Government
Business
Council

Centering the Customer in Critical Services

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The Big Issue

The government is a "one-stop shop" for the American public but using government services is often a frustrating experience for the consumer that does not meet their needs or expectations.

Why it Matters

- A better customer experience means better trust in government.

- Taxpayer dollars fund critical services provided by the government, but these services can be complicated or difficult to use.

- In 2019, the American Customer Satisfaction Index reported that citizen satisfaction with government services had fallen for the second year in a row, to 68.1 out of a 100 scale[1].

- Satisfaction is consistently correlated with trust[2] in both the private and public sector, and improving the American people's interaction with their government will earn back their trust.

What is CX?

- Customer Experience (CX) is the totality of interactions that a customer has when engaging with an organization, from start to finish.

- CX has naturally been key to private sector growth. Dissatisfied customers can choose another company or product that will serve them better. But government customers don't have that option.

- The public consistently rates their federal government experience poorly, and this lack of satisfaction harms public trust.

> **"Federal Customer deserve an experience that compares to – or exceeds – that of leading private sector organizations. "**
>
> -- President's Management Agenda

Government is 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 a number of services. Some of these include:

- o Veteran benefits and housing
- o Airport security and screening
- o Medicare customer support
- o Federal student aid services
- o IRS support when filing taxes
- o Farm loan and conservation services
- o Disaster relief

Novel Coronavirus has Expanded Need for Fast, Responsive Services

While the private sector has adapted quickly to changing customer needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have not been as nimble.

States and the federal government need to be able to share information with their citizens quickly & responsively about health guidelines, economic supports, and current protective measures.

Many government services have been moved online, such as those for the Department of Motor Vehicles, highlighting the need for automated systems that can respond to repeated requests and deal with secure data.

CASE STUDY

State Unemployment Websites

Major economic shutdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic also unleashed a massive wave of people seeking unemployment. The sheer volume of applicants completely overwhelmed state unemployment websites, many of whom still rely on antiquated mainframe systems to process claims.[2]

During a five-day window in March, the New York Department of Labor's website saw a 900% increase in traffic and fielded 8.2 million calls[3]. 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. The state also 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[4].

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.

CX in Government

Where Does the Government Stand Now?

Both federal and state 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 federal government has also updated the Federal Performance framework to give guidance to agencies about embedding customer experience as a critical component of operations.[5]

Increasing partnerships of government with the private sector help to develop tools and learn best practices.

What Is the Future?

Automation

Automating e-government services has become a critical need for both customers and government employees.

CX innovations that automate routine or repetitive processes, provide pre-filled 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,[6] boosting productivity and morale.

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, meaning that 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 means it is challenging to build a cohesive IAM platform that can safely manage a citizen's digital identity across agencies[7].

This means less reliance on passwords and more on multifactor authentication.

What is the Future?

Scalability and Flexibility

Digital tools developed by the government must be able to be used by all its citizens, who represent 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 future tools will also be prepared for waves of users at once, such as during a natural disaster or unemployment crisis.

USE CASE

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. 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, and 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 (the evaluation of a loan)[8].

What are Some Opportunities?

Citizen Developers

Given the increasing 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 structures 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 or in order to provide information quickly, these low-tech services could make a huge difference.[9]

Public-private partnerships

Government has already demonstrated its willingness to work with and learn from the private sector's CX strategies. Initiatives like the Partnership for Public Service[10] 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 will grow too[11].

Final Thoughts

CX development 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 American people. With innovation and accountability, the government will win back the trust of its customers.

"From small businesses seeking loans, to families receiving disaster support, to someone passing through an airport security line -every interaction between the Federal government and the public is an opportunity to demonstrate the government understands and is working to meet their needs."

-- CX Cap Goal Team

Endnotes

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