



Government at work:

Implementing a portal approach to citizen service

Government IT's foremost priority is always citizen service, and the digital revolution has created an exceptional opportunity for technologists to deliver in the service of the community. Web-based citizen services have dramatically enhanced the ease and efficiency with which citizens can interface with government.

These online services haven't always lived up to their promise, however. A recent study found 40 percent of citizens are dissatisfied with digital government.¹ At the same time, expectations continue to rise, with 85 percent of those polled saying they expect the same or higher quality from government digital services as they do from commercial organizations.

Some government agencies are responding to the challenge by consolidating fragmented and disparate online services into citizen-facing portals. This requires some creative infrastructure work. IT leaders need to leverage the cloud, implement best practices around security and scalability, and take a proactive approach to identity to effectively execute on a portal approach to citizen services.



COMING TOGETHER

Siloed services are a natural outgrowth of siloed government: As departments have moved more citizen services online, it's been common practice for each functional area to pursue its own course.

The result is a fragmented online experience, with citizens routed to different front doors for health, housing, permits and the like. It's not always obvious where to go and citizens will frequently give up on online services, defaulting to phone calls and other more conventional interactions. This dilutes the promise of efficiency and frustrates the end user.

The rise of cloud computing offers an alternative to this siloed approach. While individual departments may still develop their online experience according to their domain expertise, the cloud presents an opportunity to deliver these services on a shared infrastructure, through a single portal interface.

A shared cloud infrastructure creates powerful new possibilities. Beyond streamlining and simplifying the user experience, a



common infrastructure may allow diverse departments to share data and functionality. If a city can break down the walls — making it possible for health and education and housing to operate in a coordinated fashion, for example — it can deliver services with far greater depth and efficacy.



STRATEGIC APPROACH

How can agencies best leverage the cloud to forge a citizen services portal? Strategic planning is the key to success. To get the most from a portal approach, government IT leaders need to think strategically about the long-term needs of their cloud-based portal projects. This is especially true in areas such as scalability and security, key places where IT needs may evolve over time.

- Citizens increasingly look online to interact with government. This trend will increase as mobility and a plurality of devices facilitate greater access to the web. Scalability thus becomes a prime concern. IT planners need to anticipate an ever-expanding base of users, devices and applications, as well as a steadily rising volume of data and an increasing range of services. Cloud naturally lends itself to such considerations, but it takes thoughtful planning to ensure those capabilities are utilized effectively.
- Security is also a moving target. In addition to building in solid protocols for the present day, systems designers need to establish transparent rules for the use of data. As departmental services and applications are folded into the larger infrastructure, it's important to track every new point of connection, evaluate potential risks and continuously monitor. This also is an opportune moment to update legacy systems that may not have been designed with secure network connectivity and storage in mind.
- Planners also need to ensure sufficient bandwidth to support remote, IoT, mobile and other implementations. They need to put in place appropriate policies and mechanisms to prioritize network traffic and optimize bandwidth use. Equally important is the role of identity management in a cloud-based citizen services portal.



IDENTITY IS KEY

In a cloud-based service portal, identity management is key not just to security but to the user experience. A move to the cloud is supposed to make the user experience seamless and transparent: Someone looking to do business with the city can do business with the whole city. If the user is challenged by frequent checkpoints and called upon repeatedly to re-authenticate, this basic benefit of the cloud implementation is lost.

Rather than repeat the traditional siloed approach to identity, a new infrastructure calls for a new approach. An identity management portal offers a means to consolidate identity while customizing the user experience.

An identity management portal eases implementation by ensuring the user is consistently recognized across the system. Moreover, identity management solutions can build an integrated picture of the end user, thus driving a more seamless experience over time. A user who logs out this morning can log in this afternoon and pick up right where he or she left off. Push notifications can steer users to relevant content and services based on past preferences and behaviors. Applied for a restaurant permit? Here's a link to liquor licensing.

That's the power of a cloud-based service portal, and it's fueled by identity management.

ENDNOTE

1. <http://www.govtech.com/dc/articles/Report-Citizen-Satisfaction-with-Digital-Government-Services-Doubles.html>

This piece was developed and written by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Okta.

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