

Delivering Public Service for the Future

Digital Government: Get Ready for the New Wave of Mobile Citizen Interaction

A large, stylized red chevron graphic pointing to the right, serving as a background for the text.

High performance. Delivered.

A mobile-first approach requires a deeper understanding of user needs, new digital design skills and an organization transformation to successfully engage citizens.

With most of the world's population¹ now using mobile communications, digital government is entering a new era. In China today, more people connect to the Internet via phone than PC². Very soon, most citizens around the globe will be accessing public services primarily or exclusively via phones, tablets or other mobile devices. And this is not just a youth trend—the Accenture 2013 Citizen Survey³ shows preferences for mobile are similar across all age groups. Simply put, for citizens today, mobile is king.

But, so far, governments have been unable to meet citizens' growing appetite for mobile services—two-thirds of e-government sites in the United States⁴ do not have a functional mobile site or app, while, in the U.K., only 17 percent of local authorities are creating websites that can be viewed easily on a mobile device⁵.

And even where public agencies have launched mobile services, there is no guarantee that citizens are using them.

Accenture benchmarking suggests that public service mobile adoption is still low and lags significantly behind adoption in the private sector. Commercial organizations have responded much faster to consumers' demands for mobile and set the bar high. Consequently, citizens have very high expectations of how public service mobile sites and apps should look, perform, and make their life easier.

Why does this matter? Firstly, if governments want to grow levels of citizen engagement, they will need to increase the quality and quantity of interaction without additional cost. The efficiencies that can be achieved from moving to digital channels are well established. According to a U.K. government digital efficiency report⁶, the cost of an online visit is 2 percent of a face-to-face visit and 16 percent of a phone call, while research from the City of Copenhagen estimates that digital transactions will cost less than 5 percent of the equivalent face-to-face interaction. Switching to mobile is



the only viable option for cost-constrained governments looking to support increased levels of engagement.

Secondly, when public services do provide digital services that meet citizen expectations, the overall satisfaction with public services tends to increase. Accenture's Citizen Survey showed a high correlation between overall satisfaction with public services and use of digital channels. Digital governments that meet the demand for mobile services, therefore, are more likely to see increased satisfaction and approval from their constituents.

Secret to success: Engage citizens in design process

But simply adding mobile services is not sufficient. If digital governments want to meet citizen expectations, they need to move from standardized to personalized services. This requires moving from an e-government model, based primarily around transactions, to a citizen centric model, based around rich and personal interactions, and that can reduce the need to provide services through traditional channels.

Public services should not underestimate the challenges in making this shift. Designing a user experience for a mobile platform requires much deeper analysis and understanding of citizen needs and preferences than for existing transaction-type services.

A starting point is to develop citizen personas, representing different groups of constituents, to understand how each of these segments engage and interact with public services on a daily basis. This can and should be a two-way process, especially given that citizens are often eager to be involved: Accenture's Citizen Survey shows that 71 percent of citizens want to be involved in the design of public services. Ethnographic research can provide deeper understanding of user needs through on-location observations and interviews. Only with this knowledge, combined with creative design skills, can the design process begin. This must be a priority in mobile implementation, not an afterthought.

Public services also need to carefully consider which web development approach to take:

- **Responsive Design:** Allows developers to create a single website that will provide a consistent experience for users regardless of screen size or the type of mobile device being used. As this approach involves a

complete redesign, it is best suited to projects that are started from scratch. While more time consuming and complex for the upfront planning and design, responsive design provides a high-quality user experience that is easier to maintain long-term.

- **Mobile-Specific Website Creation:** Alternatively, public services with mature desktop sites may need to consider building mobile-specific websites to accelerate the shift to mobile. A quicker approach that requires less re-engineering, this solution is the easiest to implement but requires maintenance of two sites (mobile and desktop).
- **Mobile App Development:** Finally, public services will need to consider the case for mobile apps, which may provide the best user experience but have the highest development and maintenance costs because of the need to support the many different types of devices and platforms that citizens use.

As public services have previously focused on delivering e-government services, they may need to implement broader changes to the organization as they shift to mobile. Experience from commercial organizations suggests that existing technologies and organizations may no longer be fit for purpose in a mobile age. For example, adopting a responsive design approach could require building a new technology platform and for web and mobile support teams to be fully integrated.

Delivering public service for the future requires digital governments to make a fundamental shift in mindset to successfully manage the transition to mobile services. But making this shift will be more than worthwhile—by creating a world-class digital user experience, digital government can have a tangible impact on citizen satisfaction and engagement. More personalized, more immediate, the mobile channel is an opportunity that public services can't afford to get wrong.

References

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- 5 Dan Jellinek, "Few Council Websites Ready for Mobile Revolution," E-Government Bulletin, Issue 352, 17 April 2013.
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About Delivering Public Service for the Future

What does it take to deliver public service for the future? Public service leaders must embrace four structural shifts—advancing toward personalised services, insight-driven operations, a public entrepreneurship mindset and a cross-agency commitment to mission productivity. By making these shifts, leaders can support flourishing societies, safe, secure nations and economic vitality for citizens in a digital world — delivering public service for the future.

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