



UPGRADING THE GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE THROUGH USER-CENTRIC SAAS

As citizens embrace mobile technologies and spend ever-greater amounts of time online, improving the digital experience that users get from government has become a top priority for state and local leaders. Public-sector investments in this area are critical and well-timed. A recent consumer survey shows that citizens rate their experience with government lower than all other industries measured.¹

Although government organizations have a lot of work to do, new purpose-built software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions can help modernize service delivery and provide the user-centric experiences that citizens expect in this digital era. By moving to SaaS, organizations can improve user satisfaction, quickly deploy new services and pave the way for even greater innovation across websites, mobile applications and other emerging mediums.

THREE CLICKS AND YOU'RE OUT

The following challenges have sharpened government leaders' focus on adopting user-centric SaaS to improve the citizen experience:

✔ INCREASING USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND MOBILE DEVICES.

Citizens and businesses are more mobile and connected than ever. Ninety-six percent of the U.S. public owns a cell phone, and 81 percent own a smartphone.² While daily desktop and laptop use has remained flat over time, mobile device usage leapt from 0.3 hours per day in 2008 to 3.6 hours per day in 2018.³ Citizens increasingly conduct their payment transactions digitally⁴ and expect easy-to-use applications that can perform complex interactions and transactions.

✔ CITIZEN DISSATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT SERVICES.

Research shows that website users expect to find what they need within three clicks or less.⁵ Very few government sites meet this expectation —

often because they mirror the agency's internal organization instead of focusing on the way citizens need to use the site. In addition, government websites often lack a cohesive look and feel across services. This can dilute the organization's branding and result in user frustration by creating inconsistent navigation paths across services or requiring users to re-enter data that was already provided elsewhere.

✔ ONGOING NEED FOR IN-PERSON/MULTI-CHANNEL SERVICES.

Although many citizens are moving toward mobile and online services, state and local governments must ensure citizens without connectivity or those who prefer in-person interactions have equitable access to services. They also need to integrate their digital services in a way that allows citizens to seamlessly move through an application or process even as they switch from a mobile or online interaction to an in-person engagement.

MOVING TOWARD A USER-CENTRIC EXPERIENCE

Ninety-four percent of state and local governments have implemented a citizen website and 81 percent have implemented native mobile applications, according to the Center for Digital Government's 2018 Digital States and Digital Cities Surveys. User-centric SaaS solutions improve the customer experience across these and other channels by allowing citizens to perform complex transactions and interactions 24/7 on any device. These interactions are integrated with related processes to further expedite services and help citizens save time (e.g., a citizen applying for a permit can view appointment slots to schedule an inspection or track the status of a permit request). Meanwhile, approvals and other dependencies are automatically routed so turnaround times shrink from weeks to hours or even minutes.

The leading user-centric SaaS solutions build in service-specific best practices and workflows so organizations do not have to reinvent the

wheel for complex processes such as business registration, occupational licensing, and planning and building permitting. In addition, they include customizable design templates that let organizations quickly and easily create consistent branding across all services — without involving web design teams.

Permitting solutions such as the one implemented by Tacoma, Wash., exemplify the power of a user-centric SaaS solution.

“We’ve re-invented how we operate,” says Jennifer Ward, innovation team lead for the city.⁶

Tacoma’s SaaS permitting solution enables citizens to obtain limited-scope ePermits automatically (and without review) or over-the-counter permits the same day they submit an application.⁷ Permit specialists in the city’s Planning and Development Services (PDS) department now save 30 hours per month in processing over-the-counter permits and 44 hours per month with ePermits, which means specialists have more time to work on more complex customer needs.⁸

PDS customers have 24/7 online access to permitting and visibility into their application status. The department’s in-house Tracker solution directly routes applicants who come into the office to the appropriate expert, saving citizens the frustration of long waits and being shuffled from one representative to the next. Application programming interfaces (APIs) included with the SaaS solution let the agency collect metrics about these visits and capture the staff’s notes so the city can continuously improve services.

Interactive voice response (IVR) processes are integrated into the system so citizens can manage inspections and make permit payments by phone. The solution’s reporting, GIS features and open data platform allow both staff and customers to easily prepare maps, tables and other graphics depending on their specific needs.

Another important aspect of the solution is that PDS staff can manage it themselves, enabling them to respond quickly to customer requests for modifications, suggestions for new or improved services, and changes in government regulations.

“Having department staff responsible for the solution is huge for us and ensures its success,” Ward says. “We have a product that is incredibly robust and can grow with us, that can meet current needs and things we haven’t even anticipated yet.”⁹

GETTING STARTED WITH USER-CENTRIC SAAS

Ward and other leaders recommend the following approach when starting down the path to user-centric SaaS.

✔ **GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE TABLE.** It’s important to establish a unified vision, clear goals that stem from that vision and an action plan for achieving each goal. Having input and buy-in from a broad group of stakeholders — departments that interface with the solution, executive sponsors, business process owners, IT staff and others impacted by the solution — helps establish priorities, optimize processes and maximize adoption.

✔ **CLARIFY YOUR BUSINESS PROCESSES BEFORE YOU START.** In a manual world, each person may have their own way to perform a task. To leverage automation, everyone must agree on standard processes. This involves mapping out all scenarios and working together to develop process flows.

✔ **BE WILLING TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE.** Fine-tuning or rethinking procedures is part of the process. Organizations may discover even more efficient ways of doing things as they put a solution into use and better understand its capabilities.

BUILDING TRUST AND SUPPORT

Improving citizen satisfaction with government services is vital for maintaining the public’s trust and support. Purpose-built SaaS solutions provide the user-centric experience that citizens have come to expect from both private enterprises and City Hall. SaaS solutions for permitting and other complex workflows enhance the citizen experience by expediting approval processes, allowing customers to use the channel of their choice for interactions, providing visibility into the status of applications or requests, allowing online payments and more. These solutions position agencies to meet user demands now and in the future.

This piece was written and produced by the Governing Institute Content Studio, with information and input from Accela.

ENDNOTES

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