

Prime Minister John Howard recently addressed the Institute of Public Administration of Australia at the 'Centenary of the Australian Public Service Oration,' emphasising how: "...senior public servants and their staff will need to find ways to minimise any limitations associated with what could be described as the 'silo effect'. A methodology for rapid and effective integration of work units from traditional unrelated departments will need to be further refined to achieve broader government objectives."

His comments followed an ambitious target set in 1997 for Federal departments and agencies to have all appropriate services online by December 2001. At the World Congress on Information Technology in Adelaide, the Prime Minister announced that this target had been met.

eGovernment is rapidly becoming part of the vocabulary for government leaders, as Governments around the world have been tasked with objectives to meet the demand and exploit the capabilities of today's Web-enabled society.

## **Citizen Relationship Management**

The next phase for the Australian Federal Government is a move from placing government information and services online, to a more comprehensive, integrated, real-time information service. The focus is *citizen*-centric rather than *Internet*-centric.

Customer relationship management for the government and its agencies is much more than replacing 'Customer' with 'Citizen'. Government has the unique status whereby every member of the community is a stakeholder. Communication channels must be, and be seen to be, open and available; with high security levels assured; information must be up-to-date, easy to understand and, where possible, interactive; as well as overall, cost-effective.

The Prime Minister addresses the 'silo effect', referring to how often citizen information is held in several isolated departments. Linking social services with, for example, the housing department, has obvious and immediate benefits to both government agencies and citizens themselves. The NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) is embracing these capabilities and implementing an eBusiness application to capture the benefits an integrated client management system can offer.

The DoCS new client management system will provide up-to-date information for staff across multiple agencies including Departments of Health, Juvenile Justice, Education, and Housing, the police, as well as various community agencies such as shelters and child care providers. A standardised directory will enable DoCS caseworkers, administrators and management to coordinate casework activities more easily and effectively across the whole organisation. Whereas many government agencies have committed IT resources to back-office, DoCS is focusing on 'community-facing' activities, such as delivering a consistent level of service by automating manual tasks.

## **Five Essential Principles of eGovernment**

eGovernment initiatives must be carefully planned and deployed in a coordinated, deliberate fashion. Through extensive public sector deployments worldwide, our experience has proved that there are five essential principles for deploying an eGovernment strategy successfully:

1. Place the citizen at the centre of eGovernment
2. Embrace multiple communication channels
3. Develop a citizen-centric ICT architecture
4. Leverage best-practice networks to deliver a high level of service
5. Manage cultural change

eGovernment can transform the citizen and government agency relationship, and incorporating these steps into an eGovernment strategy will help improve citizen participation, service quality, and efficiency. Ultimately, a well considered eGovernment strategy has the potential to strengthen democracy itself.

This is the first in a series of three, monthly articles discussing eGovernment and the momentum for change in the public sector. Next month's article will look at best practice case management.

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