

# REACHING CITIZENS

where  
they  
are



Agencies modernize — and analyze — to improve their engagement with the public

**A** **T ANY GIVEN HOUR** on any day of the week, hundreds of thousands of people are viewing government websites. In the federal sector alone, that is more than 4,500 sites. Citizens expect to be able to access any information they need at any time — whether that means looking up tax information, downloading benefits forms or planning a vacation at a national park.

Citizens' demand for information is apparent in the government's tracking of its websites. Those sites were visited 3 billion times in the first quarter of this year, according to the federal government's Digital Analytics Program (DAP). Page views across all federal sites typically hit a midday peak of about 2.6 million views, but even at the slowest time — 4 a.m. — federal websites average about 400,000 views.

The site with the most views fluctuates based on a variety of factors. On the evening of April 9,

for example, DAP showed that most visitors were checking on the status of their tax refunds. The second most popular activity was enrolling in the Transportation Security Administration's expedited security screening program. On the morning of April 10, tax refunds had slipped to second, with the most views going to a Justice Department site for U.S. attorneys. Defense Department sites also saw a bump that morning, as did a U.S. Postal Service site for looking up ZIP Codes. The National Weather Service was popular throughout the day.

Those kinds of data analytics can help agencies promote citizen engagement. Ensuring that the public has a seamless experience obtaining information from and doing business with the government requires a web architecture that is intuitive, mobile-friendly and accessible to people with disabilities. It means understanding data and knowing what to release to the public. It requires managing access and ensuring the privacy and

security of data. And it requires an IT infrastructure that can support high-speed, high-volume access.

Furthermore, according to government speakers at a recent Citizen Engagement Summit, providing the best possible citizen experience requires buy-in from employees across the agency.

### Making sites mobile-friendly

One of the biggest challenges in the federal government has been making digital information mobile-friendly. The Connected Government Act of 2017 requires all federal agencies to ensure “to the greatest extent possible” that their websites can be easily viewed on mobile devices. The law came on the heels of a report from the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation that found that 92 percent of the most popular federal websites failed to perform well in at least one of these areas: security, speed, mobile-friendliness or accessibility.

And although research shows that more than 40 percent of people access websites via mobile devices, ITIF’s report states that only 61 percent of federal sites are mobile-friendly.

“We have to get more mobile-friendly, and we have to get more data-friendly,” said Jacob Parcell, director of mobile programs at the General Services Administration’s Technology Transformation Service. “Nobody wants to try to look at a PDF on their mobile phone.”

Some state and local agencies are redoubling their efforts to engage with the public via mobile devices. In a 2016 survey by Living Cities and Governing magazine, 97 percent of the municipalities that responded said they use social media for civic engagement, and 74 percent use mobile apps. Respondents represented 61 municipalities, including 43 of the 100 largest municipalities.

### More sophisticated users

As digital information becomes ubiquitous, viewers’ expectations become more sophisticated. According to a recent survey by Salesforce, 75 percent of consumers expect a consistent experience no matter how they engage with digital information.

For some agencies, that might be a daunting challenge. But the ones that have already made the investment now boast an IT framework for citizen engagement that is easier to maintain and garners more positive feedback from users.

That has been the case at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which has modernized its infrastructure and received praise for its citizen-facing tools, such as Vets.gov, said Aaron Wieczorek, a digital services expert on the U.S. Digital Service’s VA team. With upgrades to the basic infrastructure, VA can easily expand on its citizen engagement successes.

“It’s about showing people that a more modern platform built with modern tools is more easily maintainable,” he said. It is also typically more cost-effective.

Ultimately, a modern infrastructure frees agency employees to focus on creating new capabilities for users instead of spending their time managing data centers. ■

## How people access federal websites

The federal government has more than **4,500 websites**

with **3B visits** to those sites over **90 days** ending on April 10, 2018.

Here is how people accessed the sites:



**53%**  
desktop



**42%**  
phone



**6%**  
tablet

The most common web browsers used included:



**46%**  
Chrome



**29%**  
Safari



**12%**  
Explorer



**5%**  
Firefox

People used these operating systems:



**43%**  
Windows



**27%**  
iOS



**20%**  
Android



**8%**  
Macintosh



**1%**  
Chrome OS