Accenture Federal Services

Enriched citizen experiences through service design:

Apply cutting-edge thinking to reimagine federal service delivery— driving greater public value and better service outcomes

High performance. Delivered.

For most commercial organizations, service delivery and customer experience are top of mind. To keep pace with ever-growing customer expectations, these brands are aiming to deliver experiences that "delight" customers, and they're re-engineering processes and systems to make it all possible. For airlines, banks, energy providers and a host of other commercial entities, optimizing commercial customer experiences is highly challenging work.

Yet it pales in comparison to the complexity that the federal government faces every day.

That's because while commercial companies serve only a portion of the population, government agencies must deliver services to meet the needs of a much broader base of citizens. That includes not just highly digital and well-educated citizens but also the poor and the aged, those with physical and mental illnesses, as well as children who can't advocate for themselves. These services must often span the online and offline worlds—supporting productive engagement across a variety of scenarios.

All the while, agencies face what Accenture calls "liquid expectations"[1]— with consumers holding the public sector to the same (if not higher) standard as banks, retailers and other private-sector providers. For example, consumers increasingly expect to customize their experiences and to have real visibility into the process and status of any interaction they have with an agency. That's because they get this type of instant feedback when they deal with experience leaders in the private sector.

Whatever their missions—whether issuing documents to support travel or delivering benefits to empower vulnerable populations—all agencies are striving for higher efficiency, greater transparency and better results. Service design provides a crucial means of addressing key challenges and improving the experience for all citizens. It's a vital tool not only for commercial businesses but also—indeed, especially—for mission-driven agencies that provide essential services to the American public.

Service Design Defined

Many organizations excel at managing the customer experience. They implement governance and monitor metrics to understand what's working and what needs improvement. Too few organizations commit to actually designing the customer experience—carefully thinking through the intangible factors that combine to deliver positive, effective experiences for a diverse array of customers across multiple channels. Just as crucial: addressing the technology, tools and systems required to deliver those experiences consistently and in a way that meets users' expectations.

Blending art and science, data and creativity, service design is the discipline that guides that process. It combines innovative ethnographic research techniques with human-centered design principles to optimize the end-to-end user journey across multiple touchpoints and over time. It approaches customer experiences holistically, seeking to deliver an integrated experience that reflects each individual's known history and preferences across every encounter.

Service design can help in crafting new services or completely reimagining current ones. In fact, this approach can be especially helpful as government works to enhance "civic moments"—breaking through silos to make it faster and easier for citizens to complete all of the steps required for major life events and milestones.

Delivering that kind of citizen experience requires more than designing attractive, intuitive portals or apps. It demands a rethink not only of physical and digital channels but also of the processes, systems and culture underlying service provision. While experience design focuses on making screens more attractive and intuitive, service design reimagines experiences across multiple touchpoints—online, on the phone and in person. It requires a holistic effort that may involve a range of activities, such as customizing the user experience for multiple personas, developing new digital services, better integrating systems and conducting new training in empathy.

The Building Blocks of Service Design

Federal agencies can use a variety of methodologies to redesign services and experiences. The most effective approaches typically follow this high-level flow:

Set goals. Start by articulating desired business outcomes and identifying key performance indicators for each goal.

Understand customers. In the critical research stage, various ethnographic research methods help identify users' stated and unstated needs, as well as known and unknown constraints.

Co-design experience. Use human-centered design principles and a co-design process to build a detailed blueprint for the service experience.

Build prototypes. Service design should drive rapid prototyping—making it possible to test and iterate the design as well as the supporting people, processes and technologies. Integrate new capabilities with relevant back-end systems to drive transformation of transactional services.

Optimize. Ongoing measurement and continual improvement of the design is critical to long-term success. Apply robust analytics tools and techniques to track user needs and service effectiveness.

Redesigning Service for Families in Michigan

Like all U.S. states, the State of Michigan has a specific formula to figure out the correct level of child support per family, calculated via its child support calculator. This calculator, however, was not addressing all the needs of the 3,000+ caseworkers using it. Nor was it providing enough transparency to explain how the recommended support amount was derived. As a result, the outcomes left many parents confused and unhappy about support amounts, while caseworkers did not have the tools or insight to explain why a parent should pay the recommended amount.

Initially, the State focused on making the calculator easier to fill in and ensuring the accuracy of the results derived. But after exploring the greater service system and learning from caseworkers who use the tool, the team uncovered greater pain points that needed attention in order to truly turn the child support calculator into a service aid.

Instead of treating the project as a usability design "refresh," the team approached it as a service design challenge—with a goal of transforming the job of filling in the calculator into a clear, collaborative, human interaction. As part of the process, the team repeatedly tested solutions as they were built, reflecting an iterative, co-design process.

The result: a tool that solved those deeper issues by helping employees give better customer service. It incorporates personal home screens for all caseworkers, with a dashboard where they can see all of their active cases and child support recommendations. It also provides an always-visible figure in the bottom corner of the screen—empowering parents to see how the final figure is reached.

With a focus on a better outcome for families—not just an easy-to-use automated tool—Michigan has been able to speed up the process, improve visibility of results and infuse transparency throughout the process.[2]

Creating Shared Value

Federal agencies are serving stakeholders with diverse capabilities and needs. Service design offers a mechanism for addressing that complexity—bringing humanity back to services without compromising efficiency, security or regulatory compliance.

For agencies, service design drives a better understanding of citizens and other customers, helping to identify needs and limitations they may not realize they have. It also helps determine differences between what customers say they do and what they actually do. Ultimately, service design empowers agencies to implement processes that are simpler, more elegant and more efficient. Improved experiences drive higher adoption, and higher adoption helps any agency to achieve its mission—from protecting the environment to helping people avoid disease or retire comfortably.

Mission: Accomplished

For federal agencies, meeting the needs of diverse citizens will never be easy. But service delivery and customer experience can be improved—driving higher efficiency, greater user adoption and improved user satisfaction. With the right approach—and supporting tools and resources—service design offers a new and better way of helping agencies deliver enhanced services and stronger results to the people they serve.

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