Engaging the Connected Citizen
A digital practices checklist for government

What Today's Connected Citizens Expect from Government

Advances in technology are raising citizens' expectations for how quickly they can connect with their government and receive vital services. In response, governments are turning to tools like social media, mobile apps and new website capabilities to deliver information and services and to encourage citizen engagement.

However, in spite of the buzz around digital tools, citizens are still more concerned about less tantalizing issues, such as whether potholes are being fixed quickly and how to get the information they need for business or personal interests.

So, how can a government improve citizen access and participation online while not being distracted from the fundamentals of information and service delivery? The answer is balance. Governments need to balance information dissemination and citizen interaction through new social media tools with improving websites and incorporating advanced content management technology. This allows governments to deliver the improved information access and online services that naturally lead to increased citizen satisfaction and participation.

Using Digital Tools to Engage Citizens

Every year seems to bring another "must have" online tool for delivering information to and interacting with the public. You know that your government needs to keep up, but how do you decide which digital tools really deserve your time and effort? Are social media tools such as Facebook and YouTube the be-all and end-all of connecting with citizens? Will mobile apps be worth the investment? And will there be a place for your website in a world where people seem to expect information instantly, in the shortest form possible?

Understanding the role and most effective use of these different tools in citizen engagement is helpful for guiding your choices.

Social Media

Online social media tools offer ways to distribute public information quickly and engage citizens who might not be reached through other means. They also offer the appeal of more image- and video-based communication, and the ability to indirectly increase reach through likes and other forms of sharing. Examples of social media activities conducted by governments include posting community improvement ideas and inviting citizen comments, sending current public safety alerts, posting "Government 101" videos, and organizing in-person or online discussion events.

Mobile Apps

Today when citizens call a government office, they're most likely doing it from a smartphone. That is, if they're not sending an email or using a mobile app on that smartphone or on a tablet.

Mobile apps are effective for citizens to perform basic tasks such as receiving information, requesting service, and reporting outages or needed repairs. However, governments also use mobile apps for more complex services such as providing real-time traffic information, location-based information such as crime data or park maps, and even online voter registration.

Of course, most governments don't want to be in the business of developing mobile apps, and the do-it-yourself approach isn't the only feasible option to create an app that fits your organization. Consider joining other local jurisdictions to create shared apps or to share the cost of services for customized app development.

Online Presence

A public organization's website is still the core platform for delivering information and services to citizens. Web-based documents and services also underpin many social media campaigns.

These roles are greatly enhanced by an enterprise content management (ECM) system. As an enabling technology, an ECM system provides automated access, management and delivery of online information and services. The following table shows examples of online information access and services that are possible when an advanced ECM system is combined with a government's online presence.

Transparency	Public Records	Online Services
» Legislative agendas, meeting minutes and video/audio recordings	» Access to search, view and download documents	» Apply for human services benefits
» Contracts and purchasing information	» Submit formal records requests using electronic forms	» Report a condition, outage or violation
» News and event notifications	» Downloadable copies of local laws, ordinances and policies	» Submit development plans for review and approval
» Budget proposals and financial reports		» Apply for permits and licenses
» FAQs, how-to guides and "how government works" tutorials		» Appeal property valuations
» Location and map-based information		» Search for land records, parcels and tax bills
		» Offer an e-business portal for vendors to obtain RFPs, submit bids, download orders, submit invoices and view payment status

Digital Practices Checklist: What are you doing with digital tools to encourage citizen engagement? The following checklist can help assess what you're doing now and discover new ideas for next steps.

PLANNING FOR ALL DIGITAL TOOLS
☐ Identify your purpose and objectives
☐ Determine how information distribution can be integrated and automated for each tool
☐ Hire a digital practices coordinator to manage online activities and associated policies
☐ Check the requirements of laws and regulations covering open meetings, information disclosure, personal privacy and records retention
☐ Modify processes for how information is developed, approved and distributed through digital channels

SOCIAL MEDIA
☐ Run citizen surveys to identify preferences for social media tools; establish a presence
☐ Define responsibilities and guidelines for responding to citizen comments and inquiries
☐ Identify how social media can support routine and crisis communications
☐ Create a policy and training for employees

MOBILE APPS
☐ Identify services fit for mobile app delivery
☐ Research alternatives for app development

WEB SERVICES/ONLINE PRESENCE
☐ Inventory frequently requested documents
☐ Research jurisdiction requirements for public records and/or transparency or use best practices from policy groups
☐ Identify confidential or sensitive information in documents that may need to be redacted
☐ Identify the types of documents and records that can be posted online
☐ Assess needed website improvements by reviewing analytics and transactions of data, as well as feedback from internal and external users
☐ Determine where documents will be stored and in what formats
☐ Assess current content management systems and processes for the improvements needed to deliver consistent access to accurate information and services through Web portals, social media and mobile apps
☐ Develop a mobile version of your website — even if you also offer mobile apps
☐ Create a Web portal for citizen access to documents and 311 services
☐ Create e-procurement and other business portals

Resources for Best Practices and Next Steps

- Center for Digital Government, "Digital Cities and Digital Counties Survey Report: Best Practice Guide," http://forms.erepublic.com/dc-paper-step1-default?r=dc-paper-step2-default&contentID=200302311
- Center for Digital Government Special Report, "Citizen & Business Engagement," www.govtech.com/pcio/special_reports/2012-Q4-Special-Report-Citizen--Business-Engagement.html
- *Government Technology's* GovGirl blog contains useful, entertaining videos and tips on how local governments can make the most of social media: www.govtech.com/govgirl/

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