



Tips to Address 6 Common Pain Points in Service Delivery

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executive summary

According to a recent Gallup survey, government is behind in customer service ratings. That's even putting it mildly, as federal government came in last compared with other industries, such as businesses and pharmaceuticals. Only 28 percent of respondents viewed government favorably, with 66 percent holding favorable views for other industries, like restaurants and the computer sector.

As private businesses continue to improve their customer support, Americans are starting to increase their expectations of how services should be delivered by government. President Obama even made it a goal in the 2015 federal budget to deliver "world-class customer service for citizens." It's no surprise that better customer service benefits everyone, as poor service results in lack of trust in government and hindered communication with citizens.

While Gallup's results may seem all doom and gloom for government, many agencies are making notable efforts to improve customer service delivery for their citizens. This guide discusses six common pain points in customer service delivery and highlights several case studies of government agencies working to address these pain points. Additionally, each section features interviews with government leaders from agencies working to improve their customer services.

By setting up efficient and capable services, government can avoid common pitfalls. It can also provide citizens with information they need when they need it, while ensuring processes are simple and that help is readily available.

#1 PAIN POINT

Inconsistent Messaging



Have you ever looked at a help desk's website for its hours of operation, only to see the times listed differently at separate spots? It's infuriating and confusing. You just want to know when the location is open, without sifting through inaccurate and disparate information. Inconsistent messaging can make simple customer interactions downright painful. To ensure that doesn't happen, many organizations are turning to robust digital processes to ensure accuracy and transparency.

Serving All Citizens Consistently in USDA



Imagine you are the largest civilian agency in government. Your services touch farmers in fields, scientists applying for grants, firefighters preserving the forest, developers in rural areas and schoolchildren learning in classrooms. The Department of Agriculture oversees a vast array of services in government. “Our customers are literally every American,” said Bernetta Reese, Manager of Digital Technology and High-Level Initiative-Based Projects for the USDA. Reese sat down with GovLoop to talk about how her team works to make sure that consistent and accurate information is reaching each one of these groups.

“The depth and breadth of our audience is one of our biggest challenges,” said Reese. And it’s why the department aligns all of its various branches and sub-departments under one singular outreach strategy. By investing time and energy into making a cohesive strategy, the department is able to broadly share its messaging without overlapping or creating duplicative content.

To make sure the department is covering as much information as possible, the USDA themes its messaging by focusing on a variety of topics on a month-by-month basis, such as droughts or food nutrition. “If we didn’t organize our content, the messaging would be too dispersed,” Reese said. “There is so much to cover, we have to do it by topic, or individual offices would be sending out

messaging that might be inconsistent from what the department at large is trying to represent.”

Another way the department tries to harness its content is by tagging by category or content theme. There are more than 40 departments within USDA; if a user had to sift through the entire website directory to find pertinent information, it would be a nightmare. By tagging website content by category, USDA is able to streamline messaging both for the citizen user and the internal USDA employee.

For example, if a notice for a potential drought site is published to the USDA Drought Program and Assistance page, through tags, the USDA is also able to quickly update the content on the Drought Assistance page, the Disaster Assistance Program and the main USDA webpage. The ability to quickly locate content via tags allows for notices and updates to be launched in near-real time across the entire USDA digital environment.

For Reese, one area where consistent messaging is imperative is in the [Ask the Expert](#) feature. “If the information in the Ask the Expert feature is different than what we are promoting on our website or on social media, we are doing a disservice to our citizens. We need to be consistent,” she said.

The interactive web tool allows citizens to ask USDA employees questions about everything from food safety to seed health. The tool

is constantly updated to make sure the data is as accurate and current as possible. If it’s unable to automatically generate an appropriate answer, the tool will reach out to an appropriate staff employee.

In 2017, the USDA will unveil its newly redesigned website, which promises to be even more responsive. “The new site will allow us to update faster and ensure that all updates are made across web and mobile platforms,” said Reese. “The new site will allow for much more robust and accurate messaging.”

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IRS Slims Down

When it comes to inconsistent messaging, one of the primary culprits can be too much data. Oftentimes there is just too much information on the page that the user doesn't need. And when that information is copied to other locations, updates can be next to impossible. This was the case for the Internal Revenue Service.

Three years ago, the IRS's Frequently Asked Questions page was a labyrinth of links that redirected the user to various sub-sites. Those redirects, however, often led to error pages, incorrect links and outdated information.

The IRS teamed up with the [Digital Government University](#) (which provides programming to build and accelerate digital capacity through online trainings and in-person events) to redesign the entire process. It stripped more than half of the links from its webpage, clarified the use of acronyms and other jargon to be consistent across the site and simplified the language. Now when users log in, they are greeted with a dynamic web portal that first asks how the site can help direct them and answers their questions in clear, plain language that is consistent across the entire website.



One-Stop Shop for Veteran Health

The Department of Veterans Affairs has a host of resources available for veterans with medical needs. Those resources, however, are only as powerful as a veteran's access to them. If a veteran can't find the right information – or worse, finds the wrong information – the resources are useless.

To help returning soldiers consolidate important resources, the VA launched Vets.gov in November 2015. Vets.gov provides tools and resources that are easy to find in one place. But the really innovative part about Vets.gov is that it was built not just for veterans, but with them.

Through that process, VA leaders ensured the information that was most important to veterans was front and center. Since the VA included veterans in the process, the department was able to ask what they didn't understand, what was unnecessary and what information to prioritize. In the 30 days following the launch of the digital application, more than 11,600 veterans used it to apply for health care, with many receiving coverage in less than 10 minutes.

tips for success



Know the data location.

You can't update data if you don't know where the information resides. Government agencies should do a data audit where they investigate what information is stored and how the public would access it.

Updates matter.

Governments can't just publish information and then forget about it. Real-time updates need to be baked into the information process. Agencies can use keyword searches or automatic update tools to help streamline the updating process.

Use plain language.

Oftentimes, messaging can go off course because different content creators may word the same content differently. Unclear language can confuse the user and lead to inconsistent messaging.



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Delivering the Golden Standard of Customer Service

An interview with Abby Herriman, Chief Strategy Officer, HighPoint Global

It's no secret that government has a hard time delivering customer service at the same level and quality as the private sector. One particular hindrance? Organizational structure. Many agencies have a number of different departments, contact centers and help desks providing individual services to citizens, with little relationship to one another and the larger agency. Such silos make it difficult to create seamless interactions with citizens.

In an interview with GovLoop, Abby Herriman, Chief Strategy Officer at HighPoint Global, a citizen experience company, discussed the importance of embedding customer service into government processes and how agencies can work to deliver seamless services through the "Golden Standard" of customer service.

HighPoint Global works to help government agencies improve the citizen experience by focusing on each individual agency-to-citizen interaction. "At the heart of good customer service is the people who provide the service. They have to understand the perspective of their citizens," Herriman said. "But it's hard to walk in the customer's shoes if you don't have access to them."

Delivering the Golden Standard

"The concept of the 'Golden Standard' is really about having a mission, a vision and a set of values around customer service," Herriman said. To achieve the Golden Standard of customer service, every employee, regardless of job title or level, has to understand their connection to the citizen. This means agency leadership should have the same level of understanding of citizen needs as service representatives and those on the frontlines who are actually interacting with citizens on a daily basis.

That understanding is crucial to improving service levels. "Once you start to embed customer service into the foundation of every process in an agency, it becomes clear how everybody's connected to the citizen," Herriman said. "What you'll see is an increase in employee engagement and you'll start to see them make decisions based on what's in the best interest of the citizen."

The Omnichannel Approach to Customer Service

How can agencies start embedding customer service more to strive for the Golden Standard? The answer lies in an omnichannel approach to customer service.

Right now, government uses a multichannel approach to interact with citizens. Agencies are providing the opportunity for citizens to reach out via multiple communication channels, such as email, a website, social media, or in-person. But having a multichannel approach isn't enough if agencies don't have a central data hub to process information flowing into these various communication channels.

An omnichannel approach, on the other hand, facilitates connectedness at the front and back ends of customer service. Customer data is centralized, so that no matter how many different interactions or "touchpoints" a citizen has with an agency, everyone is aware of the citizen's past interactions, her needs and how best to approach her problem.

"With this kind of seamless customer service, agencies have an opportunity to do some predictive analytics," Herriman said. "They can make pretty good guesses about who's going to contact them next, what they're contacting the agency about and what their resolution is going to be."

To help agencies adopt an omnichannel approach, and elevate to a Golden Standard of customer service, HighPoint offers a Citizen Experience (CX) Maturity Model for government, based on customer service maturity models in the private sector. CX is the holistic perception created by the citizens' every direct and indirect interaction with government. With the maturity model agencies can track where they stand in terms of customer experience maturity. For example, an agency may initially only have a limited understanding of its citizens as customers, or may be more advanced and be ready to integrate its services more.

The HighPoint CX Maturity Model is tailored to the unique types of relationships that exist between citizens and the government that serves them. It focuses specifically on people, process, technology, analytics and reporting to inform what communication channels should be used to address customer needs.

Ultimately, the Golden Standard of customer service, for government, is about delivering citizen services in a personalized and efficient manner. Using the Citizen Experience Maturity Model and an omnichannel approach, your agency can better track its level of customer service delivery and determine what strategies should be implemented to improve. Herriman concluded, "It's about making sure you understand the people you're serving and ensuring you've got the right communication channel opened and optimized just for them."

#2 PAIN POINT

Connecting With the User



Hello? Can you hear me? I'm talking to you! It's not just phone companies that have difficulty connecting with their users. Governments do, too. And few things are more frustrating for a government organization than an inability to connect with the citizens they serve. To better understand their users, many organizations are taking a multichannel approach to reaching out. Gone are the days where notices in grocery stores were the norm. Now many agencies are taking to the web, social media and even interactive forums.

Smithsonian Gets the Right Message Out



When it comes to connecting with your users, the first step is to understand who those users are. Are they young, old, technologically advanced, do they even own a smartphone?

For government, the challenge of effectively reaching out to everyone may seem insurmountable. Fortunately, new digital services like dashboards, social media and interactive chats are allowing governments to take a multi-channel approach to connecting with users.

Lanae Spruce is the Digital Engagement Specialist at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. She recently sat down with GovLoop to talk about how she is able to effectively engage and connect with users. "If you are only using one digital channel to engage users, you are definitely leaving someone out," she said.

When she spoke with GovLoop, Spruce and her team were in the midst of spreading awareness about the grand opening of the new Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture on Sept. 24. They are taking a broad approach in order to engage the most diverse audience possible. "For the past few months, we have been working on marketing strategies across print, television, radio and digital. We've done interviews on '60 Minutes,' we have a targeted Twitter campaign, we sent out images of the

new exhibits on Instagram and we even have a Tumblr where we update blogs on the museum's progress," said Spruce.

One key to making sure their message is resonating with the public is ensuring that the messaging is consistent across all the various channels. "You don't want someone who sees a quick blurb about the museum on Twitter to have a different message than someone who visits our website," Spruce said. To make sure the content is connecting with users uniformly, Spruce works directly with the museum's digital team to build communications strategies from the ground up. "We talk about planning content for the website, how we will launch initiatives, who we are trying to reach and how social media will play a part. That way, we know how each platform will share the story and who we are trying to engage." That cross-departmental communication also goes a long way to ensuring citizens receive the same customer service experience on the various channels.

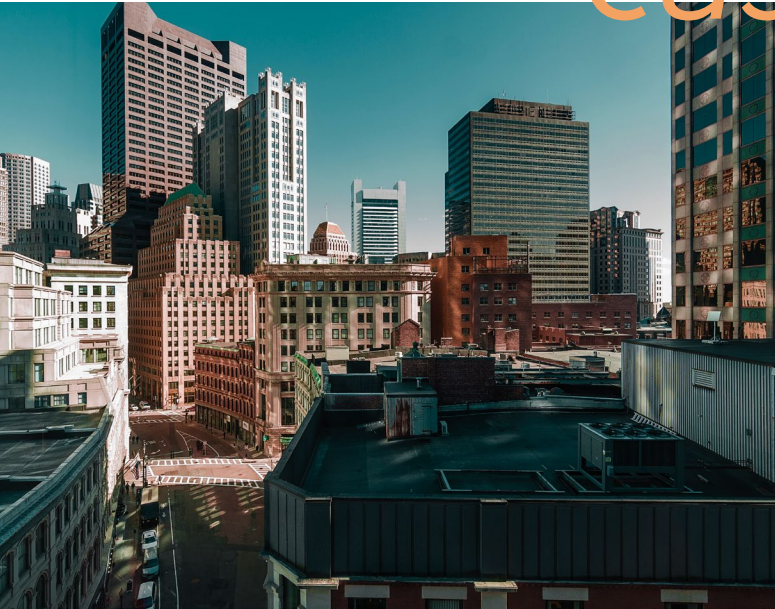
It's important to remember, however, that engaging and connecting with users is not a one-way street. "We want to be responsive when someone reaches out to us," said Spruce. "We have a social media style guide that we follow. That helps our employees engage properly with the public. We have to make sure that we are actively listening to the social conversation and that we're able to change and

adapt to our audience." In order to effectively connect with the public, the museum's digital team uses an internal group chat where they can talk about how to respond to citizens posing questions on Twitter or other social media platforms.

For Spruce, the reason she and her team work so hard to reach out and engage citizens comes back to the mission of the Smithsonian. "We're really trying to offer people a different take on American history," she said. "Our digital outreach strategy allows individual people to see themselves and their own history through our collection of objects. And it's our job to get the word out, answer questions and help make sure that everyone knows that the African American Museum is everyone's history. It's an American story."

"We talk about planning content for the website, how we will launch initiatives, who we are trying to reach and how social media will play a part. That way, we know how each platform will share the story and who we are trying to engage."

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Boston Says Hello to Citizens

It's hard to imagine a more frustrating experience than feeling like you're not being heard, or that your concerns are not being listened to by those in power. Residents often feel that way when confronted with what they see as government bureaucracy. They feel like the government doesn't understand them. They can't connect.

To make sure residents were being heard, the city of Boston implemented a website redesign to make city government interactions more welcoming and user-friendly. In order to take the engagement opportunities a step further, the city now hosts monthly "Chief Chats." These in-person events invite the public to hear from top officials about new changes or programs. This month's chat was focused on the launch of the newly redesigned Boston.gov.

The events are part of an ongoing initiative by the city government to keep communication lines open between city officials and the citizenry. The goal is to get young people engaged in planning Boston's future.



The City of Bryan's Digital Town Halls

A common complaint facing many governments is that citizens don't know where to connect. Should they voice their opinions on Twitter, online or in person? What's the best way to reach out to government?

In the city of Bryan, Texas, the government is giving its citizens the ability to connect regularly via online town halls. "In a day and age when people are tied to other commitments in our community and too busy or unable to actively participate in City Council meetings, our town halls provide a channel so every voice can be heard by the constituents' representatives. I'm looking forward to seeing just how much these chats benefit the city of Bryan and increase engagement by segments of our community that would have previously been unheard," said Kean Register, Bryan's City Manager.

The town halls also allow citizens to vote for policies they like. Bryan has been using the online town halls for more than a year and has seen much higher engagement across all channels because citizens are more aware of available services from the town halls.

tips for success



Focus on your core audience.

Before you can actively and effectively engage the user, you first have to figure out who exactly you are trying to reach. Then, you can make your messaging as targeted and personal as possible. The more targeted the message, the easier it will be to engage the end user.

Provide many opportunities to connect.

Different citizens want to connect in different ways. The key is to make sure that your messaging is as diverse as your audience. Look at sending out messaging through varieties of platforms, Twitter, your website and even in-person locations.

Don't forget: Engagement is a two-way street.

Citizens don't just want to hear from the government. They want a conversation. Governments need to make sure they are actively soliciting feedback.

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Building Experiences, Not Just Technologies

An interview with Jodi Thompson, Business Consultant, Genesys

With so many technologies available for customer support today, it's tempting for an agency or department to select the flashiest, quickest, or easiest-to-install solution, then, build their customer service strategy around that acquisition.

"In the past, technology dictated what an experience would be like," said Jodi Thompson, Business Consultant at Genesys, a customer experience solutions provider. "But today, that should not be the case. You should first decide how you want to interact with your customers."

That ability to interact with citizens using technology is a critical goal for government agencies, not simply to make sure strategy leads procurement decisions but also to ensure citizens get the services they need, through the communication channel that's right for them.

Thompson explained that, as agencies pursue the newest digital services, their legacy communication channels, like call lines, may need to become more sophisticated to meet citizen expectations. What agencies don't want to happen is an uneven customer experience, where access in one channel is better supported than in others.

"The challenge is when someone might always call when they could resolve things online, but they don't have that access," Thompson said. "Agencies need to ensure that citizens can get the same level of service if they call through a telephone – that it's not different and it's not better or worse."

To make sure agencies are selecting the right tools to create a holistic customer experience for their constituents, leaders should begin by examining their customer service goals. Then, they should seek technologies that allow them to meet

those goals across platforms, rather than only in the newest communication channels. That's called creating an omnichannel, rather than single or multichannel, approach to customer experience.

Thompson offered an example of how that strategy was executed in the city of Avondale, Arizona. Confronted with increasing constituent call volumes, the city was struggling to maintain customer service levels. However, the city didn't want to eliminate calling as an option for citizens or neglect that service in favor of other digital portals, as some solutions would have suggested they do. Instead, the city wanted to maintain and improve their calling service with an interactive voice response (IVR) platform solution, even as they explored other channels.

Their ideal service would address ever-growing constituent calling volumes, improve access to family assistance resources, and reduce utility disconnects – without capital investments in hardware, software and staffing.

City officials opted to seek a platform-as-a-service solution to meet its voice and call handling needs. This solution had to be flexible enough to handle a heavy call load and robust enough to deliver on both current and future needs, such as mobile integration and increased analytics.

Avondale leaders selected Genesys cloud-based inbound and outbound IVR solutions to help them build – in less than 90 days – a consolidated IVR platform designed to support a range of services and enable more self-service resolutions.

Now, a Family Assistance inbound IVR helps manage and prioritize constituent call loads in the Neighborhood and Family Services Department. The Utilities Disconnect Notification outbound IVR provides status updates and allows callers to make immediate payments or

set up payment plans that avoid service disconnects. After just a few months using the platform, the city's customer service staff also built an outbound IVR service to provide garbage pick-up reminders that ensure citizens and businesses know when pick-ups will occur around holidays.

Overall, Avondale's efforts increased citizen satisfaction and reduced strain on call centers. Additionally, Thompson pointed out how the efforts increased employee engagement by offering them the tools and information they need to quickly anticipate and serve citizens needs and effectively do their jobs. "Employee engagement really does play a crucial role in customer service," Thompson said.

Finally, to ensure that the IVR line doesn't dissuade other forms of citizen communication with the city, the Genesys platform syncs with other portals to create real-time updates across all touchpoints. That means citizens can access the city's government by whatever means they find most comfortable, and still get the same, reliable information. That's the goal of the omnichannel approach to citizen experience.

"The key is to ensure you aren't creating siloed solutions," Thompson said. "Genesys enables agencies and departments to say how they want to design their experience and then gives them the tools to do it. We will connect everything. We'll leverage your current investments, like your customer relationship management system of record. But, we can be the system of engagement that goes from one touch point to another across all these channels."

A platform that facilitates omnichannel customer service helps both citizens and agencies alike – ensuring the right messages reach the right people, no matter how they choose to engage with government.

#3 PAIN POINT

Cumbersome Processes



There's nothing more confusing than knowing exactly what you need but having no clue how to access it. Cumbersome, complex processes are the plague of bureaucracy and can drastically reduce a citizen's understanding or engagement with government. To simplify services, many organizations are turning to online platforms to relay more information in a clearer, tailored and more accessible manner.

Navigating Citizenship Services at USCIS

"We are public servants providing a service, and I am immensely proud to be a public servant and able to work in this space."



Imagine you're trying to gain citizenship in the United States. You're probably going to find yourself on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website looking for information on how to go about this complex process. Despite this online resource, however, you're also probably struggling with the complex process or legal terms and may even have some significant language barriers.

All of these challenges often seem insurmountable to many potential citizens. Fortunately, there is a govt who is dedicated to improving the website and system, one innovative program at a time.

Mariela Melero is the Associate Director of Customer Service and Public Engagement at USCIS. She recently sat down with GovLoop to talk about the innovations her team has spearheaded in the immigration process.

There are a few types of individuals who seek assistance from USCIS, said Melero. The first is the customer who knows exactly what he or she is looking for. "These individuals just want to know where to find information, so we have a set of tools designed for them that will take them to the USCIS website and the area that they are interested in," she said.

Then, there is a middle group who might know what they are looking for but are not exactly sure how that translates into government offerings. Melero explained that for this group of

individuals, "We built a digital platform called [myUSCIS](#) that is accessible across devices and helps unsure individuals navigate across options that will eventually lead to information about processes."

Lastly, there are individuals who come into the U.S. but are not ready to take on the visa and immigration process. They need more significant help. "For these people, we have multiple access points, including the digital services, a bilingual intelligent virtual assistant, a 1-800 number and appointments at a district office," Melero said.

A lot of these processes are innately complex on the back end and must be simplified for end users. For those users, USCIS created the intelligent virtual assistant [Emma](#).

Oftentimes, those who work for USCIS get caught up in the formal terminology and find it difficult to communicate information that customers can understand. Emma remedies this issue because she is able to understand and effectively respond to individuals coming to her with different levels of knowledge about immigration processes.

Since her debut last December, Emma has had the opportunity to evolve as an avatar in terms of popularity and use. Melero explained that Emma started out internally but now she is used by almost half the people who visit the USCIS website and answers 90 percent of questions correctly. "This is

absolutely remarkable because it takes approximately three years to grow an avatar," Melero said.

Melero and her team are also working on redesigning and improving other immigration processes. "We are creating an electronic filing experience for those seeking permanent residency," she said. They are also improving language skills in human customer service representatives and automated representatives and systems.

Melero discussed how her team is inviting customers who have used their innovative systems to give feedback. "We want to know what we can make better, and the only way we can validate our very best is to invite customers to come and give feedback so we can co-create with them and develop the best experience," she said.

Bringing innovation to the USCIS truly is a group effort. Melero emphasized that she wouldn't have been able to innovate like she has had it not been for her team and the people who use their services. "We are public servants providing a service, and I am immensely proud to be a public servant and able to work in this space," she said.

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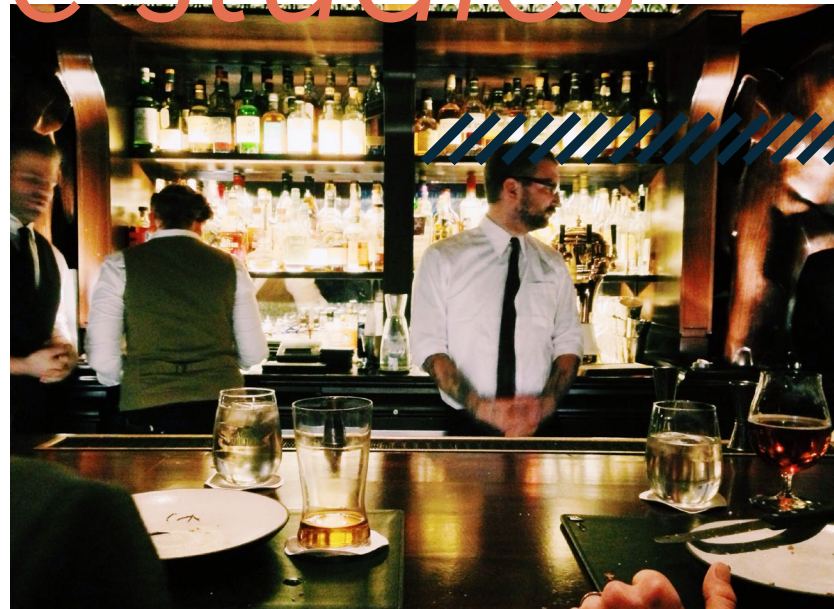


myStafford Citizen Portal

Can you think of a more confusing government process than filing and paying your taxes? For many, determining which categories and deadlines apply to their situations can seem overwhelming. To simplify the tax process for both citizens and local businesses, the government of Stafford County, Virginia, created a [one-stop digital portal](#).

Launched in 2013, myStafford provides online billing and payment services for real estate and personal property taxes, as well as county utilities. More recently, the county expanded the service so that businesses can e-file their monthly fiduciary remittances for meals taxes, transient occupancy taxes, consumption and utility taxes and quarterly fiduciary remittances for short-term rental taxes online. No matter what tax need you might have, myStafford provides an avenue for addressing it.

Now, the county is looking at ways to further expand the portal's offerings to conveniently meet a wider array of citizen needs. "The myStafford Citizen Portal is a unique and evolving solution that has become a defining element of Stafford County eGovernment," [said Laura Rudy](#), Stafford County Treasurer.



Tennessee Licensing System

The Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) processes more than 130,000 paper-based permit applications and renewals each year. That number is about to expand with a recent executive action allowing stores to carry wine and similar bills permitting beer sales in city ballparks and parks. That means TABC will have multiple new applicants, unfamiliar with liquor licensing and training procedures.

To provide these new users with relevant information, as well as a digital access point to TABC's services, the commission is creating a single portal for all [regulatory licensing and permitting issues](#). According to TABC, the portal will allow system registration, completing a new application, renewal of existing licenses and permits and electronic submission of required documentation with signatures and payments.

Most importantly, the system will provide automatic data-entry checks to make sure new users are entering all required information correctly before requests are processed. That way, users can confidently and independently begin interacting with TABC services.

tips for success



Consolidate access points.

Whether you're offering five services or 50, don't leave your user guessing how to start each process. Provide a single portal or information source from which users can access a variety of different but related services.

Provide real-time, automated support.

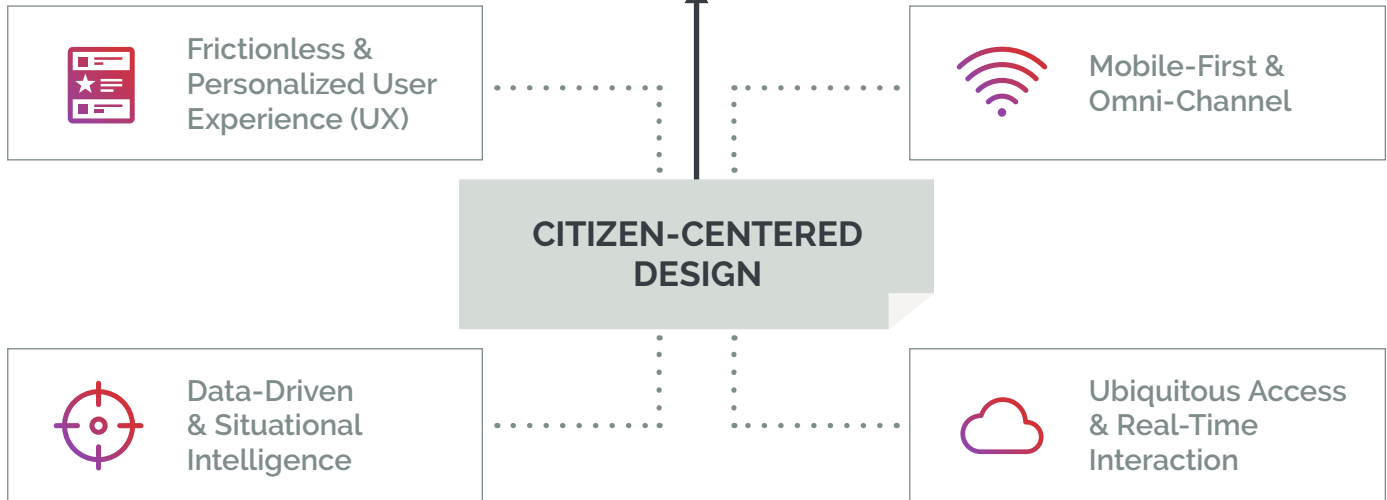
Rather than waiting for your citizen users to finish a procedure or form to quality-check their data, establish checks throughout a complex process. Automated information inspection is a great way to offer step-by-step assistance to a citizen, without dedicating additional staff time to the service.

Consider different knowledge levels.

No matter what service you're providing, you'll want to make it accessible to different users with difference levels of technical and service-specific know-how. Tailor your messaging and processes to various levels of understanding.



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Building Sustainable Engagement at Your Agency

An interview with Varun Dogra, Chief Technology Officer, DMI

As the private sector continues to modernize, the public sector must work to keep up with citizen expectations surrounding IT service delivery. Despite recent innovations, government agencies often find it challenging to match private sector technology trends and effectively engage their end users. In order to address this issue and foster stronger interactions with their constituencies, agencies should consider a digital multi-channel approach to their processes.

To better understand how agencies can adopt multichannel methods, or the ability to access the same information across multiple devices and platforms, GovLoop spoke with Varun Dogra, Chief Technology Officer at DMI, an end-to-end mobility company that provides IT, infrastructure, cybersecurity, big data, mobility and cloud services to all fifteen U.S. federal departments.

Agencies face many of the same customer service hurdles as the private sector. "Agencies are driven by their mission and there is constant pressure to deliver better services at a lower cost," Dogra explained. It is critical that agencies are aware of what their end users want and that they are getting the right experiences. And for most government organizations, they have to be aware that their technology and approach isn't just serving citizens – it's serving their internal employees, too.

These two prongs of customer service each come with their own unique challenges. "If you don't give government employees the right tools they can't be effective in supporting citizens," said Dogra. "With citizens, agencies have to be able to provide technology solutions that users adopt and easily use." The key is to give each user the right information at the right time and in the most appropriate channel, ultimately empowering the end user.

Another way to increase both employee engagement and enhance the citizen experience is to actually put yourself in your employees' and citizens' shoes during design and development phases. This process is known as design thinking.

Design thinking works to match agencies' needs with available technology to design new services and products in a meaningful way. The approach is holistic and agile, with an emphasis on user as well as mission needs. By tackling complex problems with design thinking, agency leaders are able to implement products and approaches that allow for more efficient internal operations. This allows agency employees to offer better services to their constituency, promoting enhanced engagement.

For example, the Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) ensures mine safety by performing regular inspections in the field. Traditionally, MSHA employees would record information from the mines on paper, and later transfer it to a computer. By leveraging an agile design thinking approach, MSHA worked with DMI to build a mobile inspection solution to streamline and automate the inspection process.

The methodology involved multiple iterations based on observations and findings from inspector actions. As a result, a secure mobile inspection platform was designed based on the insights drawn from each step. Inspectors will now be able to seamlessly enter information or record citations directly into their mobile application anywhere they can carry their devices, whether online or offline, and sync the data once connectivity is reestablished.

"The key is to first understand user behavior and then apply innovation to create a frictionless experience for

citizens and employees across channels," Dogra explained. This tool will dramatically reduce manual labor, improve the quality and accuracy of information and speed up the on-site inspection process. "Giving the agency's employees mobile solutions makes their jobs easier and allows them to spend more time doing other mission-critical work" said Dogra.

DMI works with government clients to actually implement and overcome these obstacles. "We provide digital strategies and leverage our existing off-the-shelf mobile platforms to help agencies support their mission objectives through technology and innovation," Dogra explained. DMI's solutions are individualized to each agency and aim to mold design thinking methodologies to each organization's needs. Another key initiative that DMI recommends is the outsourcing of mobile device life-cycle management. By shifting this complex task to experts in the field, it allows agencies to focus on their missions and better serve citizens and employees. For example, the U.S. Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) utilizes this service to assess, deliver, operate and support turnkey end-to-end Managed Mobility Services (MMS).

In the future of the public sector, keeping up with emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence through deep learning, big data analytics and crowd sourcing, will be critical to continually fostering optimal engagement. "We have to constantly evolve our perception of what the end user wants and be able to employ technologies that meet those needs," said Dogra. With the right methodologies, processes and technologies, the public sector will be able to efficiently and effectively engage their constituents.

#4 PAIN POINT

Outdated Technology



It can cost an agency between \$2 and \$15 to answer a phone call, and between \$1 and \$10 just to answer an email. That's why it's important for agencies to avoid getting stuck in the same modes of thinking with the same technologies. Outdated technology can be one of the biggest hindrances in keeping organizations from meeting customers and internal employees on their level. Self-service and virtual interactions can cost fractions of a cent and incorporate personalized experiences for users, far improving the overall customer service experience.

Using Technology at the Bureau of Consular Affairs to Protect Travelers



It's one thing when our bad connection or outdated device fails us and interrupts that funny gif we wanted to send to a friend. It's another thing, however, when technology fails and potentially impacts the safety of Americans at home and overseas.

That's why government agencies, like the U.S. Department of State, have a responsibility to meet citizens where they are, both on a physical and virtual level. The government can no longer rely on paper manuals or static websites to get important information across. In an interview with GovLoop, Kaitlin Turck, Global Digital Engagement Advisor at the Bureau of Consular Affairs at State, discussed the importance of high-quality technology and virtual service to her job and to government.

"We have to understand that when people don't find or read the information we're providing, it's not the people's fault for not coming to us the 'right way,'" Turck said. "It's actually our responsibility to communicate with them in a way that they want to receive information. We have to adapt to changing communication expectations."

As part of her work, Turck communicates to U.S. citizens before and during overseas travel via social media. She also works to provide high-quality virtual information and customer service to U.S. citizens overseas during crises such as civil unrest, natural disasters and other situations that impact their safety and access to consular services.

For example, many travelled to Europe for Germany's famous Oktoberfest. If you check the [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts of the bureau right now, you can see past conversations between travelers and the State Department regarding recommendations for safe travel in Europe amid continuing threats of terrorist actions and violence against U.S. citizens.

"We make sure to share important travel safety information with U.S. citizens going and living overseas, along with other travel tips like required documentation," Turck said. "Anything that involves travel or an application process is where people will have a lot of questions, and it's important that our information is accessible. Our customers want to be able to talk to us and we need to be readily available to address their questions."

But having updated websites, social media accounts and high-quality virtual services is not just important to people's safety for traveling, it's also helpful for navigating those time-consuming application processes for visas and passports. Turck pointed out that people often turn to social media sites like Twitter and Facebook to get answers to their passport and visa questions. And people tend to have a lot of questions when it comes to making sure their travel documents are in order.

If you check the [Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), you can find the latest information on making sure

your passport picture meets all the requirements, the latest Zika virus travel information and how to apply for passports and visas to avoid delays. Imagine how frustrating it would be if such websites weren't updated regularly and you had to base your passport knowledge off old information. It would lead to redundant processes and more frustration with government.

"If used correctly, social media becomes a channel for a real conversation," Turck said. "You don't see the person you're talking to, but because of the immediacy of the answer, it can make the government seem more accessible."

She stressed the importance of government being accessible through virtual services and social media because some Americans feel disconnected from the government. "But when you have someone traveling to London, for example, and have travel questions, we can answer it, and it really makes people feel that we're there and concerned for American citizens. We pride ourselves on providing the best customer service, and social media makes that more visible."

Ultimately, Turck recommended that with customer service and technology, each agency should consider its audience first. "Whether a person is surfing for information from your website or social media platforms, they're your customer base, and you should think about what they expect in terms of technology and interaction."

case studies



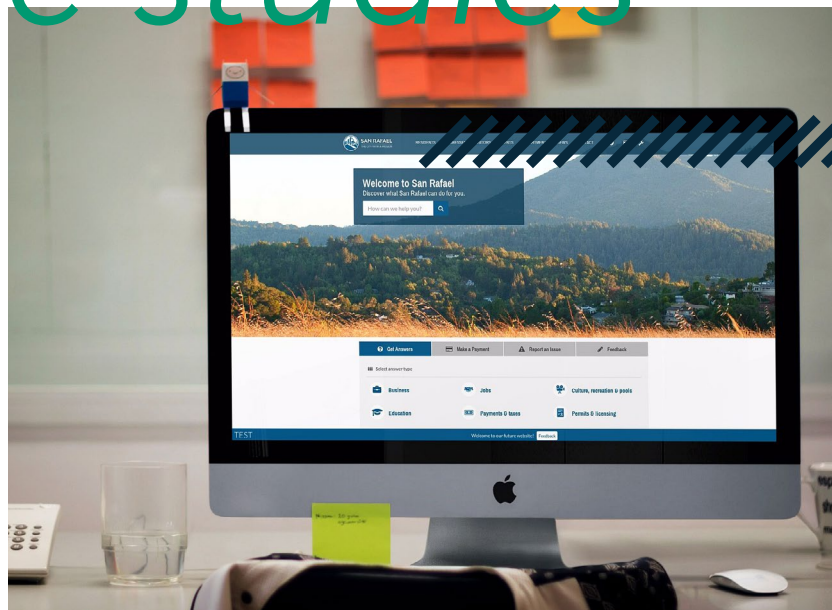
18F/GSA Leads the Way for Chatbots

The future of online services is chatbots - computer programs that can hold text- or voice-based conversations, query information and even complete transactions. With these little virtual helpers, agencies could always have a representative available to answer questions, provide support and take payments. They can even improve internal onboarding processes.

Take the bot Mrs. Landingham, for example, from 18F of the General Services Administration (GSA). This bot works with the messaging app Slack and is named after Dolores Landingham, the president's longtime secretary on the hit television series "The West Wing." She's designed to send messages and reminders to new hires with information about forms, discussions and the ever-present government jargon.

But Mrs. Landingham is just an example of an internal chatbot in the public sector. Imagine if chatbots could be used to assist citizens with government services. With 24/7 availability, they could help with scheduling tours or requesting services, making recommendations and even coordinating meetings with government officials.

Government has a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of these efficient online representatives to better connect with citizens and internal employees alike.



San Rafael's Iterative Website

San Rafael, Calif., is hoping to redesign its web presence with some help from the public – and improve city services in the process. By launching a beta version of the overhauled web portal before rolling out a full version, the city aims to develop a new customer relationship management software on the back end.

"I really saw the website as being critical to the rest of our digital services," Rebecca Woodbury, Senior Management Analyst for the city and leader of its digital overhaul, said. "If we don't have a place for people to find them, why bother having them at all?"

Woodbury felt the old website resulted in "a lot more phone calls and a lot of time getting information to individual people," frustrating city workers and residents. When coupled with the fact that employees were generally corresponding with constituents via email or using outdated tools like an online comment form "that looks like it was designed in 1997," Woodbury saw plenty of room for change on the front and back ends.

The hope is that this iterative process proves as rewarding for San Rafael as similar efforts did for major cities like Boston and New York City. With the new website, the city hopes to get positive feedback from the community on a seamless, easy-to-use website that upholds the highest customer service standards.

tips for success



Forge partnerships.

Private-sector entities can help government harness modern technology, as well as other resources too costly for government. Partner with other organizations in your community to share costs while providing better web and technology services to your citizens.

Digitize where possible.

Whether it's a chatbot or a simple website, virtual services can significantly expedite your processes and help your agency serve more people in a timely manner. It helps take the onus off of in-person representatives while delivering better services.

Keep up with the times.

If you notice other agencies, states or municipalities making updates to their web services or technologies, then consider updating yours as well. Don't subject your citizens to poor and outdated technologies simply because your agency or department may be the monopoly for a particular government service.



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Learn more: govdelivery.com



Fostering Citizen Engagement Through Text Messaging Campaigns

An interview with Alex Yule, Product Specialist, GovDelivery

A lot of government employees rely on high levels of citizen engagement and feedback in order to effectively do their job and improve services. This proves difficult, however, when citizens are not responding to traditional channels of engagement. As we move further into the 21st century, mobile engagement has been particularly effective, but with so many channels available, agencies have struggled to develop best practices and standard processes. One tool that is proving popular, however, is text messaging campaigns that reach a broader audience.

To better understand how agencies can optimize texting capabilities, GovLoop spoke with Alex Yule, Product Specialist at GovDelivery, a platform that offers end-to-end digital communications solutions for government.

Agency programs mainly have three phases that lead to success. First, agencies must disseminate information about the program to their target audience and establish a way people can enroll in the program. Second, there has to be a way for continued engagement with the program. Third, agencies have to develop a way to measure outcomes of the program.

Despite this clear path to successful programs, agencies often struggle engaging their target audiences in their programs. Yule explained that historically, many agencies utilized postal mail or email to engage their audiences, but this was problematic because the audiences they were trying to reach were not using these channels.

In order to address this issue, GovDelivery introduced text messaging as an engagement channel. "Text messaging is the only technology that is really accessible to most people," Yule said. "If you are trying to provide

a government service and you are not doing it through text, you are leaving out a huge chunk of people."

As a result, text messaging is one of the most effective ways to successfully implement agency programs. GovDelivery works with communications departments inside agencies in order to open up communications to a broader audience, gather public feedback and promote civic engagement. Additionally, GovDelivery's interactive text messaging is supported in six languages, enabling agencies to reach diverse audiences. These text campaigns allow communications departments to meet these goals in a more efficient and effective manner.

The effectiveness of text messaging campaigns can be seen in Philadelphia's Arise program. The program aims to help previously incarcerated individuals reintegrate into society. In this circumstance, program staff needed a more efficient way to coordinate services between caseworker and client. Yule explained that in order to do this, the agency sent out a weekly text survey to see how people were doing and based on the replies, caseworkers could more efficiently delegate their time.

Additionally, a recent construction project in San Francisco highlights the effectiveness of text messaging while incorporating a multi-channel approach into the overall campaign. "The initial campaign consisted of signs posted along the project corridor, prompting individuals to text a number for more information. From there, the text message initiates an interactive survey that offers the person the ability to receive project updates via text message or email in six different languages," Yule said. The flexibility between channels allows the campaign to proceed in a way that best fits the user, promoting satisfaction and further engagement.

Crucial to the effectiveness of text messaging campaigns is ensuring citizen security. "We handle a lot of sensitive data, so when data reaches us, we lock it up and keep it secure," Yule said. On the other hand, if an agency sends a text message to someone, the message is only as secure as that person's phone. In order to keep sensitive data secure once it reaches the end user, campaigns can take a more discrete approach. Yule explained that instead of text messaging sensitive medical test results, a campaign would send a text message saying the individual's test results are in and to please call to receive them.

"People text their friends and families, so they should also be able to text with agencies that are providing potentially lifesaving benefits," Yule said. However, agencies must respect the sanctity of text messaging and only use the channel to send pertinent information. "We work very closely with our government clients to make sure they understand that with the power of text comes a great responsibility," Yule said.

Respecting the power of text messaging campaigns will only become more important moving forward as more and more state and local agencies take advantage of text messaging. "We are really working on increasing the scale of operations and being able to integrate other GovDelivery tools to solve agency problems," Yule said. Often, state and local government organizations are understaffed and lack resources, so they have to turn to innovative solutions to get their jobs done. "The problems agency employees are facing are hard to solve, but at GovDelivery we think we can make a difference with our technology and enable government employees to do their jobs better, more efficiently, and more effectively," Yule said.

#5 PAIN POINT


Lack of Accountability



What's more infuriating than having a bad experience? Having no one to take responsibility for the problem. When agencies aren't accountable to the citizens they serve, serious consequences, like poor perception or distrust of government, arise. To show that government really does care about its citizens, agencies are trying to implement better online and open data platforms to give users more access to government and easy communication portals for any unhappy customer.

The Magic of Disney in Ottawa County

"Our core belief is we have a high-quality county because we have high-quality people living in the county. They deserve nothing but the very best as far as customer service goes."



What does the imaginative Walt Disney have in common with government? A lot more than you think.

In an interview with GovLoop, Alan Vanderberg, Ottawa County, Michigan Administrator, shared how he and his team drew inspiration from Disney and its Golden Rule to deliver better customer service and be more accountable to their citizens.

"In government, we're accountable on a number of different levels," Vanderberg said. "There are a lot of legal standards we have to adhere to, and we're also held to a high standard of scrutiny as a public agency on how we spend money. We're expected to provide high-quality services in the most efficient manner."

With the effects of the Great Recession winding down in 2012, Vanderberg and his team thought about how best to take Ottawa County's 33 different departments, agencies, offices and courts to the next level.

"Our core belief is we have a high-quality county because we have high-quality people living in the county," Vanderberg said. "They deserve nothing but the very best as far as customer service goes."

So Vanderberg and his team first decided to create a common understanding and expectation of what customer service should mean. As part of employee training, they applied the "4 Cs" initiative – inspired by the book "The Disney Way," which discusses

management and customer service secrets and best practices in Disney.

The 4Cs are communication, customer service, creativity and cultural intelligence.

Vanderberg wondered what it would be like to have Disney experts help him and his team in their customer service efforts. To his luck, Bill Capodagli and Lynn Jackson, authors of "The Disney Way," actually happened to live in Ottawa County. Capodagli worked with leaders representing the 33 areas of the county to develop consensus on a customer service vision, story and codes of conduct.

Capodagli worked with county leaders to develop a two-and-a-half-day training program that more than 900 employees completed over a year and half. "In training over 900 people, we used the foundations of Disney customer service like Disney storyboarding, which allows people to anonymously get their ideas out quickly and ranked as far as what needs to be improved," Vanderberg said.

He found this tool especially helpful, since many in government surprisingly feel they need permission to deliver good customer service. For example, everyone thinks receiving a speeding ticket has to be a miserable experience. But more than 15 deputies who had given tickets in the county received nominations from private citizens for the Quarterly Outstanding Customer Service Award. Even such a negative situation can be turned into a positive customer service experience.

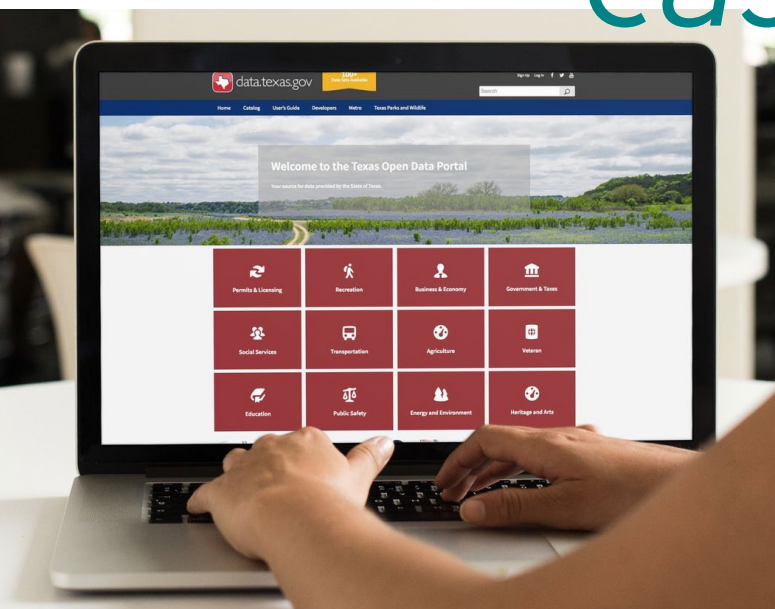
A customer service team was created to help keep training concepts alive and to be the catalyst for continuing customer service improvements.

The customer service team implemented the Quarterly Outstanding Customer Service Awards Program, where citizens, businesses or even other employees can nominate county employees, recognizing outstanding customer service. This motivates everyone to deliver better services. The response has been overwhelming, with dozens of nominations coming from citizens and businesses for employees from a wide range of county service provision areas.

Vanderberg and his team have adopted a philosophy similar to Disney's "touchpoints," where every interaction with another human being during work hours represents an opportunity to deliver outstanding customer service. He stressed that anyone can be having a bad or stressful day, and one big part of the Disney way is the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It's been a defining strategy for Ottawa County, and it's making a huge difference in the positive response from private citizens.

Vanderberg concluded, "It is amazing that while we get immersed in complex management and governmental systems, the most powerful customer service approach is the simplest: Treat others the way you would like you or your family to be treated."

case studies



Texas' Transparency With Open Data Portal

Texas recently unveiled a series of updates to its open data portal, with a focus on making the most commonly requested information in the state more readily available.

The state's Department of Information Resources redesigned the site to make it more user-friendly. It also made a series of changes to how state agencies manage their contributions to the portal to make popular data more accessible.

By doing so, data like public records and laws are easier for citizens to access, making the state's government more transparent and more accountable to its people.

"In addition to providing data to the general public for purposes such as licensees, businesses or citizens seeking services, [the open data portal] reduces the workload on agency staff to respond to open records requests as well as internal demands for our data," the IT director with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation said.

That department has worked to ensure that more than 100 datasets housed on the portal include the information people requested the most. Now, users can be directed straight to the information they asked about.



Social Media in South Carolina

When people go online to vent about government, they probably don't expect a response. But South Carolina wants to change that. The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) hired the Social Analytics Institute (SAI) at Clemson University to determine users' opinions about its Medicaid services online so the agency could benchmark its performance and improve accountability.

The SAI scanned websites like Twitter, Facebook and blogs to better inform DHHS's Medicaid customer service. The agency received data reports from SAI along with qualitative information, such as feedback like "South Carolina Medicaid seriously sucks!"

While seeing negative comments like that was one of the difficult parts of the project, John Supra, CIO of the DHHS, said "that type of candor was also valuable because it's generally not found elsewhere."

Using existing social media structures to gather data is helpful for better customer service delivery because the infrastructure is already there and people are already using it. To make sure the state was delivering better services and being more accountable to citizens, the department took the first critical step: It listened.

tips for success



Listen to your customers.

Negative or positive, be ready to receive and respond to your users' feedback. There's nothing more frustrating than voicing a complaint to government and feeling like no one cares. Using social media or data analytics for communities are useful ways to tune in to what your citizens are saying about your services.

Remember the Golden Rule.

We all have stress in our lives; we all have good days and bad. That's why it's important to remember how you'd like to be treated and be sure to treat your customers accordingly. Even if you're providing a potentially negative experience, like giving a ticket, being kind and understanding goes a long way.

Show where the money is being spent.

Whether through open data, a customer service awards program or other communications channels, invest in creative ways to show your citizens how you're improving services. Find ways to broadcast how much your agency is spending or saving with new customer service initiatives.

PAIN POINT

Failure to Follow Up



You've done everything right. Your service is beautifully designed and easy to use. You completed your citizen's request in record time and met his exact request. But no one knows about it, including the citizen in need. That's a failure to follow up, and it's the final hurdle to achieving true customer service. While it might seem like your job is done when a request is fulfilled, it's actually just as important to communicate what you have or haven't done for the citizens you serve.

Reaching a Wider Audience at ODNI



"It's a relatively new idea to think of an average citizen as our customer. The customer that we think of more naturally, more reflexively, is the warfighter, the diplomat, the legislator or the president."

We often consider the citizen to be the primary user of government services. In an interview with GovLoop, Michael Thomas, Chief of Strategic Communications for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), explained that's not always the case.

"It's a relatively new idea to think of an average citizen as our customer," said Thomas. "The customer that we think of more naturally, more reflexively, is the warfighter, the diplomat, the legislator or the president."

ODNI is the lead agency responsible for sharing intelligence information across the federal government. To reach a variety of federal users, ODNI is striving to have a workforce composed of about 40 percent ODNI staff, while the rest are pulled from the community, as part of a joint duty program or detail.

"We have to consider that people are in different career stages and that our workforce is largely made up of other agencies that are much more longstanding than ODNI and who bring a heavy cultural load with them," said Thomas.

That diversity also brings technological challenges in communication and follow-up. "Every agency cites things like IT limitations to what consumer tools people are used to engaging with," he said. "We have this added level of classification and security."

So how does ODNI ensure it gives every employee the necessary information they need to monitor and respond to critical intelligence?

Thomas said they match the diversity of their audience with a diversity of tactics and tools, like getting information out to people from an infrastructure perspective. That includes using multiple platforms and technologies, to make sure the message can reach the appropriate customer on their network and device.

The next step is to find narrators. "We had a full-court press of information published on the internal site. On the external site, we published workforce messaging as well. We also scheduled live events in the town hall system, where people could come and ask questions," Thomas said.

Once a message is released, ODNI uses the same tactics to determine the success of its communication. Thomas described a variety of feedback mechanisms across platforms, including user surveys and in-person feedback, which test user engagement and response to messages. "And I think we have room to grow as we evolve the tools that are available to us in the corporate communications environment to use analytics more and more effectively," he said.

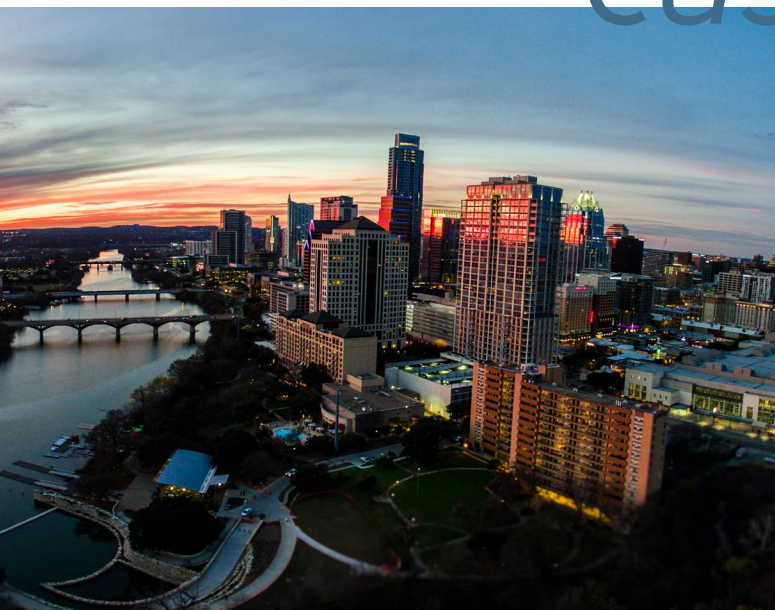
Finally, as Thomas' team determines which communication tactics are working, they focus on making those strategies replicable across other

agencies. He cited the standard operating procedures for social media that ODNI created as one example of that effort. "Not only did it allow us to quickly roll out new platforms, but it also enabled other agencies like CIA and NSA to adopt tools, with at least a framework that they know was blessed at the ODNI," Thomas said.

In the last few years, these tactics have extended into public outreach campaigns too. In 2012, ODNI helped the national intelligence community launch its first participatory campaign via social media, called [Global Trends](#). "They wanted to move into this collaborative space, which is fairly unprecedented for the intelligence community," Thomas said. "So we developed a campaign that would include live events like South by Southwest, other sessions attended by the principal authors of the document, with this online location where anyone could read these draft materials and provide comments."

As ODNI and the broader intelligence community embrace the citizen as a customer, their lessons from engaging with a diverse array of federal employees will be immeasurably beneficial. By using a wide variety of outreach platforms and messages and then testing their assumptions with live user feedback, Thomas is confident they'll find success.

case studies



The City of Austin on Reddit

Austin, Texas, has had a presence on the social media site Reddit for more than two years now. The city's sub-Reddit started as a place for the government to post announcements. Today, it's a robust online community where citizens engage directly with city personnel.

One of the greatest attributes of the site is its ability to let government employees immediately and personally respond to citizen questions, said James Williams of the city's public information office. In an interview, he recounted how one citizen asked if he could drink legally in a park. Williams didn't know the answer but was able to walk over to the parks department, get the answer from a colleague and immediately post it on Reddit. Within minutes, a citizen had an answer to his question.

That's just one example of how the city is using the website to follow up with individuals. Users can also discuss police cases with the relevant authorities, get advice on locations to live within the city and even help connect lost animals to their owners or local shelters.



eRegulations Demoed Live at 18F

One reason many government organizations fail to follow up on feedback is that it can be seen as an impediment to progress. The eRegulations Notice & Comment team at 18F faced that dilemma as it attempted to build out a new feature set for its platform.

"One of the challenges we wrestled with was how to share our work out frequently and openly with the dozens of interested parties, while not making that a blocker in focusing on our work of doing many demos for the many different parties interested in and informing our work," one team member wrote.

To eliminate the tradeoff between communication and efficiency, the team explored several options to make feedback concurrent with development of the minimum viable product (MVP) of the platform. They began live-streaming demos of their products on YouTube – a streaming service that is widely available in government agencies. Additionally, the team used phone conferencing lines to allow live feedback from any participating stakeholders.

On the fly, developers could hear what was and wasn't working in their MVP. The team could verbally respond to users' comments. Additionally, those comments were directly incorporated into the product, and then presented to the same stakeholders during the next spring demo.

tips for success



Consider a wide range of potential customers.

For many agencies, the citizen is only one of many customers. Contractors, employees and other agencies might also rely on your government services. As you release information on your projects, make sure it's tailored to each audience, keeping in mind the level of detail, previous knowledge and clearance that each group requires.

Use a variety of channels.

Solicit feedback via traditional methods like surveys and user groups, but don't forget about other communication channels. Social media is a great way to monitor and respond to citizen sentiments.

Don't rely on paid services alone.

There are multiple applications and services that can help you connect with users for a fee. In addition to tools like SeeClickFix, however, there are a wide variety of free platforms like Reddit that can allow you to track and address issues at little to no cost. If you're worried about fitting customer service into your budget, consider such free options.

conclusion

We all know what it feels like to be the recipient of poor customer service, but achieving success – especially in a government setting – is not always a straightforward task. As the case studies and interviews in this guide highlight, customer service is about much more than pretty websites and friendly government workers. Common pitfalls like inconsistent messaging, outdated technologies and a lack of accountability can do just as much to damage your agency's reputation and citizen engagement as a faulty web service.

Luckily, there are agencies at the local, state and federal levels that have learned how to overcome these common challenges to deliver excellent customer services. These agencies exemplify how public service requires listening to the needs of citizens, making and testing assumptions, providing your services on a variety of platforms and communicating your progress to all relevant stakeholders.



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