

Dominic Delmolino: The Exploring AI in Government podcast is brought to you by Accenture Federal Services and produced by Government Executive Media Group's Studio 2G. Accenture Federal Services combines the power of artificial intelligence, automation, and advanced analytics with deep client, industry, and technology expertise to help agencies reimagine how they achieve their mission, serve citizens, and manage their organization. Learn what Applied Intelligence can do for your agency at "Accenture-dot-com-backslash-federal-AI."

[Intro Music]

Dominic Delmolino: Hello and welcome to another edition of exploring AI in government, a podcast series dedicated to interviewing leading global minds in the artificial intelligence ecosystem and getting at the insights that drive adoption across key industries and the federal government. I'm your host Dominic Delmolino, chief technology officer for Accenture Federal Services and I'm here today with our guest analyst Kathleen Walch, AI and machine learning expert and managing partner at Cognlytica.

People have shown a willingness to take advantage of AI-enabled customer services if there's a clear benefit to them. And because government has the distinct challenge of finding ways to serve all people and meet their diverse needs, taking advantage of artificial intelligence can be a game changer for resource-constrained agencies as well. And this episode we'll look at how AI can improve the customer experience and the work required to make it a reality.

Today we'll be speaking with two experts on this subject, Suzette Kent Federal Chief Information Officer and Courtney Winship of US citizen and immigration services. Our first guest is Suzette Kent. I'm excited to get her perspective on overarching federal initiatives and goals around artificial intelligence.

Kathleen Walch: She is at the forefront of helping federal agencies modernize their infrastructure, empower their workforce, and transform service delivery for the American public. Welcome Suzette, and thanks for joining us today.

Suzette Kent: Thank you, Kathleen, Dominic.

Delmolino: So, given that perspective of AI and customer experience and service in the commercial world. How would you describe the state of customer experience in the federal world today?

Kent: Um, that's a great question. There are some bright spots and some exciting spots, but there is a much opportunity. When I compare, uh, to the private sector in places, particularly in customer service and product delivery where emerging technologies have been leveraged to better serve whether it's a constituency or a customer, um, there's a lot of opportunity. I, in elimination of paper, there's many of our government processes that are still paper-based. Um, some of our processes are very elongated. We have multiple handoffs which increase the opportunity for error. Um, so that's places where we can actually restructure those processes. And what's exciting about, um, many of the newer technologies, whether it's AI or how we use data, is that we can actually leapfrog with improvements to customer service and citizens set their expectations based on the way they live their everyday lives.

Delmolino: And I know the administration has put significant emphasis on improving customer experience and has defined requirements for federal agencies, especially those high impact service providers to establish customer experience metrics, gathered data and assess performance. How do you, how do you see that being implemented?

Kent: That's a great question. And you started it with, with one of the responses I would use, establish and capture and some of the cases we have, um, particular processes where, uh, we have an opportunity to better establish exactly what type of service we're delivering and how do we measure success and what does that look like, not just through the eyes of the government, it was done from A to B, but from the citizen who was receiving that service? Was it done well? Was it error free? Was it timely, was it clear and understandable? So many of the things that we're starting with first are, um, establishing and capturing information.

And then the second big challenge is when we capture that information, how do we interpret it and what we do with it? How do we understand what the positive points are and where there are opportunities for improvement and turn that into some type of rapid response places where we can improve technology or change the business process or the customer? So, it's a, it's a journey that has started, but there's still a lot of work to do.

Walch: Yeah. And that's great that you bring it up because you know, customer experience, you need to make sure that you're looking at the entire customer experience. So beyond just access, assessing performance, what else should agencies be doing to improve customer experience?

Kent: That starts with the, the, the putting the customer kind of at the center. And that's some of the things that you've seen both in the president's management agenda, cap goals with customer experience. Uh, the focus on user centered design. Um, the engagement model that we've had on multiple initiatives with bringing in those who we are serving and actually asking how are we doing? What do you want? What do we not tell you? What do you not understand? How could we make this easier?

Um, I very often look to things that were successes in the private sector. So, places where not just responding to a customer need and delivering a service, but sometimes anticipating. Um, I think we also have an opportunity clearly to leverage technology better inside the federal government, but we also have an opportunity to leverage data that we already have.

Walch: So, it's refreshing that you're, you know, looking to past experiences and because you're right, that that type of experience is what people are now expecting. So, if government isn't doing that, they feel that government's lagging, they're behind. They're not listening to their citizens needs and reacting fully. So, where do you see AI fitting in into all this?

Kent: I'm going to answer your question, but I'm going to share something based on what you last said. When I, the federal government, one of the first things someone did was handmade, literally a stack of about 200 pieces of paper. Um, and I've said to people before, is this a joke? Is somebody playing a game? Right? Or are you trying to be funny? Right? This is part of the onboarding, uh, thing. Um, but, but that is actually some of the places that's an example of where we're not meeting citizen expectations. Um, and where AI fits in is in a couple of different ways. And I'm going to talk about it on the journey.

Right now, when I look across the agencies maybe the things that they're doing, whether it's robotic process engineering, um, natural language processing, AI, machine learning, um, types of image recognition, they are starting with taking out some of the manual pieces and that allows our customer service professionals and those who are engaging with citizens in whatever the experience to focus more on the experience, to focus on the issues, to focus on discrepancies rather than just the manual execution of tasks. So, so that's a component. But as we make investments in data and bring data into the experience, that's where we have opportunity to speed up processes, to eliminate errors. Rather than asking a customer to fill out an entire form, we can ask a few intelligent questions and make that a much quicker process. When we have the ability to use data inside the federal government, we can bring things in that we know and accelerate that for customers.

We can also leverage AI in certain types of, um, augmenting human decisions so that responding as much more, more, much quicker. And that citizens don't, you know, submit something and then they wait weeks wondering what happened. Um, we can also use automated technology to tell them about what's going on in the process. So, we're at step a, step B, this is going on. So, there are so many different ways and opportunities in the service perspective where we can use that broad spectrum.

Walch: Yeah, that's a great way to look at it. And you know, augmented intelligence, I think a lot of people should be talking about this, where you're augmenting and enhancing human capabilities, not taking the human out of the loop.

Kent: Absolutely.

Walch: And I think especially for a lot of agencies on their journey and if they're, if they're new to this journey, it's a great way to make your workers feel like they're engaged and part of the process rather than you're replacing them. So, I know that some agencies are using chatbots for a variety of things. And is there a risk of agencies viewing chatbots, chatbots as a quick fix and neglecting the need to improve their end to end multichannel service delivery?

Kent: That's a good question. Um, and I've been asked that question before in a couple of different ways is, um, it is very exciting that some of the technologies like chatbots, like RPA, are very quick and very easy for, um, for teams to understand, to use and to get deployed. Um, but that does not, that creates flexibility and opportunity for professionals to focus on other activities that does not take away the responsibility to re-examine the business process end to end and look for opportunities to improve it. Um, you know, sometimes when we automate certain, um, paper-based functions, there's some kinds of tendency to stop there that that's good enough. I got that little lift. Now I'm going to move on to the next thing. Um, but we have to hold the discipline to continue to ask, can we improve this service? Small wins are impactful and that lets us turn the attention of the professionals who are delivering the service and those who are supporting and deploying the service to other things.

Walch: So, building upon this, I know that some, a CX teams embrace AI for self-service. While programs like benefits administration are pursuing automation, in many cases, it sits in the middle in a supporting role. So, to agencies need a more holistic AI strategy. And if so, how should it be structured?

Kent: That's a great question. Now, some agencies do have, right now have a holistic AI strategy. There are a few and they've tried, they've shared them openly. Others are just starting the journey. And I'll reflect back on that last question. That's where we're saying let's start somewhere. So, you can learn and grow and build, uh, build the right capabilities inside the team, make the right investments in your data, engage with your citizens and see what they expect and take advantage of those small wins while you're building.

Um, the broader strategy, and I also with the IT professionals, I, I'm sometimes called the, the magic that they do is choosing the right technology for the right problem or the right challenge. Um, there are so many things that we can do with the spectrum of automated technologies but matching it to the right problem still means you have to understand the citizens you're serving and the mission that you're trying to accomplish.

Delmolino: So, it sounds like when we have AI in, we're implementing it, it's much more holistic in the way you've described it. And does that mean we're expanding the stakeholder base, right? So not just the citizen, it's not just the business function. It's not just IT anymore. Do we have a larger pool of people who may have some questions, may have some concerns, and we want to make sure that they implement AI in kind of an ethical and trustworthy way? And they all have different questions around that set of ethics and trust. So, what, um, what is the key to maintaining citizen trust? How can federal agencies ensure that they're implementing AI responsibly and ethically for each of those stakeholder group?

Kent: That's a great set of questions and I'm going to separate it kind of in two sets of activities, um, because when in in many of the cases, um, there's kind of two key inputs that there are two key components going on. It's the data that we're leveraging and the technology that we're using, that those are critical. And we're looking at the ethics and use and privacy and responsibility framework for both of those. Um, so when you build an algorithm or you build a capability, it's leveraging data of some type. And so, the frameworks that we're putting in place, we have to have those same principles of ethical, explainable, repeatable and responsible both in the information that we're using as well as whatever, you know, analysis or capability that has been built.

So the approach that we're taking with across the federal agencies is a set of disciplines that are in the federal data strategy, um, that are applied to data and particularly some things that have been highlighted for year one focus that includes ethics framework, capability, maturity assessment inside your agency, um, and then clarity around the problems that you want to solve.

And then simultaneously on the other side, we are working on right now that so that the data components out, uh, we are working on another piece for how we look at and examine algorithms, capabilities, you know, AI frameworks. We know whichever thing you want to call it. How do we examine those and have the right guardrails and how do we make those transparent and them transparent goes back to the same concepts of delivering customer service? Because how you explain something to one audience might be very different than how you explain it to another. And the channel in which we have to make that transparent may also be different. So, there's some more exploration around that.

Delmolino:

Yeah. So, I know a lot of people are interested in, you know, I don't want this black box algorithm making a decision that impacts me directly. Right? So, there's a big call for explainable and transparent AI. But one thing I thought that was very interesting in your answer was sometimes the need to have an explainable process that an AI can present actually gives us an opportunity to re-examine perhaps an opaque or convoluted government process that already had some low trust associated with it. So, do you think this need for or desire to have explainable AI is also helping improve the level of trust in government overall with that kind of approach?

Kent:

I certainly hope it does. And when I separated the two pieces, both with data and AI, um, I think those were both components. A- across our nation you see many people becoming much more comfortable with data, right? They look up something, they ask a question, they expect to see a data supported kind of explanation or argument or fact base. That's actually a great thing. Um, and our investment in the data strategy and the efforts that agencies are putting around the data helps build confidence on that side. Um, and then how we use it and how we explain the process. Um, you, you said a really important thing, um, and I'm laughing or smiling because even when we're doing work in agencies and we're doing design work, people will say, why were we doing that? Right. And why is that in the process? It's a fabulous time to re-examine why and to break things down to their most simple form.

Walch:

Yeah. And you know, it's important that with business processes in general that they are examined and evaluated. And if you're going to bring new technologies into, into an organization or an agency, that's a pretty good time to start looking at it and making sure that you're using this new technology wisely. So, from a very broad perspective, I know that your office is developing policies for federal agencies regarding AI. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Kent: Yeah, I'll relate it back to the conversation that we were just having. What we're looking at is the spectrum of capabilities from very simple automation of manual tasks to augmented decision-making to autonomous activities. And as you move up that spectrum, you need much different level of inspection and oversight, both of the data as well as the capability that you're building.

So, the policy that we're looking at is exactly what those guard rails are in those different categories. So, reproducibility, examination of the data, frequency of testing, how the exposure of the particular algorithm or capability may work. Um, and that is something that right now is in the phase of discussion and debate across the CIO community. Um, looking at what that actually means for how we deploy. So I am, I am, uh, excited. I'm excited because even in going through that discipline, it helps us have a common nomenclature for how we explain how the technologies are being used and get to a common ground because in different agencies they are serving different constituencies. We have different auditors, um, we have different types of technology decisions that have to be made. And that gives us a good framework for those discussions as well.

Walch: Yeah, that's a great way to think about it. And I know that you had said earlier that not every federal agency is at the same point in their journey with AI, but can you talk to us about where you see federal agencies today with AI adoption?

Kent: Um, again, very, very, you know, different, uh, places. And I think that also has to do with the maturity of the capability, um, and tied to the type of mission that the agency serves. And in some places it is, um, I will say it is, uh, agencies are pushing and you know, they're, when you look at the types of things that we can do in our national labs, um, that the DoD is exploring, obviously the National Science Foundation. Um, you know, they're asking questions that are on the front-end of capabilities.

Some of our other agencies are having conversations with their citizens, um, or with the particular mission they're serving where there's questions of, hey, why can't you, I, um, I'll use an example of a conversation with the USDA and we were having a conversation with farmers, um, a group of farmers, you know, and they were explaining what they were doing in the cloud and they're saying, well, we're doing these types of things. You know, couldn't we, couldn't we share information in this form rather than a paper based form? And couldn't we consolidate some of these things because we can do those together? And that's just what the USDA did. Um, and some of the things, you know, that they're, um, that they're working on as well.

So many of the agencies have said that it's very, um, very often there's some quick wins in those manual tasks and it's not as disruptive. So almost every agency has going on there. We have an RPA community of interest that's being actually led by the CFO community, has more than 400 people, um, involved across the federal government because there's a lot of manual tasks there. Um, and they know that that will bring them opportunity to automate those and then focus team members on other things.

Um, others, when you look at the work that's going on in, for example, HHS, uh, or Department of Energy, they're looking at broad spectrums of data and ways that using AI and, or high-performance compute capabilities. We can ask questions, um, that use massive volumes of data and have outcomes that we could not have achieved before or outcomes that might have taken us weeks or months that we can now do in days. So that's just kind of a, a broad, you know, perspective across many different agencies. But, um, there's still so much more to go.

Walch: So, AI will impact the workforce. Um, there's no doubt about that. But how do you envision it impacting the workforce?

Kent: Lots of different ways. Um, I already talked about a few ways where in automating manual tasks we are, um, I actually heard from the workforce that how thrilled they are because, um, they actually get to spend time on more value-added tasks. That's also one of the CAP goals in the president's management agenda.

Um, I also think that as we look at certain activities, the interaction between human and automated capabilities changes how we work. Uh, and I'll give you an example of something. It changes the timing. It changes um, it actually in some cases make some components more complex because very often you automate a set of things and if it doesn't meet the rules, that's actually what the, the human is working on. And that's really complex work. People have to have a level of data literacy and a level of understanding around how the technology is functioning. So that's whether you are, um, uh, mission, someone who's using it or your delivering a customer serv-, you know, a service. Well why, why was that the outcome? Um, and as w so we have to make some kind of broad investments in data literacy and continued comfort with using certain types of technology.

And then we have to make some very specific, um, role-based changes as we introduce those technologies into various roles. And that's the, some of the areas where we're focused on reskilling. Um, because the, the, the teams who are best at that are the ones who understand the mission and can marry the

improved process with the mission, with the data and technology that's being used.

Delmolino:

So, you've mentioned kind of the dichotomy between the data that's necessary to power AI and obviously the technology and where that stands. But I'm really want to start diving in a little on that data element. I know that's an area of passion for you and, and the cap goal of leveraging data as a strategic asset really looms as large a large component of that.

One of the things we've heard from some other guests is the fact that people are really excited about learning skills to become more data literate. And yet, um, they don't always have the baseline that's necessary to achieve that. And so, um, what's being done with that goal of leveraging data as a strategic asset, not only for the data, but also training people to be more data literate and capable of working and actually performing that leveraging function?

Kent:

The entire data strategy is much broader. And there are some things that are some guiding principles in north stars. There's a long set of actions that move through that maturity curve of using technology that we aspire to. But the things that we're charting with are some of the things that, that every agency needs to do around building ethics framework and understanding use of data. What, what are, you know, for your agency when you collected the data and your relationship with the citizen, what is your responsibility for privacy, for security and for use? What did you tell them you were going to do with it? And how do you stay within those boundaries? Um, data practices.

We're also making some tools available more broadly and, and um asking people to become familiar with those tools. Uh, we are actually asking agencies in the agency specific section to do a maturity assessment of their own capabilities. And as we just talked about around workforce, we're prioritizing some investments in building those skills across the workforce. So, the, the year one priority items in the data strategy are around people and the what I'll call the foundational activities to create that, you know, solid. Um, data capability as we go forward.

And then we'll build on some of the more complex things that we're also starting on. Three datasets. Um, we are starting on the datasets that external industry wants for AI Research and development. Overall, it's a priority both in the government now even though we're talking about inside the government. Um, the second is, um, the geospatial datasets and improvement of geospatial data sets. And the third is financial management data says that.

- Walch: Suzette thank you so much for joining us today. This was a very insightful podcast. For our listeners that want to follow you and learn more about your work, how can they best engage with you?
- Kent: That is a great question. Um, all of the things that I talked about and the outcomes are represented on performance.gov, uh, that is the progress on the cap goals, and we report updates quarterly. Uh, there are success stories from agencies and there are actual there are metrics there, t- to uh, Dominic's point there, uh, metrics there around the sets of activities that I've specifically talked about. Um, more on the data strategy. strategy.data.gov has a real deep dive into things that are going on around the data strategy and actually the opportunity to sign up for a newsletter, so you see information, you actually get a, um, an email when there's new activities or public engagement opportunities.
- Delmolino Awesome.
- Walch: So great. Thank you so much for sharing that.
- Kent: Appreciate it. Thank you for having me.
- Walch: Suzette shared an amazing perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the federal government as a whole. What makes its customer experience mission so unique is the diversity of audiences that agencies need to serve. For example, our next guest serves with an agency with an incredibly broad constituency.
- We're very fortunate to have Courtney Winship joining us today. She is the division chief of the Digital Services Division at the office of citizenship and applicant information services under the US citizenship and immigration services. US CIS is widely regarded as a CX leader in government with pioneering programs like 'Ask Emma', one of the first federal chatbots. So, thanks for joining us today Courtney.
- Courtney Winship: Thanks for having me.
- Walch: So, Courtney, I know that I got to introduce you to our listeners, but can you share a little bit more about your background as well?
- Winship: Sure. Well, actually I started at USCIS as an adjudicator in one of our international offices and I had the pleasure to do a lot of cases that were international adoptions, uh, filed joints for refugee and asylum cases and

really see what kind of impact, uh, USCIS casework has on people's lives. And I would say that, that then informed some of the choices I made in my work when I came to headquarters. Um, but always allowed me to, to focus on the public and public needs. And what's really exciting. I previously outside of government did some startup work and, and small business consulting. So, doing the work that I'm doing now is really exciting because I can kind of merge both, uh, knowing, understanding our public needs while also, uh, spending time in in startups and, and in design and development so that we can enhance our public services.

Delmolino: In terms of the customer experience uh process at USCIS, what's your overall strategy? Do you have like a North Star, a long-term goal? What are you trying to achieve kind of in the long-term?

Winship: So, I think in the long-term we have two priorities. One is to unify all of our, uh, digital tools and resources. And the other is to create a secure account, uh, that has online services for, for individually individuals and really build that self-service experience, that is directly connected and integrated with things like our contact center so that the customer feels like they are getting the responses that they need, whether it be live in, in, on the phone or on the website or whatever other digital tools we might have.

Delmolino: Awesome. So, Courtney, how would you describe the state of customer experience at USCIS today?

Winship: The state of customer experience at USCIS today is, is really good. I would say I think we are on the front end of innovation in government. We are really trying to uh, keep the customer first in everything we do. Everything we do is co-created and tested with our customer and our user base. And that is central in how we think about our products and even how we communicate with our design and development teams. Customers always first.

Delmolino: Now you alluded to the website presence and Kathleen mentioned Emma, the Chat Bot that I think many people are familiar with and I know that's managed by the customer engagement group, but I'm certain you speak with them with regard to, you know, how that coordinates with an overall digital strategy. So, can you tell us what, what Emma's been up to lately? What, what uh, what's new for that?

Winship: Yeah, sure. So, well just a little bit about Emma. For those who may not know. She started in December of 2015 and she is uh DHS's first interactive virtual

assistant. So, she, to date, she's uh responded to more than 34 million inquiries and that's by 11 million distinct users. So, people are going back to her to get additional information. Uh, so recently in the last year or so, we did redesign the avatar and it's actually a representative of one of our employees. So, we've, we have engaged the employees on helping to, uh, both build up Emma's knowledge, as well as how we publicly present her. Um, so that's exciting. We also continue to build out some of our Spanish services, uh, for Emma. Uh, and, and I would say in the last year or so, we tested out a live chat as well through Emma. So that's a very, very small kind of pilot. Uh, but, but there is, uh, some integration with some of our live chat or contact center services as well.

Delmolino: Wow. Those are some real impressive numbers. I mean, 34 million questions and 11 million people, you know, with her at that volume. What lessons have you learned? I mean, you've got some great experience now, so what worked well, what could you wish you had done better? And what are you looking to do slightly differently maybe in the future with her share?

Winship: Sure, so her 'I don't know rate' still is a little higher than we would like. She's about 8 to 10%. We're aiming for about 3%. Uh, so, uh, in order for her to, to learn more, we need to get more questions into her, I think. And, and we need to be also incredibly nimble in terms of our policies as that continues to change. Uh, so one of the things that we've noticed is that the back-end support for Emma is still very, very manual and we're trying to move away from that and try to automate, uh, that, that process a little bit more because, uh, as you can imagine, it's very labor intensive in that way.

Delmolino: So, it sounds like you're almost hoping to use AI to help AI in this case, right?

Winship: I think that's exactly right. Yeah. Yeah. So, we, we've, uh, have another initiative where we're doing some deep answer learning, uh, and built- using machine learning in that regard. And that's been really productive for us. We've been able to pull from other systems, uh, within USCIS to, to refine the types of answers we're providing and also make it a little more personalized. So that's where we're hoping to interject some of that same type of AI or machine learning into a, uh, a secure account that will allow us to provide additional information rather than the high-level kind of basic information that that Emma currently provides.

Walch: Yeah, that's great. Start to make a little bit more hyper-personalized. So, the about each individual instead of general broad answers and, and discussions.

- Winship: Exactly.
- Walch: Where do you see AI having the biggest impact on how you serve your customers?
- Delmolino: And also, what kind of lessons you've learned from pioneering and deploying something that, what would you say to yourself two years ago that you wish you had done?
- Winship: So, I think one of the lessons that we've learned is to consider what your overarching goal is going to be. Is it to be broad and provide general information or is it to go narrower and deeper in the types of responses that you want to provide? Now, I don't think you have to do one or the other, but I think in terms of you do have to prioritize a little bit when you first launch something. So, I think both are very good and they can be integrated in the long-term, but you do tend to have to choose one direction.
- And I also believe that, uh, technology continues to change, and it changes quickly. So, the resources that we had available a couple of years ago are, um, almost, uh, they're less ideal than some of the tools and resources that are available to us now. And so how do we, how do we, uh, use all of that, uh, to, to provide the best tools for folks moving forward?
- Walch: Well, many agencies are focused on using AI to extend self-service. This often requires backend challenges as well and backend changes. So how do you balance these important needs?
- Winship: That can often be tricky. I will say, luckily at USCIS we have a number of different IT initiatives that support both microservice and shared service architecture. And most of the work that we're supporting is integrating with those, those services anyway. So, we're kind of one step ahead. It makes it a little easier when we think about how, uh, how we leverage AI in our work. So, I, knock on wood, I'm very, very lucky in that regard. Um, I think our biggest issue at the moment is around prioritization. So, everyone gets thrown so many different priorities that trying to get everything in order and allow us time to do that development work, uh, is really tricky and that's where we struggle sometimes.
- Delmolino: You mentioned earlier the ability and requirement to be nimble with regard to how you deploy AI or features for something like a chatbot. You also mentioned some of the initiatives in it around how they're being more

flexible. How important is that to making sure you get AI correct for citizen experience, do you think?

Winship: I think it's very important. We've had a lot of success being able to be as agile as possible. Uh, and in terms of not so much in our AI development at the moment, but a lot of our work, uh, you know, we are doing CICD continuous integration and deployments and that, uh, allows us to be responsive, uh, to whatever the public need may be at the moment. Um, and I was just thinking about that on the way here actually. You know, I think the more we can get all of our teams into that, that space, the better because we'll have that flexibility and we, we will be able to be more responsive.

Walch: Um, you also mentioned earlier that Emma is learning Spanish or working in more Spanish domain. Um, and I remember hearing from one of your colleagues about some of the challenges that you can't just do a straight one for one translation that just doesn't work to serve certain groups of individuals who may refer to something in a different way. I'm really curious, uh, how are you extending that to other languages? How important is that natural language capability for AI? For something like Emma?

Winship: I think that the natural language processing is very important. It's a bit tricky because, uh, we do have a number of different languages or that folks want to interact with USCIS in. And we are driving towards improving both our English and our Spanish. And what we're trying to do is analyze intent and try and look at things like comments, common themes that I think will allow us to kind of, uh, discern what types of questions or concerns people have. So things like case status or processing times specific forms, we've been able to do a lot of analysis that allows us, uh, to train, uh, our backends to respond to the questions in, in, in such a way that should be relevant to the users on the front end.

Walch: So, you know, as far as users wanting to interact with various conversational systems, it's really important that you both build and then maintain trust so that they'll keep coming back and you can bring more and more, as you said, with, you know, hyper-personalized experiences. If they don't have trust, they're not going to want to engage that way. So, in terms of deploying tools like conversational AI, what steps should agencies take to ensure trust?

Winship: I think one of the most important things to do is just co-create from the beginning, right? So, you're going out, you're hearing what it is that users really need and what, what types of responses will be helpful to them. Um, so, so getting that feedback early on, going out and doing user testing, you

know, both with your employees to allow them to gain trust and build that kind of level of engagement, but then also with, with the public and all, all over the place. So, the beautiful thing about unauthenticated tools is it really is the public, right? You can go and do user testing pretty much anywhere and use that feedback to better inform what you're doing.

The other thing I would say is trying to figure out ways in which the agency or the government can be proactive in their communication and leveraging, uh, the information that we have to, to notify folks in something like a secure account or, or in any type of communication they might have before they may want to contact us for information about their, their case then in regard to USCIS.

Walch: Yeah, that's a great point. Help with transparency, et cetera, that it's open. So how is USCIS addressing potential privacy concerns surrounding the use of AI?

Winship: So, I'll speak for my team and our experience to date. One of the things that we've had to do working with privacy is to make sure that we scrub anything that we have of any PII, the personally identifiable information. We have to do that before we train, uh, any of our tools. Um, and that's been fine. I mean, successful and we've not had any issues in that regard. Uh, and then also working with all kinds of security folks, privacy, our counsel on, on creating that secure account and finding ways in which we can be, uh, more and more secure without being intrusive to the user.

Delmolino: So, improving customer experience with federal services is a key aspect of the president's management agenda is do you think there's a limit to how far you can go in that area without resorting to AI? Is AI necessary to go beyond a certain point? What's your thought on how AI interacts with how far you can go with customer experience?

Winship: I think it takes you to another level. I don't think you have to rely solely on AI, especially if you're kind of dipping your toes into the world. I think there's a lot you can do, uh, without AI, but certainly in terms of meeting expectations of the public, uh, like you talked about earlier, Kathleen, I think AI really does get you there. And it will also help us, uh, automate and streamline a lot of our processes and, and just information that we can make available. So that will take us farther, quicker I, I believe.

Walch: Courtney, thank you so much for joining us on this podcast. It was very informative, and you know, we got to hear a lot about what you're doing. So,

for our listeners that want to follow up and learn more about your work, how can they engage with you?

Winship: Sure. So, I do have on LinkedIn a page, feel free to contact me there. Also, I would encourage everybody to visit the USCIS.Gov website. Learn more about our digital tools and resources there. Um, and certainly through USCIS anybody can reach out as well.

Delmolino: During this episode I was particularly impressed with the statistics Courtney gave us around how over 10 million people have asked 30 million questions of USCIS' Emma Chat Bot keeping Emma up to date with relevant answers while expanding her knowledge to reduce the 'I don't know' rate keeps us pretty busy. Using artificial intelligence to assist in that process seems to be yet another way artificial intelligence is enabling a nimbler and more responsive customer experience.

Walch: I also really liked how the USCIS wants to move forward and move towards this hyper-personalized user experience. Courtney pointed out about how building and maintaining trust was very important. If citizens don't trust the AI Chat Bot that they're interacting with or feel that it's not using their data in trustworthy ways, then there'll be less inclined to interact with that chat bot going forward. Thanks for joining us. We'll be back next time with a discussion on AI and Ethics in the public sector. If you like what you heard share this show with a friend and rank us on your favorite podcast provider.

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Delmolino: Thank you for listening to exploring AI in government brought to you by Accenture federal services. To continue the conversation, visit us at [accenture.com/explore AI](https://accenture.com/exploreAI) where you can listen to other episodes and download relevant research, or you can connect with myself, Dominic Delmolino, and our guest analyst Kathleen Walch on social media. We look forward to seeing you at accenture.com/ExploreAI.