

Want to enhance customer experience? Here's where to start



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Federal agencies are dealing with a dearth of public trust. Many citizens are concerned about agencies' abilities to deliver essential benefits and services.

Private sector companies specializing in instant gratification, streamlined services and easy accessibility have set public expectations for customer service high, and those expectations are

rarely met by the public sector, said Rod Bremby, regional vice president for global public sector at [Salesforce](#). Benefits like supplemental nutrition assistance, Social Security, unemployment or disaster relief often are delayed, tedious to apply for or not well known.

It's time to bring the public sector and customers together, Bremby said. That's why the Biden administration made customer experience — and by necessity, IT modernization to improve that CX — one of its top priorities. But many agencies haven't undertaken this kind of modernization effort in many years, and they're struggling to get started.

One agency they should look to for inspiration, Bremby said, is the Agriculture Department.

"Farmers.gov is an online portal where farmers can grow their businesses. This one-stop shop allows farmers, ranchers and producers to fill out applications for loans, grants or services. They can

also use that same portal to check loan balances and status," he said. "Through the same portal, they can also apply for disaster assistance and where to find the most convenient USDA office locations for in-person support."

Less complicated, more engaged

The key to the success of this platform is its simplicity, Bremby said. USDA has put all the information farmers need in a single place and made it easy for them to complete the necessary processes to receive services. USDA consolidated seven digital systems and 150 web resources into one intelligent platform that follows a user's progress.

And that, Bremby noted, is the biggest metric for success in customer experience: Did the customer



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complete the transaction? Or did they drop off somewhere in the middle of the process, like abandoning a cart while shopping online?

In many cases, benefit management isn't something the average citizen wakes up in the morning thinking about. Seeking benefits from a federal agency is something people tend to do after a major life event, like a natural disaster.

"To apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency benefits, disaster assistance, citizens want to be able to go to a single location or know that there's a single location to go to so they can access the rules by which they can apply. They want to know the timeline by which they'll be supported or get the benefit. Or if they're not eligible, they can move on and look for other opportunities to get their needs met," Bremby said. "Those are some of the outcomes that people are looking for — real-life deliverables."

Accounting for the employee experience too

But there's another aspect to this as well: the employee experience. There is often friction between frontline workers and citizens because citizens are responding emotionally to a major life event and think benefits are easier to get than they may be. Meanwhile, employees are often required to swivel between systems, aggregating information manually to explain benefits to the citizen.

Streamlining the employee experience by simplifying workflows; automating notifications, triggers and alerts; making data shareable between systems and providing a 360-degree view of the customer can help reduce that friction between employee and citizen, Bremby said.

But that requires not just technological modernization but a cultural one as well.



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"It starts with understanding where the pain points are for frontline workers. They want better systems, but sometimes they believe that the devil they know is better than the devil they don't know (a new system). You have to show them the art of the possible and help them to understand that there can be a better future for them," Bremby said.

"One of the challenges with modernization of technology that is likely to occur is that you modernize an old set of processes. Modernization needs to drive all the way to looking at processes, ensuring that the right processes and the right workflows are being utilized and also sharing how the technology can help accelerate those workflows."

Identify possible quick wins

That also translates over to the customer. Bremby said the best way for success now with quick wins and organizational buy-in is to discover the pain points citizens have as well and address those processes with an agile methodology and iterative

improvements. Agencies often shoot themselves in the foot by trying to do a multiyear, big bang rollout of new services, when instead they should focus on getting the best return on investment through incremental enhancements, Bremby said.

Bremby thinks a digital portal is the best place for agencies to start if they're looking to build trust by improving customer experience. Rolling out a one-stop-shop portal like USDA signals modernization.

"Customers tend to withdraw their trust from an organization when they have multiple touchpoints, and each channel treats them like a new customer. It's like the organization doesn't know them from program to program. Customers expect to be known. They expect to be serviced," Bremby said. "Having that ability to tie together customer data across multiple programs in the back office is really crucial and helpful for some quick and early wins." 🔄

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