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The antidote for declining trust in government? Simplified citizen experience

Improve accuracy and reduce wait times to boost citizen services

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eBOOK

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Content

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A matter of trust

Using government services is often a frustrating experience for citizens. A lack of transparency, confusing instructions, and uncertainty around the security of personal information are too often the norm. In 2023, the American Customer Satisfaction Index reported that citizen satisfaction with government services had grown for the second year in a row, to 68.2 out of a 100 scale, back to pre-pandemic levels.[1]

Despite the growth, government lags well behind the private sector.

Satisfaction is consistently correlated with trust in both the private and public sector. A better customer experience means more trust in government.

1 American Customer Satisfaction Index, *Government*, 2023

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What is Citizen Experience?

Citizen Experience (CX) refers to the totality of interactions that an individual has when engaging with a public sector organization, from start to finish. Modern citizen experience design draws from best practices in the commercial sector. Leading industries in digital customer experience include online banking (example: taking a photo of a check and auto depositing it into your account) and retail/restaurants (example: pizza apps showing progress from purchase to baking to delivery).

Government agencies are deploying similar technologies to assist citizens with tasks like submitting taxes and renewing drivers' licenses, but too often they lag well behind their commercial counterparts. Forrester, who publishes an annual CX index score based on survey data, ranks government as the lowest-performing industry.[2]

The public's lack of satisfaction harms public trust, which has fueled White House attention to customer experience. The President's Management Agenda has highlighted digital customer experience as a key priority, singling out a set of high-impact service providers (such as the IRS, Department of Veterans' Affairs, and Social Security Administration) as worthy of special attention.[3]

2 Forrester, *Forrester Releases 2024 US Customer Experience Index*, 2024

3 *https://www.performance.gov/pma/cx/*

> "[Government users] deserve an experience that compares to – or exceeds – that of leading private sector organizations."
>
> –President's Management Agenda

President's Management Agenda

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Government as a one-stop shop

Unlike the private sector, where dissatisfied customers can choose to take their business elsewhere, the government is the sole source provider of several services, including:

- Veteran benefits and housing

- Airport security and screening

- Medicare customer support

- Federal student aid services

- IRS support when filing taxes

- Farm loans and conservation services

- Disaster relief

Some global governments like the United Kingdom and Canada operate healthcare systems as well, which means patient care is also part of the citizen experience.

When there is no profit incentive, the public sector must look elsewhere for motivation to improve. When Victor Dominello took over as Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government in New South Wales, Australia, the first thing he did was to set up a feedback mechanism. He then began publishing new releases of his all-in-one app, starting with digital drivers' licenses, then adding COVID-19 vaccination status and other features, adjusting based on real-time customer feedback. The results were an extremely high rate of downloads and satisfaction scores.[4]

4 Financial Review, *Minister Victor Dominello shares digital watershed moments*, 2021

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Doing the work with a focus on the citizens is important. Original government websites made the mistake of organizing information according to the governmental departments and sub-agencies, which provided challenges to users unfamiliar with governmental organizational charts. Miami-Dade County took a user-oriented approach to redesigning its website, which resulted in experience awards and high customer satisfaction.[5] Another successful example is when the US Department of Labor aggregated all the federal benefits programs (and many state and city benefits programs) into a single, easy-to-use portal at benefits.gov.[6]

> **"Governments need to think about where they invest their money for the highest impact. Instead of bricks and mortar, we need to build digital infrastructure. That will change lives."**
>
> - Victor Dominello, former Minister of Customer Service and Digital Government, New South Wales[7]

5 OpenText, *Department of ... huh? U.S. county models citizen services after consumer sites*, 2022
6 OpenText, *Focus on citizen experience to make lasting change in government*, 2023
7 SAP, *Lessons From the Vanguard: Victor Dominello On Digital Government, Trust, And Failure*, 2023

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The COVID conundrum

The global pandemic provided a conundrum: more citizens than ever needed access to health services and government support as the virus spread and service industry jobs vanished. Government needed to be able to share information quickly about evolving health guidelines, economic supports and protective measures. As public sector workers shifted to fully-remote operations, government services, such as those for the Department of Motor Vehicles, moved online.

Unfortunately, when the public needed them most, government systems were not up to the task. The sheer volume of applicants completely overwhelmed state unemployment websites, many of whom still operated on antiquated mainframe systems.

During a five-day window in March 2020, the New York Department of Labor's website saw a 900 percent increase in traffic and fielded 8.2 million calls.[8] The website crashed repeatedly, leaving New Yorkers unable to file claims or reach a customer service representative. The government resorted to asking the public to wait to file their claims based on their last name. Desperate, the state turned to the private sector—Google helped to rebuild the website, including automation of the process, and Verizon assisted in setting up a call center that rapidly expanded phone capacity.[9]

8 The Washington Post, The Technology 202: State unemployment websites are crashing amid record number of claims, 2020

9 Bloomberg Law, Google Helps New York Reboot Unemployment System After Crash, 2020

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The technological gap crippled the state government's initial ability to provide public services during a crisis, complicated the process for those seeking to use those services, and weakened the public trust in their government.

The upside of this technology gap was increased investment in digital government, with many countries making great strides in citizen services. For example, the Netherlands created a Digital ID used by 80 percent of the population, while Portugal, Estonia, and Malta digitized 99 percent of their citizen services.[10]

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of the population

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99%
of citizen services

in Portugal, Estonia, and Malta were digitized.[10]

"A service tailored to the individual's needs, interests, and circumstances, enabled by digital infrastructure, can enhance customer experience and put governments on par with the leading private sector organizations."

– Deloitte[11]

10 Forbes, The Digital Transformation of Government During Covid-19, 2022
11 Deloitte, 10x improvement in customer experience, 2024

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What is the future?

Both national and local governments have developed strategies for improved digital customer services, such as the IT Modernization Center of Excellence and Goal Action Plans developed by the President's Management Agenda. The US federal government has also updated the Federal Performance framework to give guidance to agencies about embedding customer experience as a critical component of operations. Increasingly, public-private partnerships help to develop tools and learn best practices.

Automation

Automating e-government services has become a critical need for both citizens and government employees. CX innovations that automate routine or repetitive processes, provide prefilled out forms, or use AI predictive technology to respond to common questions and concerns result in a streamlined experience for the customer. Automation also allows government employees to migrate from low-value to high-value work, dealing with more complicated requests or processes, boosting productivity and morale.

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Frictionless identity access management

Identity access management (IAM) is a key tool that allows the right consumers to access the right information. The experience for the customer should be seamless, but secure, across different types of digital tools. Citizens should be able to apply for their passport, check on their student loans, or renew their driver's licenses from their mobile phone, computer, or tablet.

However, decentralized government data and structures can get in the way of building a cohesive IAM platform that can safely manage a citizen's digital identity across agencies. This means less reliance on passwords and more on multifactor authentication.

Scalability and flexibility

Digital tools developed by the government must be able to be used by all its citizens, who have a vast range of needs. That could mean keeping mobile apps minimalistic, so that those using older devices can still access them, or having automatic translations into commonly spoken languages. These tools must also be prepared for unexpected spikes in users, such as during a natural disaster or unemployment crisis.

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Farm Loan Discovery Tool

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) partnered with the Financial Services Association to create the Farm Loan Discovery Tool (farmers.gov/fund), an online tool that helps new producers get start-up loans for their farms.[12]

Potential applicants no longer have to wade through mountains of paperwork and navigate a complicated and confusing system—instead, this tool matches them with the loan that best suits their situation. It also provides them with Application Quick Guides that prepare them for their eventual meeting with the FSA loan officer. This approach combines best practices in CX by identifying the consumer, evaluating their needs, and streamlining a previously complicated process. It also helps FSA loan officers migrate to high-value work (evaluating loans).

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Citizen developers

Given the importance of IT occupations to the federal government, formally encouraging federal employee citizen developers can be a good strategy in helping close mission-critical IT skills gaps. Citizen developers use low-code or no-code to build basic applications, combining their content knowledge with easy-to-use, flexible technology to create tools quickly and efficiently. In times of crisis, such as during national disasters, these nimble services could make a huge difference.

Public-private partnerships

Government has already demonstrated its willingness to work with and learn from the private sector's CX strategies. Organizations like the Partnership for Public Service[13] combine government needs with industry knowledge.

Identity, credential, and access management (ICAM)

As CX tools become more sophisticated, the need for equally mature ICAM platforms that will protect all parts of the user experience grows too.

13 *https://ourpublicservice.org/our-work/customer-experience/#what*

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Conclusion

Citizen CX has enormous potential to build a better relationship between citizens and their government. Agility and responsiveness by the government to the needs and expectations of their customers will ultimately improve the lives of the people. With innovation and accountability, the government will win back trust.

⊡ Discover how OpenText can help with the total Citizen Experience
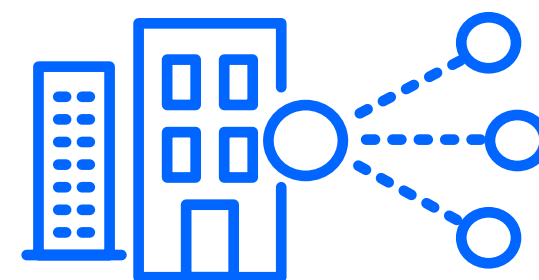
"**When individuals and organizations interact with any part of the Federal Government, they want that interaction to work seamlessly.**"

– President's Management Agenda[14]

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