencies. The second and third models show approaches to multi-channel service delivery that are increasingly “mature”.

Model one – vertical integration (“electronic silos”)

This is an early maturity model, reflecting application of ICTs to a silo form of service delivery. Each silo (normally based around an agency, but often found at the business unit level within agencies), has its own approach to using ICTs to deliver services and managing delivery channels. This model involves each agency or business unit in administering separate channels with separate layers of management. Choices about information, access, distribution and governance models are owned and controlled by individual agencies. The agency or business unit view of the world tends to dominate how the needs and expectations of customers are perceived and addressed. Opportunities for service improvement and transformation tend to arise on an unplanned basis and be limited to individual processes, services or agencies.

Figure 2.1 The “vertical integration (‘silo’)” model

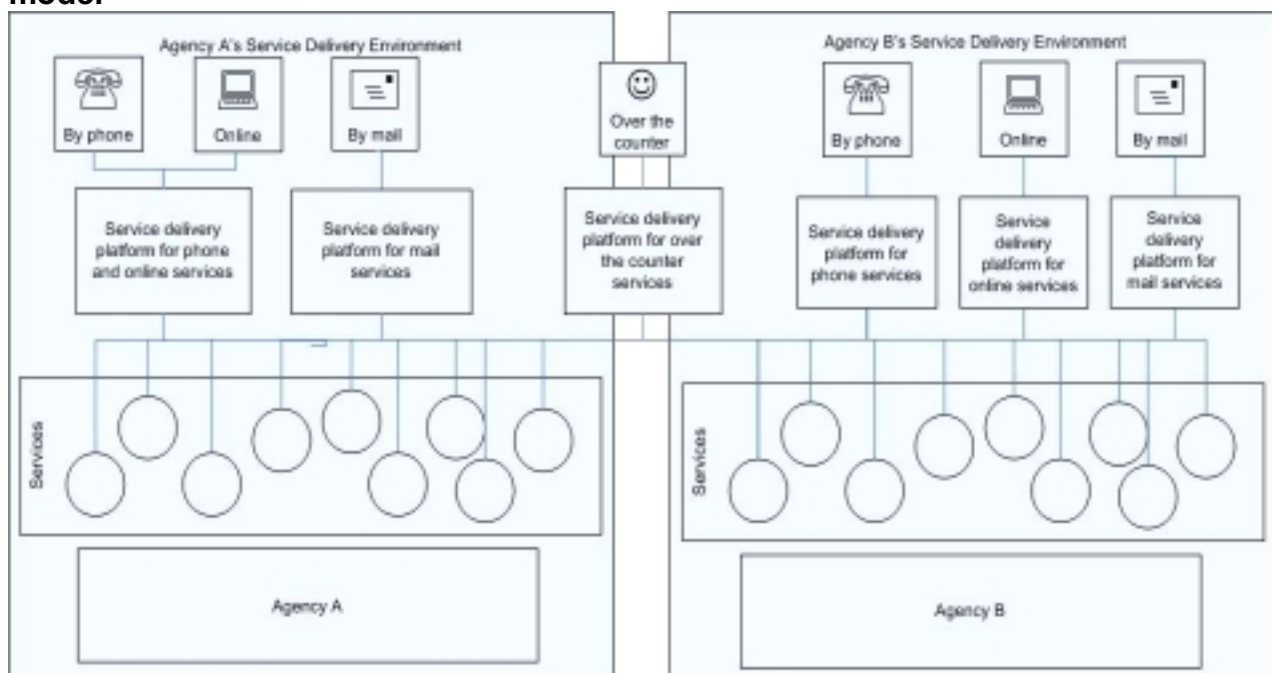


Source: Australian Government Information Management Office, Department of Finance and Administration, 2005.

Model two – vertical integration with interoperable delivery platforms

This is a more mature model of channel management. Agencies still administer largely separate channels, but recognise that better quality services and greater efficiency can be achieved by some cross-over of access and service content among different channels (e.g. agency A supporting its phone and online channels with the same platform). It is characterised by a more collaborative, although still *ad hoc*, approach to service delivery, with some sharing of infrastructure and data and a greater focus on standards, so as to develop interoperability between channels (e.g. agency A and B share a platform and channel for over-the-counter service delivery). Administration of services and channels generally resides with individual agencies, and information and capability is still agency-based, resulting in variable governance and funding arrangements, and inconsistent customer experiences.

Figure 2.2 The “vertical integration with interoperable delivery platform” model

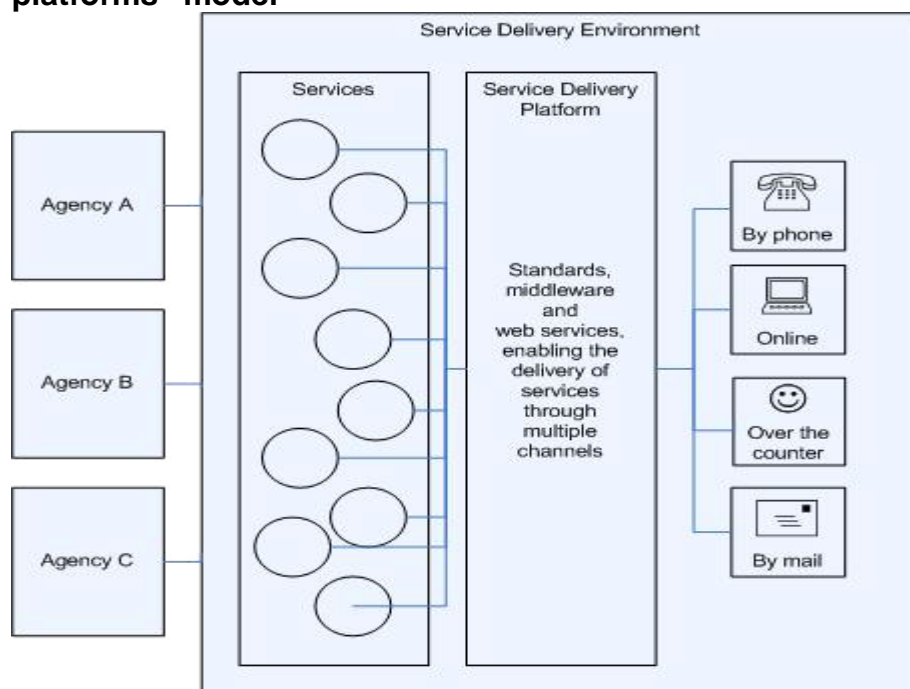


Source: Australian Government Information Management Office, Department of Finance and Administration, 2005.

Model three – vertical integration with integrated service delivery platforms

This multi-channel delivery model is characterised by fully interoperable and integrated channels that enable service users to transfer between channels and experience seamless service. It is a user-focused model that works both within and across agencies. A “create once, use many times” principle of information and ICT management is incorporated into the service delivery frameworks of all government agencies. The model adopts a government service delivery architecture built on recognition that ICTs are the backbone of all service delivery channels, regardless of whether actual delivery takes place on- or off-line. There is growing recognition that this type of approach is what is eventually required to enable seamless, multi-channel, multi-agency and user-focused service delivery.

Figure 2.3 The “vertical integration with integrated service delivery platforms” model



Source: Australian Government Information Management Office, Department of Finance and Administration, 2005.

A set of increasingly universal tools or building blocks is central to the service innovation agenda and essential for supporting a move from the silo model to the more mature models of multi-channel service delivery presented above. The next section explores some of these building blocks.

A crucial enabler – interoperability

Interoperability – the ability of government organisations to share and integrate information by using common standards – is now widely understood as being crucial for e-government. If channels and back-office processes are integrated, different channels can complement each other, improving the quality of both services and delivery to government and citizens simultaneously. The ideal is to create an environment in which data, systems and processes are fully integrated and channels interoperate instead of merely co-existing.

Interoperability allows service delivery applications (*e.g.* electronic processing of licence applications) to be separated from the front-end delivery channel(s). This enables applications to be implemented independently of a delivery channel, making it possible to introduce new channels (*e.g.* adding in a mobile phone channel for notifying people when licences are granted) without developing entirely new applications, and vice versa.

Authoritative data

An integrated multi-channel environment implies that personal data and information concerning the status and progress of a service interaction are available to all channels involved in the delivery of a particular service in a secure manner. This relies on a single authoritative source of data (the “create once, use many times” principle). It may be

facilitated either by having the information and data physically located together in a central store or through a logical network of distributed stores. What is important is that information and data are available to be shared by applications that feed all the channels, with appropriate regard to privacy and security requirements.

Service delivery architectures

What is crucial to successful multi-channel service delivery is not which architecture is used, but that an architecture is consciously used to support multi-channel service delivery and, more broadly, service innovation. Some approaches are outlined below.

National approaches

The United States government has established a whole-of-government or “enterprise” architecture (the Federal Enterprise Architecture) to support a citizen-focused approach to e-government, facilitate integration and leverage the value of IT investments across government. The architecture is a top-down approach consisting of reference models that:

- describe at a high level the services the government provides, independent of the agencies that provide those services;
- provide a standardised framework for measuring the performance of IT investments and their contribution to programme performance;
- describe the data and information that support government programmes and business;
- classify service components and identify how they support government business; and
- identify the standards, specifications and technologies that support the business of government – see <https://www.feams.gov/>.

Together, these reference models provide a framework enabling better decisions about investments in ICTs and their application to US government services. In particular, the Technical Reference Model describes standards that support interoperability, data management and channel choice. This approach, while suitable for the US environment, may not be appropriate for other jurisdictions.

Canada is pursuing a different enterprise architecture approach which is based on taking a business approach to the design of services and information systems. Known as the Business Transformation Enablement Programme (BTEP), the Canadian architecture programme aims to facilitate sustainable whole-of-government client- or citizen-centred transformation, and to provide the design and alignment tools that will enable rapid change.

The BTEP methodology is tied into the Canadian government’s project management framework, in which projects are broken down into iterations and phases. Deliverables are tied to iterations and phases, and funding is tied to deliverables (Weisman, 2004). This process provides for a very rigorous approach, however, it may not suit the cultures and political environments of other jurisdictions.

New Zealand is focussing architecture on the service delivery process. A service delivery architecture built around an interoperability framework is a cornerstone of its latest e-

government strategy, released in September 2003, states that: “the architecture will be comprised of:

- *shared components*: components developed and implemented only once, and used by many or all agencies (*e.g.* the portal);
- *generic components*: standardised components that support a generic activity, but are implemented locally (*e.g.* a technology solution for handling an online registration process that can be incorporated into different business processes in different agencies); and
- *unique components*: components that are specific to an agency, function or service”. See <http://www.e-government.govt.nz/e-services/index.asp>.

New Zealand is working on ways for agencies to implement the service delivery architecture through shared use of modular ICT applications and infrastructures.

In Denmark an increased focus on enterprise architecture and a significant cross-governmental co-ordination effort is seen to be essential for realising Danish visions about e-government. Government is implementing an enterprise architecture based on a national white paper published by the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in June 2003.

The white paper recommends that the government adopt a service-oriented architecture model in which IT solutions are modularly designed services that have well-defined interfaces with each other and with legacy systems as a common architectural principle. The white paper points out five core architectural principles: interoperability, security, openness, flexibility and scalability.

Service-oriented architectures

In implementing enterprise architecture approaches, many countries are turning to service-oriented architecture (SOA) approaches. SOAs identify and break down processes, services and applications into discrete parts and develop solutions for the discrete components which can then be used and shared across a variety of processes, services and applications. Developments in SOAs have been very recent. This is particularly true in the government sphere, where SOAs are so far much less common than in the private sector.

Adopting a SOA is a long-term and progressive process that should and can, by virtue of its modularity, be embarked upon in stages. Not all applications or services in government must become SOA-compliant. Governments and agencies need to set their SOA goals strategically and pick targets that generate an appropriate e-government value proposition in terms of meeting public expectations and achieving better use of public resources. This approach is highly appropriate where a “big bang” type of project is seen as impractical, prohibitively costly, risky or impossible to justify on a business case basis.

To date, SOA success stories see its adoption occurring in stages and layers, for example through application to:

- the data and information that are retrieved and manipulated by software applications;

- software services that undertake specific information transactions;
- discrete business functions (*e.g.* retrieving a customer history, opening an account); and
- service delivery processes built from a sequence of discrete business functions.

Early movers in the use of SOAs in e-government are developing directories or repositories of the elements of their SOAs to assist in the development and dissemination of such approaches among service delivery agencies. In the United States, the Component Organization and Registration Environment (www.core.gov) provides a repository of discoverable processes, systems and code. In Australia a similar programme called “Govdex” that will provide access to XML (eXtensible Markup Language) schemas, is also under development. New Zealand is developing what it calls the “e-government component architecture” of modular, reusable software and a repository for government-wide XML schemas as part of its e-Government Interoperability Framework. Denmark has implemented its “Infostructurebase” a collaboration tool supporting exchange and reuse of data related to public service delivery, in support of co-operation, business re-engineering and alignment of related services. Again, a key to this is the development of common XML schemas for use in relation to government services and activities.

For rapid deployment of services over a variety of channels, SOA approaches may be combined with sophisticated business work flow tools to enable quick reconfiguration of components to create new services, processes and applications within and across agencies.

Reuse of components or modules will reduce costs, because fewer components need to be developed, maintained and managed. This will ultimately lead to services that are cheaper, better or both. Co-operation in developing modules within and among administrations can also achieve economies of scale, which also leads to lower total costs. Other benefits of this approach include:

- achieving faster “time to market” for new services and applications;
- enabling closer alignment of business objectives and IT functions;
- lowering costs of software development and service integration work;
- providing agencies with the tools to be more agile, flexible and integration ready; and
- bringing more discipline to the ICT environment and making it easier to manage ICT and data assets.

In adopting such an approach, experience so far suggests it is sensible to:

- start with a focus on service delivery needs, and then match these to the technology view of service design and delivery;
- engage all stakeholders including the IT staff;
- start small, but think big, focusing on a few strategic issues at first;
- think about data as well as software reusability; and
- tie an SOA approach into the government’s overall information management approach.

- An Australian example of a multi channel service delivery approach is provided below.

Helping Centrelink customers stay in touch – Australian Government case study

Centrelink delivers a range of Australian Government services to the Australian community, and has expanded its channels of communication with customers through the Internet and by using voice recognition technology.

Centrelink designed the Student Notification of Employment Income initiative to make it easier for eligible customers to declare employment income. Previously, customers filled out a paper form and gave it to Centrelink Customer Service Centre staff for processing. In limited cases clients could telephone Centrelink.

New self-service options removed both the requirement for attendance at Centrelink and an expensive paper-based procedure to collect a small piece of income information. Two self-service options were developed: 1) Natural Language Speech Recognition system used by telephone and 2) an Internet application. These options followed the Centrelink e-business principle of 'build once – use many', where a system is designed to allow it to be used in different ways and with different groups through multiple channels. The student customer group was used to test the self-service process and pave the way for its use with other customer groups.

Centrelink's primary objective was to improve its provision of information and services to customers by simplifying their reporting needs and expanding their choice of interaction channels. The self-service system provides a wider range of options for youth and student customers using Centrelink services, and complements existing service delivery channels.

Centrelink recognised that not all customers would be able or willing to use new technologies and that customers might choose to use different options at different times. For this reason, no single channel is promoted over another and all traditional service delivery channels remain available to customers. Centrelink hopes to move 'low value – high volume' transactions to self-service options and to target appropriate customers to elect this convenient channel.

Increasing Centrelink's efficiency was an important driver to develop self-service options. Designing the new self-service options provided the opportunity to streamline Centrelink's business processes, increase the use of electronic record-keeping and improve the integrity of data.

Centrelink is now building on the groundwork of this initiative to increase the range of services offered on self-service channels. Centrelink staff support customers in becoming confident self-service users. Customer feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Centrelink continues to review the optimum hours of availability for the services and customer support, together with any additional needs for security and authentication to support development of additional and more complex self-service transactions. It works collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to ensure it addresses integrated service design. Centrelink continues to analyse customer behaviour to inform future developments and define anticipated demand on new and existing service delivery channels.

The full Centrelink case study is available from *Transforming Government Volume 2: Enhancing Productivity* which was published by the Department of Finance and Administration, Commonwealth of Australia in March 2005. It is available online from http://www.agimo.gov.au/publications/2005/04/enhancing_productivity

Further information is available at <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/>, and from Centrelink, PO Box 1216, Tuggeranong ACT 2901, Australia. Phone: +61 2 6212 0060.

More building blocks

Other building blocks that will assist development of mature multi-channel service delivery include:

- A common vision for multi-channel service delivery.
- A strategy for achieving that vision across government that includes:
 - information management policies that enable realisation of the “create once, use many times” principle, based on the concept of a single authoritative source for information and data;
 - a technical interoperability framework that maps out the standards, policies and practices to support interoperability between ICT systems and applications;
 - security policies and frameworks;
 - authentication and identity management frameworks;
 - privacy and data-matching policies, legislation and guidelines;
 - access and distribution strategies, including a channel management strategy that takes into account the needs and priorities of customers, citizens, subjects and government;
 - stakeholder engagement and market research policies, guidelines and tools to enhance governments’ knowledge of their customers; and
 - monitoring and evaluation strategies and tools.
- Appropriate governance bodies and mechanisms (including investment and accountability mechanisms) that reflect the move towards a more holistic and integrated approach to service delivery and include models and guidance for partnering with private and non-government organisations.

Choosing the right channel, developing the right framework

Users’ preferences should be central to the design of service delivery across different channels. However, they should not be the only or overriding factor driving decisions about service innovation and choice of delivery channels.

Providing channel options

In making optimal choices about the range of channels through which a service will be available, agencies need to balance costs and benefits to service users and to government. It is important to recognise that, when people can choose freely among different channels, they will tend to choose those that they *perceive* as providing them with the greatest personal benefit. What counts for most service users is the quality of the service that they receive, not the technology or channel used to provide the service.

In order to know how different user groups may benefit from different channels, agencies need a good understanding of user needs, capabilities and preferences. Agencies need to know what services users might use, over what channels they might use them, at what point they are most likely to cross over to another channel, and what that means for the agencies' business operations.

Some jurisdictions are adopting a customer relationship management strategy. The major challenge of this approach is to identify individuals uniquely and consistently across government. This is acceptable in some jurisdictions, but in others it is problematic for social, historical and legislative reasons.

Choosing the right channels for the service

The suitability of channels depends on a range of factors, of which technology is only one. In addition to understanding user requirements, factors to be considered when determining appropriate channel choices for services include:

- which services are suitable for which channel;
- costs associated with channels from the perspective of both agencies and service users;
- the possibility of activating latent demand when a product or service is made available through a new channel, and the impact this may have on agency capability and service delivery costs; and
- the impact of the movement of a customer from one channel to another during a transaction or interaction on costs, organisational capability and customer service perceptions and experience.

Strategies and frameworks for choosing channels

Agencies need to make channel choices based on a combination of often conflicting factors. Service delivery and channel management strategies are the frameworks within which agencies should make these choices and, as such, agencies must ensure that:

- channels are matched to services in a cost-effective manner;
- channel integration is supported, so that customer information and services flow seamlessly across multiple channels and agencies;
- channel investments are aligned with customer expectations and needs as well as governments' financial imperatives;
- assessment of opportunities to reuse, refocus or rationalise existing channels is part of the channel development process;
- channels are evaluated for both technical and organisational appropriateness; and
- choices realise the best public value, based on (expected) costs and benefits, and proper consideration of any tradeoffs required between equity and efficiency.

The rigour associated with many of the processes surrounding online service delivery is often greater than that associated with other channels. For example, authentication requirements and practices used when delivering services over the Internet are often more rigorous than those employed when delivering services via mail or telephone channels. This is also true for other issues agencies face when looking at options for multi-channel service delivery, including privacy and security concerns, infrastructure and channel asset management, and user equity issues.

When moving to a networked and multi-channel delivery strategy, the issue of privacy becomes paramount because information is more readily exchanged among channels, and potentially also services and agencies. Agencies must balance the need to ensure the privacy of individuals and the goal of meeting customer expectations of integrated and more seamless service delivery, on the one hand, and governments' need to operate more cost effectively on the other. To support agencies and maintain the confidence levels of customers and citizens, it is very important that privacy issues and the interpretation of privacy laws and guidelines are treated consistently across agencies.

Security is also a key aspect of maintaining trust and confidence. Delivery channels need to be secure at every point in the process, from the physical security of buildings where infrastructure and data are kept to the security of the actual service interaction, including application of appropriate identity management and authentication practices. For security as for privacy issues, a delicate balance is needed between understanding and mitigating risk and the constraints this imposes on both service users and the government in terms of lost efficiency, productivity and increased cost.

Equity issues relating to the digital divide also need to be considered and addressed when making choices about delivery channels. It is important, at a minimum, to consider potential service users':

- access to various channels;
- access to the infrastructure (communications, hardware, software) required to successfully interact with those channels; and
- skills in accessing and using the channel.

Other key issues to consider are how to:

- work with people who cannot access new technologies;
- work with people who refuse to use or prefer not to use new technologies;
- give people the experience, confidence and trust that will make them able or willing to migrate to new service offerings; and
- market, encourage, and enable migration to the most cost effective and highest impact channels.

Human resource issues

In developing multi-channel service delivery, governments need to consider the impacts on staff of the need to develop new skills, change existing roles, and adapt to changing organisational cultures. Multi-channel service delivery creates new skill requirements in government, in areas such as enterprise architecture, standards-based interoperability, and co-ordination and collaboration across traditional organisational boundaries. Governments and their agencies need to be aware of the need to either develop or obtain these types of skills, which are often in high demand and limited supply.

Changing roles is a potentially significant issue, as staff (particularly on the front line) find that they need to become familiar with a wider range of services offered by a larger number of organisations, and/or adept at delivering services through a wider variety of channels.

This is a dimension of the frequently discussed shift from being process workers to knowledge workers that many expect e-government to drive in the public sector. This shift will create a need for training of staff to enable them to perform effectively in these new roles.

Multi-channel service delivery is critically dependent on collaboration. Collaboration has not been the usual approach to delivering government services and is not generally an innate behaviour for either individuals or organisations. Achieving the level of collaboration that advanced multi-channel service delivery dictates presents a major challenge in terms of cultural change. Governments need to be aware of this challenge, and be prepared to develop strategies and initiatives to address it.

Conclusion

Public expectations of better government and pressures for government to operate more efficiently are increasing all the time. E-government has an important contribution to make in both these areas, especially through a co-ordinated government-wide move to multi-channel service delivery. Despite this, the basic requirements and building blocks for creating multi-channel service delivery as part of overall service innovation are known and available to governments. Important among these are:

- having a sensible and nationally appropriate vision and strategy for creating multi-channel service delivery;
- developing and implementing a service-oriented architecture to guide the use of data and ICTs to provide services through various channels;
- ensuring interoperability among agencies' ICT infrastructures, data, services and component business processes;
- providing for governance arrangements that support agencies working together to provide multi-channel service delivery; and
- engaging stakeholders in developing a user-focused understanding of services users' needs, priorities, preferences and capabilities that can be balanced against other considerations such as channel economics.

Private sector experience shows both the potential and pitfalls that governments face in moving in this direction. The vision of creating government services that are available on demand through a variety of channels, and integrated across traditional boundaries where appropriate, is a long-term goal that requires a lengthy transition period.