

Electronic Government Front-Office

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Front-Office

Definition [Front Office]

Front-office refers to the government as its constituents see it, meaning the information and service providers, and the interaction between government and both citizens and businesses.

Front-office implementation of e-government involves two issues:

- 1) on-line services
- 2) citizen engagement

On-Line Services Model

Many models for on-line service delivery.

None accepted as “standard”.

A four-stage model by the Australian National Audit Office:

- 1) Information
- 2) Interactive Information
- 3) Transactions
- 4) Data Sharing

Stage 1: Information

A website publishing information about service(s).

Information is static.

Challenges for implementing agencies:

- 1) Digitise the available information and make it accessible on-line.
- 2) No process re-engineering needed.

Stage 2: Interactive Information

Stage 1 + **users' ability to access agencies' databases:**

- 1) browsing, exploring and interacting with data
- 2) performing electronic searches and calculations based on the user's criteria

Challenges for implementing agencies:

- 1) how will citizens use the information?
- 2) what are the rules for making certain information public?
- 3) what is the target audience for specific information?
- 4) how to make information easier to find?
- 5) what tools can be used to enrich user's experience?

Stage 3: Transactions

Stages 1 and 2 + users' ability to enter secure information and engage in transactions with the agency.

Requires real-time responsiveness by government agencies to the service demands by citizens and businesses.

Challenges for the implementing agencies:

- 1) establish online service standards
- 2) ensure security and privacy protection
- 3) prepare back-office processes for on-line delivery
- 4) rethink relations with agencies for seamless service delivery

Stage 4: Data Sharing

Stages 1, 2 and 3 + agencies' ability to share with other agencies personal information, when approved by law and with the users consent.

Data-sharing has many benefits:

- 1) simplify procedures
- 2) create savings in administrations
- 3) reduce reporting burden for citizens and businesses

However:

- 1) sharing of data among agencies must be limited because of privacy protection legislation
- 2) all data-matching must be legally approved or explicitly permitted to prevent unauthorised/illegal combination of data

Service Quality

Successful services are built on an **understanding of the user needs**.

There is a growing empirical evidence on what works:

- 1) Effective services need not be complex.
- 2) Simple information services may meet the user needs.
- 3) Moving to transaction services may not necessarily add value.
- 4) **Seamless services** are more effective than delivering many separate services to the same user group.
- 5) Services should be offered through **various delivery channels**, with on-line delivery being just one of the options.

Example: Service Quality

Example [Evaluation of Services in Denmark]

The project “Top of the Web” carries out an annual evaluation of all public sector websites and collect users' opinions.

Evaluation criteria:

- 1) user-friendliness – users should find the website easy to use regardless of their level of expertise
- 2) practical value – users should benefit from the information, information is up to date and self-service options are provided
- 3) openness – users should understand who takes decisions and how they can influence a decision-making process
- 4) interactivity – users can ask questions and receive answers electronically

Public assessment of websites inspire agencies to improve the quality of their services; few agencies want to rank at the bottom of the list.

Exercise: Service Maturity

Exercise [Service Maturity]

List the main online services delivered by your agency. For each service, specify its maturity level in the 4-level hierarchy.

1) service:

maturity:

2) service:

maturity:

3) service:

maturity:

Channel Strategy

e-Government services should be developed as part of a broader **service channel strategy**, especially given the digital divide.

Integrated approach to service delivery:

- 1) **“no wrong door”** to access public services
- 2) on-line delivery as just one possible access point, with traditional channels - phone, kiosks, counter maintained
- 3) choice of channel is in itself a service quality attribute
- 4) **channel integration** is part of the overall transformation of a particular service to better serve particular customer groups
- 5) more efficient approach in the long term – more intensive use is made of common infrastructure and data

Citizen Engagement

ICT can be used as a tool for providing information, consulting and engaging citizens in the policy-making.

This can be done through:

- 1) **reaching** a wider audience
- 2) **tailoring** information to the target audience
- 3) **engaging** citizens through consultation and participation
- 4) facilitating the **analysis** of citizen contributions
- 5) providing **feedback** to citizens

Access and Trust

Increasing citizen trust through access to information:

- 1) information on **entitlements** and costs of services reduce opportunities for arbitrary behaviour
- 2) systems that guide **applicants** through complex entitlement procedures clarify the decision-making process
- 3) on-line **tracking** of applications, linked to timeliness standards for approval processes, reduce fears of corruption, etc.

All reduce administrative and judicial **appeals**, which impose costs on both administrations and citizens.

Also increase citizens' **confidence** that laws are applied fairly.

Access and Accessibility

Two key issues to enable citizens to obtain online information:

Definition [Access]

Access is the real possibility of consulting or acquiring government information electronically.

Definition [Accessibility]

Accessibility is the ease with which citizens can make use of the possibility of consulting government information electronically: find, digest and use it.

Accessibility criteria: recognizability, availability, manageability, affordability, reliability, clarity, ability to cater for special needs.

Accessibility measures: search engines, spell- and grammar-checkers, multilingual translations, online glossaries, etc.

Example: Accessibility

Example [Guidelines for Accessible Website Content, Japan]

The guidelines for page designers and developers of website tools to make sure that government websites are accessible for the disabled:

- 1) provide alternatives to represent content
- 2) avoid dependence on color information
- 3) ensure clarity in the use of natural language
- 4) use markup languages and stylesheets
- 5) ensure that design does not rely on special devices
- 6) respect technical standards for the Internet
- 7) explain clearly the system of navigation
- 8) ensure that users can convert to newer technologies
- 9) ensure that pages are accessible without newer technologies

Designed jointly by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Summary: Front-Office

Front-office development for e-government:

1) **a maturity model for online services**

(1) static information about services (2) users can access agencies' databases (3) users can engage in secure transactions (4) agencies can share information

2) **services should rely on the understanding of the user needs**

more mature is not always best, most effective are seamless services, online services are part of channel strategy, channel integration follows the overall process transformation

3) **e-government as a tool for citizen engagement**

email lists, discussion forums, government consultation portals, online mediation systems to support deliberations about policy and service matters