A digital-first approach to CX

Agencies can simplify and enrich their interactions with citizens through digital engagement

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AS CONSUMERS OF commercial services, we have certain expectations that we naturally extend to our experience with government. So we are often left wondering why requesting a government service can't be as easy as ordering through Uber Eats or Amazon.

Government is our only choice for certain services, so when the engagement is not intuitive or straightforward, as citizens we can become frustrated, disengaged and unwilling to work with ineffective agencies.

The poor user experience is often ascribed to agency dependency on old systems and a lack of investment in technology, which has dire impacts. Such user experiences negatively influence citizen perception of government efficiency and lead to service disruption, rendering citizens without access to service.

Agencies should leverage technology to transform user experiences and meet citizen needs, especially in emergencies such as the coronavirus pandemic, which emphasized citizen preference for app-driven and digital-centric interactions.

Learning from the private sector's success

Ideally, agencies and citizens have a streamlined, productive conversation online. It starts with considering the art of the possible and asking how an agency can achieve the same ease of use and digital-first approach that people experience with private-sector organizations.

Agencies should ask themselves what problem they're trying to solve and then put themselves in their beneficiary's shoes. It's also helpful to ask frontline employees, who are speaking to citizens every day, what changes would make it easier for them to achieve their tasks faster and more efficiently. That might involve breaking down barriers between offices or agencies so that citizens and employees can have a seamless experience, or leveraging chatbots for simple, high-volume requests online.

Focusing on a user-centric perspective enabled an Australian government agency to improve user experience by shortening and simplifying a process for resolving home contractor complaints from 18 months to 90 days. Their initial process required people to download a form, fill it out and fax it back. To address this challenge, the agency's officials asked how they could use technology to streamline the process and shift the responsibility away from the citizen. They ended up creating a digital process that shortened the turnaround time by 83%.

A roadmap to a better future

Salesforce offers the types of technology that make it easier for people to access services and easier for government employees to deliver those services. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us just how

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important that public/private partnership is to breaking down barriers and accelerating solutions domestically and internationally. We are learning lessons about working together and establishing relationships quickly, even between competitive companies and agencies that don't typically interact on a regular basis.

For example, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act demonstrated how funding could be created and distributed from the federal government to state and local agencies to reach the people who needed it. Those lessons extend to child welfare programs and efforts to keep small businesses open and people working. To support its community and respond to the influx of calls it received for COVID-19 unemployment information, the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions uses the Salesforce platform to extend the traditional call center through chat.

Leveraging technology and strengthening the relationships between contractors, suppliers, other private-sector organizations and the government offer a roadmap for how we can solve other big problems more quickly and create a better future for everyone. ■

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