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RIGHTNOW CX CLOUD SERVICE

An Oracle White Paper
March 2012

Creating a Superior Customer Experience Online

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Introduction

As Americans spend an increasing amount of time on the internet, they're demanding a more positive, intuitive, and instant online experience—each and every time. In short, they expect the time they invest in the Web to be worth every millisecond devoted to it. Likewise, business leaders know that every visit to an organization's Website affects the way consumers view their companies as a whole. Thus, each online interaction must be better than good and, at best, generate positive buzz. Just one negative experience, after all, can generate a negative buzz heard around the world.

The federal government is taking notice of lessons learned in the private sector. It understands that citizens are also consumers—and as such, are looking for the same streamlined experience they get elsewhere online when interacting with the government. It also understands that what consumers may be finding instead is a sometimes fragmented and confusing Web presence. The sheer volume of U.S. government–based online experiences is one reason; a lack of uniformity in approach is another.

.Gov Snapshot

The U.S. government has at times maintained 2,000 top-level federal .gov domains. Beneath these are another estimated 24,000 subsites, or *microsites*, representing topics as diverse as the desert tortoise, lupus self-evaluation, and invasive species.[1] (The full list of top-level .gov Websites is available on Data.gov.[2])

"While many government Websites each deliver value to the taxpayer through easy-to-use services and information, an overall online landscape of literally thousands of Websites—each focusing on a specific topic or organization—can create confusion and inefficiency. In addition to confusing the public, duplicate and unnecessary Websites also waste money," wrote Macon Phillips, White House director of digital strategy, on the WhiteHouse.gov site in June 2011.[3]

Addressing this proliferation, the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is making progress on its plans to

- Eliminate half of the Websites maintained by the federal government.

- Freeze all .gov URLs, permitting new ones only with the approval of the CIO of the United States.

- Solicit public feedback on the current list of .gov domains.

- Develop a governmentwide policy for Websites.

In the second half of 2011, many steps were being taken to accomplish these goals. Between July 13 and September 7, 2011, for instance, the number of .gov sites decreased by nearly 100—from 1,759 to 1,660, as reported on Data.gov.[4] To monitor progress, the government is publishing plans and results on USA.gov/WebReform. On October 11, 2011, for instance, .gov domain and Web governance surveys were due, and agencies are required to post Web improvement plans on their open government pages.

White House: Customer Service Focus Spans Years

Presidential mandates dictating that government must improve customer service originated decades ago, and they continue to guide agencies responding to citizen needs in a technology-driven world.

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[1] "TooManyWebsites.gov," WhiteHouse.gov blog posting by Macon Phillips on June 13, 2011, whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/06/13/toomanyWebsitesgov.

[2] http://explore.data.gov/Federal-Government-Finances-and-Employment/Federal-Executive-Branch-internet-Domains/k9h8-e98h.

[3] "TooManyWebsites.gov," whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/06/13/toomanyWebsitesgov.

[4] "Campaign to Cut Waste: .gov Effort to Improve Federal Websites" by Kasie Coccaro on WhiteHouse.gov, whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/07/13/campaign-cut-waste-gov-effort-improve-federal-Websites.

The OMB's actions are part of the larger "Campaign to Cut Waste," launched via executive order on June 13, 2011.[5] Its far-ranging provisions came less than two months after another White House directive aimed at improving customer service, President Barack Obama's April 2011 executive order "Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service."[6] He called for serving the public with the following:

- Improved processes to reduce both customer inquiries and complaints

- Better, faster, and lower-cost delivery of services

- Solutions that entail self-service options accessed by the internet or mobile phone

The president's directive relies heavily on utilizing advances in technology and service delivery systems, because these are the forces driving citizens' rising standards. Web-based technology, then, is the cornerstone of government's ability to meet those demands.

This customer service focus continues a trend started in 1993 with the executive order "Setting Customer Service Standards," which required agencies to identify and survey their customers, establish service standards, track performance against those standards, and benchmark customer service performance against the best in the business. In March 1995 and then again in March 1998, this initiative was reinforced with additional presidential memoranda on customer service. President Obama's "Streamlining Service" executive order effectively raises the bar on customer service experiences with his commitment that "the Government must keep pace with and even exceed those [rising] expectations." Web-based technology is seen as the most viable vehicle of change.

Imperative: Deliver a Dynamic Web Experience

The Web is emerging as the preferred transaction and information retrieval medium of the early millennium. Statistics tell the tale.

One study found that a full 92 percent of citizens expect to be able to engage with their government online, and 86 percent want to do so on their own time.[7] This mirrors how they interact with businesses: a Zappos executive recently said that the #1 time customers are communicating with the company is at 10 p.m., on an iPad, from bed.

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[5] "Executive Order: Delivering an Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government," whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/13/executive-order-delivering-efficient-effective-and-accountable-governmen.

[6] "Executive Order: Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service," whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/27/executive-order-streamlining-service-delivery-and-improving-customer-ser.

[7] The 2010 Open Government Research Report by Harris Interactive.

Although it's not surprising that younger Americans prefer the online experience, that experience is also emerging as the first choice for older citizens. A survey by the Corporate Executive Board found that 42 percent of those ages 50 and older prefer Web self-service to phone interactions.[8]

At the Internal Revenue Service, the customer satisfaction payoff for the movement to the Web has been calculable. While 54 percent of paper filers report being satisfied with their experience, 77 percent of e-filers report a satisfactory experience.[9] The cost differential is appreciable: It costs only 17 cents to process an e-filed return, compared to $3.66 for a paper-filed return.

Where, and How, Can Government Improve?

The following two charts show where there's room for improvement—and the size of the mountain that must be climbed to get there.[10] The graphics are representative of a survey that assessed the view of citizen service, engagement, and the progress government has made in becoming more transparent from the perspective of government employees—both as citizens and as employees responsible for delivering services and executing programs for citizens.
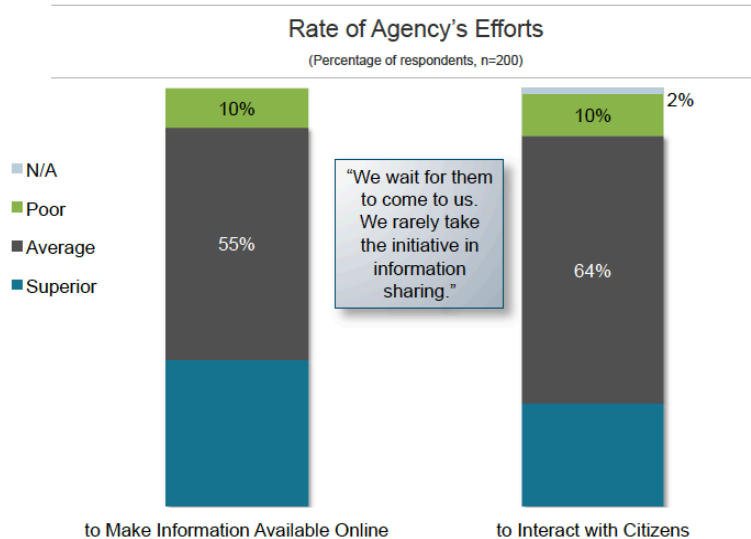

Figure 1. A recent survey shows that agency information and interaction need to improve.

[8] "Cost Savings Customers Want: Quick Wins for Reducing Call Volume Through Self-Service 'Stickiness,'" Corporate Executive Board, https://ccc.executiveboard.com/public/CCC_Cost_Savings_B2B.pdf.

[9] ACSI Scores for U.S. Federal Government 2010, January 25, 2011, theacsi.org/index.php?option= com_content&view=article&id=238:acsi-scores-for-us-federal-government-2010&catid=14:acsi-results&Itemid=298.

[10] 2011 Citizen Engagement with Government Survey from the Government Business Council.

Bringing the 24/7 interactive opportunity to federal agencies will go a long way toward boosting citizens' satisfaction with their government interactions. Citizens want to log on to their computers before or after hours and conduct government business—much as they can log on to their computers whenever they want to buy from Amazon.com. They want to resolve issues online, much as they can with companies like Overstock.com. This kind of instant access already exists in parts of the federal agency infrastructure.
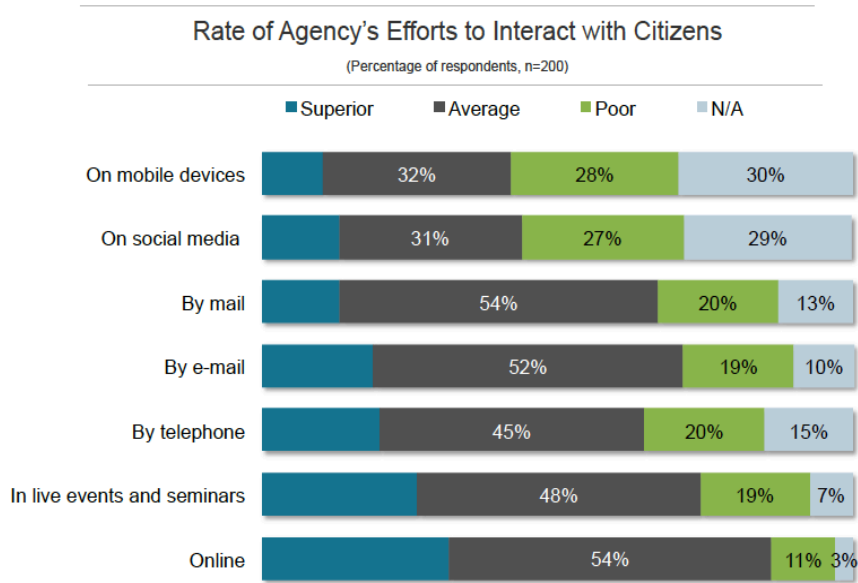
Rate of Agency's Efforts to Interact with Citizens

(Percentage of respondents, n=200)

	Superior	Average	Poor	N/A
On mobile devices		32%	28%	30%
On social media		31%	27%	29%
By mail		54%	20%	13%
By e-mail		52%	19%	10%
By telephone		45%	20%	15%
In live events and seminars		48%	19%	7%
Online		54%	11%	3%

Figure 2. Agencies are overextended and underperforming across platforms.

Integrating Self-Service Web Solutions Since 2005: USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service

Ask Karen, an online service from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), serves as a strong example of how one agency integrated and upgraded its knowledge-base online to respond to citizens' 24/7 "need to know"—in this case the topic being food safety.[11]

Launched in 2005 as a consumer education tool, Ask Karen relies on a virtual knowledgebase that provides answers to consumers via an automated response system. People across the nation seek out this interactive platform for information about how to safely handle and store their food.

In 2006, FSIS implemented Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service. Early assignments improved e-mail communications and response times while capturing important feedback to improve information

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[11] fsis.usda.gov/education/Ask_Karen/index.asp.

sharing. Within months of FSIS's original implementation, an average of 90 percent of all inbound requests through Ask Karen were answered via self-service. Today, that number stands at 98 percent according to Kim Taylor, director of Web services at FSIS. The addition of chat gives citizens another online option for finding answers to their questions.

Next Wave: Mobile Ask Karen

With so many cell phone owners migrating to smartphone platforms, FSIS decided to make its popular food safety source available in a mobile format. In mid-2011, FSIS launched Mobile Ask Karen, which taps into a common knowledgebase powered by Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service. Citizens can search for nearly 1,500 answers by topic or by product, chat with a live representative, or send e-mail— all from their mobile devices. Mobile Ask Karen is optimized for iPhone, iPad, and Android, with additional devices to follow.

Getting started is as easy as going to m.AskKaren.gov on your phone's browser, or scanning Mobile Ask Karen into your iOS or Android mobile device.

Self-Service Meets Citizens' Needs in Many Ways

Today's online community is comprised of digital natives, early adopters, and adopters with varying degrees of comfort in accessing information and conducting business via the Web. Meeting the expectations and abilities for each level of sophistication is essential for most government Websites, because U.S. citizens span the spectrum of capabilities.

Targeting groups with appropriate Web content and then clearly and quickly directing each audience to the information that is pertinent to them is the holy grail of Web usability. Agencies are learning how to span a range of needs.

For example, FSIS leveraged the success of its consumer-oriented Ask Karen by broadening its Web-based self-service capabilities. First, the agency launched AskFSIS for its business and industry audience (food handling businesses, restaurants, and so on), and then it launched Ask Inside FSIS, an intranet for FSIS employees.[12, 13]

In some cases, increasing accessibility means offering content in languages other than English and on select social media sites. A case in point is the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA), which posts content online in English and Spanish, and integrates with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.[14]

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[12] fsis.usda.gov/education/Ask_Karen/index.asp.

[13] Inside Ask FSIS: http://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/public/static/index.jsp.

[14] SSA in Spanish: ssa.gov/espanol/; SSA on Facebook: facebook.com/socialsecurity; SSA on Twitter: twitter.com/#!/SocialSecurity; SSA on YouTube: youtube.com/socialsecurityonline.

Visitors can receive updates by e-mail or learn from Webinars.[15] They can also access SSA information via their mobile devices. Mobile support options are available for the general public and employers in both English and Spanish.[16]

The SSA relies on the technology underlying Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service to answer the public's questions and to provide an electronic self-service delivery channel. More than 1,000 questions and answers are incorporated in the SSA's knowledgebase. In fiscal year 2010, more than 35 million answers were provided via the SSA's Online Answers Knowledgebase (SOASK). This highly scalable solution allows the SSA to meet peak traffic loads without investing in any additional IT infrastructure.

SOASK is optimized for mobile devices so that the software detects whether a citizen is using an Android, BlackBerry, iPhone, or Palm WebOS operating system. It then renders the page for easy viewing without requiring the citizen to download "an app for that."

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has also successfully tapped into Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service solutions to expand self-service. This agency must provide fast, accurate, and up-to-date answers to more than 80 million program beneficiaries, healthcare service providers, and CMS staff. The medicare.gov Website is truly citizen centric. It answers 99 percent of visitors' questions, even with Web traffic exceeding 1.75 million views per week.

Info on Demand: The Pivotal Role of Information Management

Most Websites contain overwhelming amounts of content. How that content is arranged for easy access will go a long way in determining users' experience with a Website.

Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service has provided customer experience solutions for more than 2,000 customers. As a result, Oracle has identified a core group of best practices in this area. Agencies that follow these best practices will respond to Web requirements that are key to maximizing customer experience. These practices are as follows:

- Make the Website easy to find.

- Make the Website easy to use.

- Understand your customers' issues.

- Provide clear and readable content.

- Offer multichannel choice.

- Capture citizen feedback about the Web experience.

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[15] Sign up for SSA e-mail updates: ssa.gov/govdelivery; SSA Webinar information: ssa.gov/Webinars.

[16] SSA mobile for general public: http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov; SSA mobile for employers: http://employer-ssa.custhelp.com; SSA mobile support in Spanish: http://ssa-es.custhelp.com.

- Optimize your site's performance.

- Deliver a personalized experience.

- Ensure that your site is accessible.

Best Practices for Better Web Experiences

Although there are many ways to implement these best practices, the following provide some simple, high-impact examples:

- **Make the Website easy to find.** Prominently display a link to your self-service area; visitors will appreciate the convenience. For instance, on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Farm Service Agency (FSA) Website, Online Services is prominently displayed as a front-and-center top tab. Once an individual creates an account, he or she can access several e-services.

- **Make the Website easy to use.** For instance, underline all Web links but understand that too many hyperlinks can be overwhelming. Knowing when to link—and when not to—is essential. The content-rich Website for the CMS demonstrates this distinction. On the CMS.gov home page, highlighted hyperlinks take the public to Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, and Regulations and Guidance, with a list showing what links they will find on each subsite.

- **Understand your customers' issues.** Your visitors should be able to easily identify where they need to go to find information and get help, and then navigate there without a problem. Such is the experience of users on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Website (CBP.gov). Here, visitors can quickly identify their options and access desired information. A menu on the left side of the page displays five options: Advisories, Contacts, Questions/Complaints, Forms, and En Español. A revolving banner at the top alerts visitors to CBP News. A box on the left shows the National Terrorism Advisory System's alert status. And a box on the lower right side of the page features a "how to" with embedded video.

- **Provide clear and readable content.** Make sure your content is written at a level almost anyone can understand (for example, an eighth-grade level). To learn about applying for Medicare, for instance, citizens can visit the SSA site, where they are directed to an Apply Online for Medicare page as one of the top SSA services. The page—ssa.gov/medicareonly—provides information in a conversational style that makes it easy to read and understand.

- **Offer multichannel choice.** Giving customers the option of e-mail, phone, chat, or mobile communications broadens your ability to serve them. Visitors to the virtual assistant known as Ask Karen can get many questions answered 24 hours a day.[17] They can also submit questions on forms and receive answers within seven days. Or, they can go on live chat and communicate with a

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[17] Ask Karen: fsis.usda.gov/ask_karen/.

customer service representative during the designated hours. Mobile phone users are directed to m.askkaren.gov.

- **Capture citizen feedback about the Web experience.** Consider collecting feedback that allows you to improve or remove content based on ratings or comments. Responsive agencies use Web analytics to identify citizens' queries and clicks, and then adjust their Websites based on this data. At FSIS, these analytics allow the agency's Web team to see where its customers are coming from, what tasks they want to perform, and what needs to be changed or modified to accommodate these customers. At CBP, the ability to gather feedback from end users when they're interacting with the Web increases the opportunity to receive and respond to customer comments and recommendations.

- **Optimize your site's performance.** Consider load times when adding customizations to your site. Slow load times are frustrating and can cause visitors' attention to wander.

- **Deliver a personalized experience.** For instance, use an e-mail address for registration (rather than a unique username) so that visitors don't need to recall anything special to go online. If a user registers, ask how they'd like to be addressed in future visits to your site, and then "recognize" them by this name when they return.

- **Ensure that your site is accessible.** With Section 508, Web accessibility is an imperative—not an option—for all federal Websites. The SSA addresses this matter with its own page, Accessibility Help. Agencies that adjust their Websites to better meet citizens' needs will send a message that they value the individuals and organizations visiting these sites. This provides a powerful takeaway for visitors and a positive outcome for the agencies.

Conclusion

From the White House and the Office of Management and Budget to every U.S. agency, from customer-citizens to every business that must comply with U.S. law, outstanding service expectations drive organizational behavior. Whether it's top down or bottom up, the trend is a demand for measurable improvement in accuracy, speed of responses, and integrated multichannel options. Currently, more than 170 government agencies rely on Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service products to answer the call for better citizen service. These products assist agencies in the following areas:

- Creating Web self-service for citizen inquiries

- Integrating online chat with existing communication

- Providing customer response via mobile devices

- Reducing e-mail volumes by improving Website functionality

- Surveying customers to get information for service improvements

With Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service products, organizations in the public and private sectors experience dramatic, measurable results. Empowered customers find answers online, with self-service rates of up to 99 percent, as in the case of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Contact

center demand often diminishes with a decline in call volumes of up to 30 percent, as was the case with a national tax preparation company that implemented Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service solutions. Less time is required for individual e-mail responses, thanks to reducing e-mail volumes by an average of 50 percent—an accomplishment achieved by three separate online retailers. And finally, overall costs may decline by 30 percent or more, as proven by the tax preparation service that was able to reduce costs in its contact center.

Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service solutions help federal agencies trim costs while meeting mandates. Whatever the online initiative to improve customer experience, Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service offers opportunities and options to positively transform citizen experiences and agencies' workloads.

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