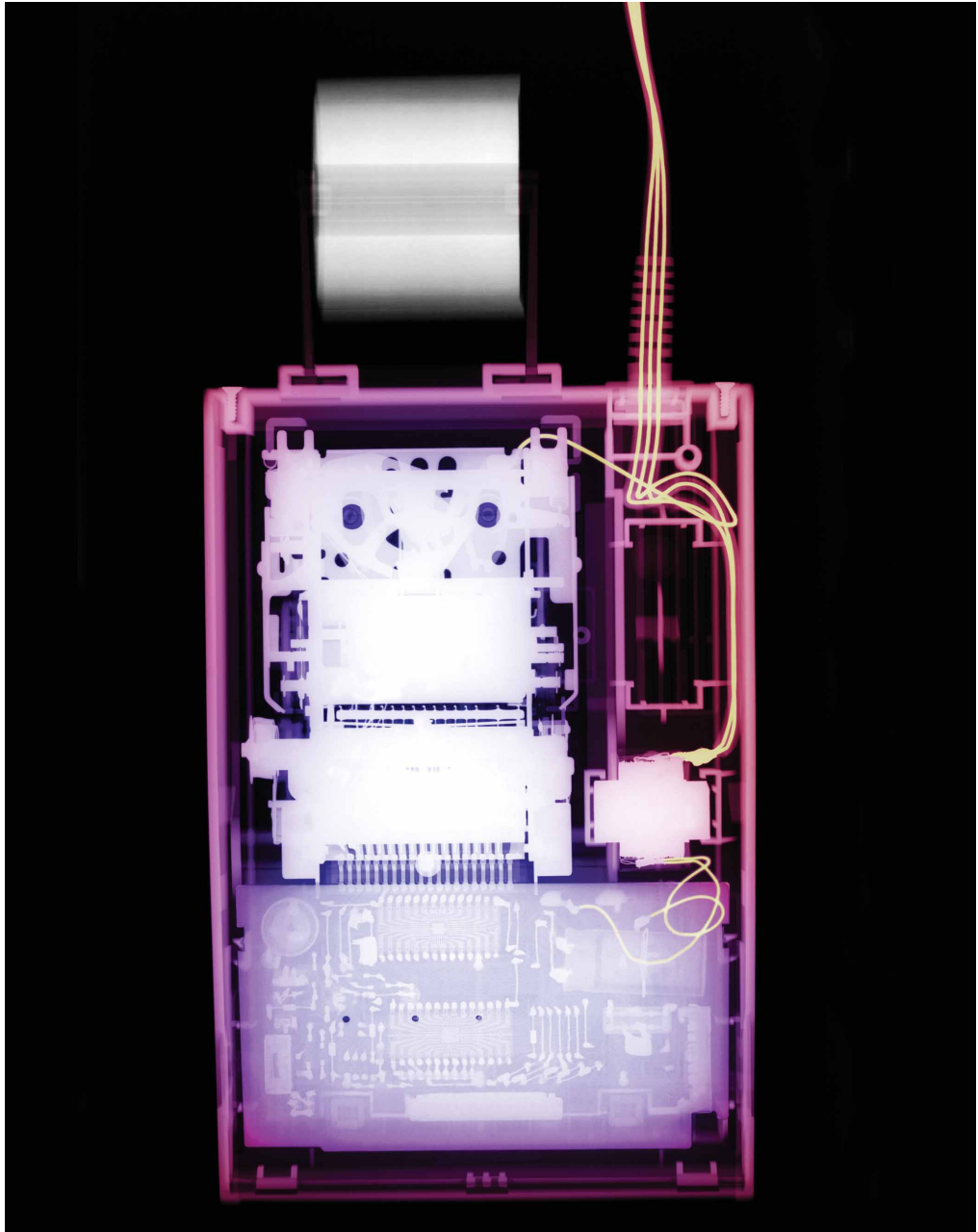


Transparent Government Solutions

Full Strategic Report at:

[www GCN.com/TransparentGov](http://www.GCN.com/TransparentGov)



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We The People

Federal CIO Vivek Kundra is leading government transparency and open government initiatives.

Transparent: *adjective* – free from pretense or deceit; easily detected or seen through; readily understood; characterized by visibility or accessibility of information especially concerning business practices.

Transparency: *noun* – the quality or state of being transparent.

Source: Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

The public wants – and has always had the right – to know. But B.I. (Before Internet), it was often hard to get publicly available information, because it was in print form only, or only available if you came to Washington, DC or it just took a long time to get a response to a FOIA request.

The Internet has changed all that and today our government is not only promising, but actively becoming a leader of the transparency and open government movement often referred to as Government 2.0, powered by Web 2.0 technologies.

A powerful new voice in this transparency movement made his first public comments on March 12, 2009. A standing room only audience of government and industry managers and technologists filled the hall at FOSE 2009 to hear the first public words of Vivek Kundra, recently named the Federal Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the White House by President Obama.

1105 Government Information Group Custom Media listened as Kundra reminded the audience that one of the first acts in President Obama's administration was to sign a memorandum about transparency and open government. And that transparency is going to be one of the key agenda items that will drive the Administration.

“What is transparency? What does transparency in open government look like?” asked Kundra. In his answer he urged the audience to visit www.recovery.gov and see the Administration's model at work.

(This is) “a leading indicator of what you can expect from this administration in terms of engaging citizens, making sure that we put information out there in the public domain and a different worldview of what it means to be a citizen... [What] the idea of citizenship in terms of civic participation and transparency or open government allows you to do is to embrace the notion that the government is about we the people and that it's taxpayer dollars that are being spent,” declared Kundra.

Participation, visibility, accountability are central pillars of

what transparency provides. Kundra says it allows people to participate in the public civic process, to look at where their money is going, how it's being spent and to hold the government officials accountable.

Tracking where the money is going is only one element of transparency. Full disclosure of government rule making and how government programs are operating are two others, but there are many, many more – and many, many more waiting to be discovered.

“If you look at what happened when data has been democratized, when data has been put in the public domain, you've had an explosion of innovation.”

Vivek Kundra, Federal CIO, The White House

Kundra further told the audience that another model they can expect to see is the idea of a Data.gov platform. How important is this? It changes the mindset of government – meaning that information will be published with the core assumption that data should be open and available to the people, rather than being held out of the public domain.

“If you look at what happened when data has been democratized, when data has been put in the public domain, you've had an explosion of innovation,” Kundra explained.

Engaging Citizens

During his talk Kundra spoke about the four central pillars anchoring Administration efforts – transparency, engaging citizens, lowering the cost of government operations and finding the innovative path.

“You're beginning to see this with what the New Media team is doing on www.WhiteHouse.gov, which is opening up the government and at the same time allowing people to engage in terms of the public debate,” added Kundra.

Central to transparency are Web 2.0 technologies. As government turns more and more to these social networking and collaborative tools, Kundra is calling on a governmentwide effort to “re-engineer on the back end, not the technologies but the staff and the teams within agencies to make sure that they're better positioned to take advantage of some of these technologies and drive hard in

that direction.”

With a government that has more than 4 million federal staffers and more than 10,000 IT systems, this is not going to happen overnight.

The old sayings “Rome wasn't built in a day” and “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” really apply here, because this isn't going to be easy. And there are issues to overcome. Some are generational and one is especially in the area of security as Web 2.0 tools put more strain on agency infrastructures and security policies.

This puts the onus on government security leaders to develop high level strategies and practical policies that view threats as a whole; ones that hinge on having a total security architecture; ones where managing risk becomes acceptable and is the norm; ones where there is a balance between collaboration and social networking and legitimate security concerns; and ones where the security focus shifts from protecting the perimeter to protecting data at rest and in motion.

At the same time, as a result of the Stimulus Package, government is creating thousands of jobs, putting added pressure on identity management capabilities to coordinate identities across systems.

So, if there are going to be information exchanges and collaborations in the spirit of openness between agencies, then it is essential to protect data already in the system. At the same time it is imperative that when agencies use “social networking” and other collaborative tools, people are confident that the person or the machine they are communicating with is authenticated.

Expert Views

In 2006, then Senator Barack Obama and Senator Tom Coburn introduced legislation requiring the full disclosure of all organizations receiving federal funds through an online database operated by OMB. The result was the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 which created www.USAspending.gov. Now there is a site where you can view online basically all federal contracts, and you can see how much has been spent, you can see the actual contracts of where the money is going.

After the 2006 elections, House Democrats pledged they would enact legislation to “restore accountability, honesty, and openness at all levels of government.” The result was the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007, which requires that information about earmarks be published on a public, searchable Web site forty-eight hours before a vote can be taken on the bill containing the earmarks.

These laws and much of the transparency focus has been, due to the economy and current events, on “following the

money”. But just as essential is a transparency and openness between the federal government and their state and local counterparts and between government agencies themselves about a host of topics. There is so much to be gained through the new mantra which espouses the “responsibility to share”.

What could be written about transparency is almost limitless. What this Snapshot does is approach the topic from the perspective of those intimately involved in making the promise of open government a promise that government will keep.

In the Snapshot, you'll read about the efforts of Greg Elin, open government evangelist from the Sunlight Foundation; Jerry Brito, senior research fellow at George Mason University and Teresa Nasif, the acting deputy associate administrator for the Office of Citizen Services at GSA. Plus you'll find a host of resources you can use to begin your transparency and open government efforts. □

New Media: The New Way Of Doing Business

Transparency, participation and collaboration are the cornerstones of the new way government does business.

On the day after his inauguration, President Obama turned longstanding promises into action. His now famous January 21, 2009 memo to all department and agency heads clearly spelled out what he expected government to do to make it more transparent and open.

“My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government,” wrote the President.

And he gave marching orders that by May 21, 2009, OMB and GSA are to collaboratively develop recommendations for an Open Government Directive that will be issued and implemented by OMB.

So, with the stroke of his pen, the President took New Media mainstream.

New Media Mission

“We started to use the term New Media,” said Teresa Nasif, the acting deputy associate administrator for the Office of Citizen Services at GSA in a recent interview with 1105 Government Information Group Custom Media.

Nasif explained the White House now has a director of New Media and that most agencies will have directors of New Media to guide the movement to a transparent government.

Nasif defined New Media as not TV, radio and print (traditional media), but a complete online presence including Web 1.0 and new social networking tools (Web 2.0). “The whole online citizen experience is covered by the New Media.”

Nasif is also a member of the Federal Web Managers Council that has authored two position papers *Putting Citizens First: Transforming Online Government*; and *Social Media and the Federal Government: Perceived and Real Barriers and Potential Solutions*. (Download from www.webcontent.gov)

She urged her federal colleagues to go to www.usa.gov and check out the Web 2.0 page and to www.webcontent.gov to read these thought leadership papers of how agencies are using online

and New Media tools to achieve agency objectives. “Going and seeing what others are doing is a fabulous first step, because the next few years are going to be transformational.”

Nasif said that this is an exciting time for the community because the Administration believes in Web 2.0 and Government 2.0 and that the time between now and the May 21 deadline is being used to look at the obstacles, see how to overcome the barriers and offer possible solutions to help agencies be more transparent and citizens to become more engaged.

Web 2.0 is a communications tool, it is not IT infrastructure. When at your computer you log on and give your opinion. Wait, you don't even have to be at your computer – your laptop, PDA or Smartphone will do.

Inconsistency in government policies meant that agencies had different rules for using New Media social networking tools. Some agencies did not have access to Facebook or YouTube. “What we are doing is to encourage agencies to examine their missions and think about how they can use New Media tools to get information about what they are doing out to the public and then engage them,” said Nasif.

Goals & Obstacles

Government agencies have to be where the people are declared Nasif.

“There are 175 million on Facebook. How can we not want to be in a room with 175 million where you can talk about your programs, what you have to offer and describe your mission? You have to be part of conversation; you have to be there because that is where the people are.”

Nasif advocates establishing Web communications as a core government business function so that the public can:

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Easy & Accessible

Citizen-engaging technology can make government data available online, easy to access, and understandable.

On Friday, March 6, 2009, President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder announced the allocation of \$2 billion in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to control crime and improve the criminal justice system. You can follow the money on www.recovery.gov.

Following the money is what most American's have on their minds these days when they think of transparency and open government. And this website allows them to do just that. It is one important solution for a transparent government, but just one.

“Do a Google search for DC Data Catalog (<http://data.octo.dc.gov/>) and hopefully this is what Data.gov will look like, but obviously for the federal government,” explained Jerry Brito, senior research fellow at Virginia's George Mason University in a recent interview with 1105 Government Information Group Custom Media.

Brito is the author the author of *“Hack, Mash, and Peer: Crowdsourcing Government Transparency,”* published last year in the Columbia Science and Technology Law Review. What he is describing is what Federal CIO Vivek Kundra did when he was CTO for Washington, DC.

What Kundra did with the DC Data Catalog was very simple according to Brito.

“Every government agency in DC has its own IT system they use to process their cases, whatever they do. So for example police department arrest records go into their computer system. Every time a water pipe is fixed or one is recorded broken, it goes into a computer system. The same thing for Metro system bus and train schedules. All are on computer systems,” explained Brito.

“These are all internal IT systems the government has access to. So what Kundra did is basically build a pipe between the systems and the Web. And they are all in one place and they are just XML feeds or other kinds of structured raw data feeds that anybody can take and use.”

What makes this fantastic according to Brito is that third parties, whether they are watchdog groups, citizen groups, academics or Web application developers can take this data and do amazing things with them.

Activating Transparency

Brito explained for example that a developer took the feed

Tools include RSS feeds, mashups, which highlight hidden connections between different data sets, and crowdsourcing, which makes light work of sifting through mountains of data by focusing thousands of eyes on a particular set of data.



for alcohol licenses and bars and plotted it on a map. Then they took crime statistics from another data feed and plotted it on a map on top of that. You could now see the relationship visually, which is a great tool for the police.

“Another is called 'we the people wiki' where they took data feeds of different things that were being reported, street light bulbs out, potholes and they created a wiki page automatically for each of these reports,” explained Brito.

“Citizens can go there and use the wiki to track whether the thing has been fixed and keep their government accountable. So if you make the data available, third parties can do amazing things with it. And that's what I'm hoping will happen with Data .gov.”

RSS and Mashups

Brito thinks what is driving the transparency revolution is that communications and storage technologies have become so cheap. Combine this with the fact that there is all this data publicly available by law and people are demanding more data be available on line then you can

use it in interesting ways.

“For example RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds are just a raw data feeds. If the government makes those feeds available, third parties can take them and do interesting things,” explained Brito.

RSS usually refers to a family of data formats that allows the automation and aggregation of data. For example, if a website offers an RSS feed for its homepage, you can subscribe to these feeds with a desktop application or Web-based “feed reader”.

“Anytime something is added to the homepage, it is simultaneously published in the site's RSS feed,” said Brito. “When subscribers turn on their feed reader, it checks all the subscribed feeds for new items. So, with one simple feed reader application, a user can keep track of multiple feeds without having to regularly visit the Web sites of the publisher.”

What happens then is third parties can make mashups. “Mashups are when you take two or more of those feeds and you combine them to create new and interesting tools,” Brito said. “So you can take a combination of arrest records or crime records and alcohol licensing on top of a map, that is a mashup and it's very interesting. So now this new thing is more useful than either of those things standing alone.”

Liberating Government

So what is that going to mean for the government staffer and IT professional? What are they going to have to do other things that they are not doing now?

Brito said that if agencies aren't providing RSS feeds now, they will have to. But what this really does according to Brito is liberate government from having to worry about the presentation of data.

“If they can give us the raw data, everything, they don't have to worry about creating the maps, about creating different presentations for the data. Third parties can take it and create a million different presentations.”

“If the government creates one presentation and that's not exactly what you wanted, you are stuck with that one view. But if you provide the raw data you can go out and create your own or you can look around and maybe someone else has built it,” Brito declared.

While mashups can help ease the information overload by highlighting the most interesting connections among data sets, human judgment is still necessary to determine the most relevant facts said Brito. “Crowdsourcing presents the key to sifting through the data made available by official disclosures, hacks, and mashups.” That's because the more eyes you have studying the data the more you are likely you are able to spot problems and offer solutions.

For all this to happen there has to be some standards for recovery of data. “You want all agencies to be reporting how much money they are spending on the different projects and what they are getting for their money,” said Brito. “But you want all the agencies to report it in the same ways. For example let's say, imagine it as an excel sheet and you would have a row and that row represents a project. And then you have columns. It's just making sure the columns are the same for all agencies.”

Structured Data

Brito went on to say that even when public information is available online, it is often not available in an easily accessible form. And to allow users to exploit the full potential of the Internet-to subscribe to data streams, to mix and match data sources-data must be presented in a structured machine-readable format.

“Structured data,” Brito said, “is a term of art, meaning that information is presented in a format that allows computers to easily parse and manipulate it. Although a static Web page that lists a series of news stories is not structured, it may have a companion XML file containing the same information. A structured XML file would allow a user to sort the data by ascending or descending date, alphabetically and in many other ways that a static Web page does not afford.”

It would also allow users to download the data. Brito said the benefit of a download of the data is that with the complete data set computers can help people delve more deeply into the data and put it in new forms, such as charts and maps, that would be too time consuming to create by hand.

The bottom line said Brito is “If government data are made available online in useful and flexible formats, citizens will be able to utilize modern Internet tools to shed light on government activities.” And deliver more solutions for a transparent government. □

Spreading Sunlight

If you look at the history of the Internet, it has always been about creating a fertile soil for people to do interesting things at the edge of the network.

Alexander Ovechkin is not only an outstanding hockey player for the Washington Capitals, but he is an outstanding example of how an innovator can come along and can change the way an organization operates.

For years, the Capitals were plodding along, but when Ovechkin arrived all of a sudden their victory total shot up like the blade of a hockey stick, making the Capitals a prime example of what a “hockey stick” graph looks like.

Like the Washington Capitals, the “hockey stick” graph can be applied to Web 2.0 technologies explained Greg Elin of the Sunlight Foundation in a recent interview with 1105 Government Information Group Custom Media.

Sunlight’s goal is through grant-making, blogging, projects and technical leadership, to use the power of the Internet to shine a light on the interplay of money, lobbying, influence and government in Washington in ways never before possible. In Elin’s words, “we want to be a catalyst for using the Internet for greater transparency and accountability in understanding the workings of government.”

Sunlight’s rays have already shone on projects such as Open Congress, Open Secrets.org and MapLight.org. Through its Sunlight Labs, it helped build Congresspedia and funded OMBwatch.

“Right now in 2009, we are starting to hit that hockey curve of adoption of government transparency and Web 2.0 technology,” exclaimed Elin. “It is suddenly exploding.”

According to Elin the other word for transparency these days is the web. “I’m really excited looking at the www.recovery.gov and the other agency dot gov/recovery web pages and web sections that have launched, because I think what we are seeing is the blossoming of a lot of forces that have been at work for a while and some that are coming into being.”

Being a catalyst is important said Elin because “if you look at the history of the Internet and the history of the web, it has always been about creating a fertile soil for people to do interesting things at the edge of the network and connecting to each other rather than a fixed solution to a problem.”

Creating Model Behavior

One of the powerful things about Web 2.0 is that anybody can model behavior for the government. What we are learning from Web 2.0 is that is while the public needs

online content, online no longer means just publishing it for a human to read. It also means publishing content for a machine to read, thus online means being both human and machine friendly.

Popular websites such as Flickr and Facebook have openness to other software and machine participation. They have APIs (an application programming interface, which is a set of routines, data structures, object classes and/or protocols that support the building of applications) that allow other developers to extend and add value whether it’s to software or to data.

According to Elin, if you focus on making your information really friendly to human beings first, and you postpone making it machine friendly, what happens is you target your services to one or two communities and that’s it.

“If instead you make it friendly for humans and machines in the beginning, you end up creating something that’s easier for you to use, that’s easier to share, and that’s easier for other people to build upon,” said Elin. “And on the web success is really about other people linking to, remixing, and building upon your information. That’s what success is on the web, because the web is a network.”

So as an IT professional, if you design your information so that it’s easier for other people to use, it turns out that it’s easier for you to use. Prime examples of this are www.cdc.gov and www.irs.gov said Elin. And since the Web is a very plastic agile medium, what we did in the labs was make stuff rapidly; working side by side with subject matter experts so that everybody got the feel of what was possible.”

A concrete example of what Elin promotes is in the 2006 elections Sunlight went through the HHS budget bill for FY07, identifying earmarks in the bill and just typing them into a spread sheet. “We put those earmarks on a Google map and published a web page with the Google map and the earmarks,” Elin explained. “Now you could look up by zip code and it would zoom in to a particular scaled area of your zip code and you could actually see earmarks that were in that zip code.” That was the first time this was ever done.

Getting It

With technology when people “get it” is when they have a visceral personal experience, such as having a live video call
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Web 2.0 and Social Networking Tools For A Transparent Government

What Is Social Media and Web 2.0? According to www.webcontent.gov, Social Media and Web 2.0 are umbrella terms that define the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media use the “wisdom of crowds” to connect information in a collaborative manner online. Through social media, individuals or collaborations of individuals create web content, organize content, edit or comment on content, combine content, and share content.

On January 21, President Obama took new media in the federal government became mainstream. Here is the memo that launched the government's Transparency and Open Government commitment. Then look below for links you can use for transparency, participation and collaboration.

Memorandum For The Heads Of Executive Departments And Agencies

DATE: January 21, 2009

FROM: President Barack Obama

SUBJECT: Transparency and Open Government

My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.

Government should be transparent. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing. Information maintained by the Federal Government is a national asset. My Administration will take appropriate action, consistent with law and policy, to disclose information rapidly in forms that the public can readily find and use. Executive departments and agencies should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public feedback to identify information of greatest use to the public.

Government should be participatory. Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge. Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate

in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public input on how we can increase and improve opportunities for public participation in Government.

Government should be collaborative. Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government. Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector. Executive departments and agencies should solicit public feedback to assess and improve their level of collaboration and to identify new opportunities for cooperation.

I direct the Chief Technology Officer, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Administrator of General Services, to coordinate the development by appropriate executive departments and agencies, within 120 days, of recommendations for an Open Government Directive, to be issued by the Director of OMB, that instructs executive departments and agencies to take specific actions implementing the principles set forth in this memorandum. The independent agencies should comply with the Open Government Directive.

This memorandum is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

This memorandum shall be published in the Federal Register.

Resources and Links

More From www.webcontent.gov

Social media and Web 2.0 use uses many technologies and forms, including RSS and other syndicated web feeds, blogs, wikis, photo-sharing, video-sharing, podcasts, social networking, social bookmarking, mashups, widgets, virtual worlds, micro-blogs, and more.

- *Overview: Government and Social Media Presentation* (PDF, 7,019 KB, 3/2008, 71 pgs, requires Adobe Acrobat Reader)
- *Barriers and Solutions to Implementing Social Media and Web 2.0 in Government* Recommendations from

leaders of the Federal Web Managers Council, December 2008 (PDF, 55 KB, 12/2008, 4 pgs, requires Adobe Acrobat Reader)

- *Examples of Agencies Using Online Content and Technology to Achieve Mission and Goals* (PDF, 45KB, 5 pgs, November 2008, requires Adobe Acrobat Reader)
- *Matrix of Web 2.0 Technology Tools and Government* (PDF, 45 KB, 3/2008, 2 pgs, requires Adobe Acrobat Reader)

Some Forms of Social Media

- Blogs
- Microblogging
- Podcasting
- RSS Feeds
- Social Media Releases
- Social Networks and Government
- Web Chat (Live Support Software)
- Wikis
- Virtual Worlds

Resources

- Records Management and Recent Web Technologies

www.USA.gov 2.0 Tools

- **Gov Gab Blog** – Gov Gab's six bloggers share tips and information from the federal government to help you make life a little simpler. Read along each weekday and comment and share your own experiences.
- **Government News** – Get the latest RSS feeds from across the federal government.
- **Reference and General Government Gadgets** – Breaking government news, GovGab blog...
- **RSS Feeds from USA.gov and the Federal Citizen Information Center** – Subscribe to RSS feeds from USA.gov and the Federal Citizen Information Center.
- **USA.gov E-mail Subscriptions** – Receive an e-mail notification any time one of your favorite USA.gov pages is updated.
- **USA.gov on Twitter** – Follow us on Twitter to stay up to date on the latest official government news and information.
- **USA.gov Tutorials** – Get help finding government information and services online.
- **USA.gov Word Cloud** – See the 75 most popular words on USA.gov.
- **Videos from USA.gov** – Watch videos from USA.gov with our accessible video player.
- **Web Chat** – Live personal assistance now available weekdays from 8:00 AM until 8:00 PM Eastern Time

Government-Wide 2.0 Tools

- **Blogs from the U.S. Government** – Read blogs from various U.S. government sources.
- **Government Gadget Gallery** – Explore gadgets from across the government.
- **Government RSS Library** – Library of RSS feeds from across the government
- **Podcasts from the U.S. Government** – Listen to podcasts from across the government.
- **Videos from the U.S. Government** – Links to public domain videos that may be used and reproduced without permission or fee
- **Virtual Tours from the U.S. Government** – View virtual tours created by federal government agencies.

More Open Government Sites

- www.whitehouse.gov
- www.recovery.gov/
- www.openthegovernment.org/
- http://freegovinfo.info/
- www.sunshineweek.org/index.cfm?id=7204
- www.wellstone.org/blog/transparency-and-accountability-government
- www.sunlightfoundation.com/
- www.opensecrets.org/
- www.sunlightlabs.com/
- www.opencongress.org/
- www.maplight.org/

Some Social Networking Sites

- Ask
- Backflip
- BallHype
- Bebo
- Blinklist
- Blogmarks
- Delicious
- Digg
- Diigo
- Facebook
- Fark
- Faves
- Favorites
- FriendFeed
- Furl
- Google Bookmarks
- Kaboodle
- Link-a-Gogo
- LinkedIn
- Live
- Mister Wong
- Mixx
- Multiply
- myAOL
- MySpace
- Netvouz
- Newsvine
- Propeller
- Reddit
- Segnalo
- Simpy
- Slashdot
- Spurl
- StumbleUpon
- Tailrank
- Technorati
- Twitter
- Yahoo Bookmarks
- Yahoo Buzz
- Yardbarker
- FeedMeLinks

IT: To Be Or Not To Be Social?

The key IT benefit of introducing social computing to end users is that IT can provide the right tools to solve business problems.

All across government, departments and agencies are busy hiring Directors of New Media to facilitate the transformation to a transparent and open government.

As GSA's Teresa Nasif told 1105 Government Information Group recently, Web 2.0 tools are communications tools; they are not IT infrastructure tools. But as agency after agency begins to embrace Social Networking and other collaboration tools the question government IT managers naturally focus on is "what it's in it for me?"

While no one questions the value of following stimulus spending on www.recovery.gov, government IT managers must be clear in their own minds of what exactly they are gaining as there is always a tradeoff between collaboration and security, and how to define, accept and manage risk.

There are several ways in which Social Networking tools can provide benefits. For example, the technologies enable users to collaborate on projects or business opportunities irrespective of physical or time separation wrote Microsoft's Alina Fu in a June 2008 White Paper on the value of social computing to businesses.

Drawing upon a US CIO Confidence Poll Online Survey¹ conducted December 2006, Fu said businesses embrace Social Networking because it "improves the efficiency and productivity of the business, encourages creativity, sets the organization apart as an innovator and addresses a gap with the capture and management of knowledge."

IDC estimated that information workers spend 9% of their day searching for information.² Much of this research time is affected by the lack of IT sources that capture the proper data. Today, better information and knowledge management systems are saving time and minimizing redundant inquiries. Thus, the key IT benefit of introducing Social Networking to the end users is that IT can provide the right tools for end users to solve business problems.

By doing that, IT enables users to collaborating effectively and push germane information to the targeted audience. And they can be more than a cost center according to Fu. They can deliver the right technologies to improve business processes.

Other benefits according to Fu are that the IT department is able to directly benefit from the use of Enterprise 2.0 technologies as well. "For instance, IT can leverage wiki technology to create a FAQ for call centers. IT customer service representatives are able to quickly locate responses

to commonly asked enquiries as well as refine the standard responses on the FAQ wiki when necessary. IT leaders may also use RSS feeds to push information out and enable audience targeting to distribute different announcements that are relevant to respective product support groups."



Because the IT department is responsible for agency infrastructure, it has the knowledge and expertise to integrate social computing solutions smoothly into the agency environment.

"IT departments recognize that vendor solutions that offer governance and control are 'enterprise ready,'" explained Fu. "Thus, they will be more likely to implement and deploy such environments more quickly and seamlessly."

Every Workplace Task

Collaboration is at the heart of New Media technologies. And tools are readily available and familiar to most users. Social Networking applications can be applied practically everywhere in the workplace. IT managers will be looking closely at the technologies that allow them to leverage applications that provide the most practical value.

In the areas of oversight and transparency, project managers are looking for IT to provide them with tools that provide strong reporting capabilities, ease and familiarity of use. At the same time program and portfolio managers are looking for IT solutions that provide a complete and accessible investment inventory, enable project reporting, ease of access and support telework initiatives.

If government is truly to be transparent and open, then managers and users need tools that streamline communications, allow them to collaborate securely and demonstrate compliance and accountability. At the same time IT departments must open up government to citizens through the use of cutting edge technologies that create a new level of transparency, accountability and participation. The good news is they are already doing so. □

¹US CIO Confidence Poll Online Survey, December 2006

²IDC, 2005

continued from page s4, New Media

- Easily find relevant, accurate, and up-to-date information
- Understand information the first time they read it
- Complete common tasks efficiently
- Get the same answer whether they use the web, phone, email, live chat, read a brochure, or visit in-person
- Provide feedback and ideas and hear what the government will do with them
- Access critical information if they have a disability or aren't proficient in English.

But there are obstacles which the implementation of the new Open Government Directive will have to overcome.

Nasif said the government will have to overcome obstacles such as cultural issues and a lack of a strategy for using these new tools; providing employee access to online tools; developing governmentwide terms of service; how to deal with advertising on social networking sites; how to procure tools governmentwide and not have each agency develop its own solution; how to protect privacy; how to deal with persistent cookies; providing access for people with disabilities and general administrative requirements during rulemaking.

One major obstacle according to Nasif is that many of Social Media providers have terms of service agreements that agencies would have to sign that would present problems for federal users.

To solve that issue Nasif said there is an interagency group working to come up with a governmentwide agreement so a YouTube wouldn't have to work out

individual agreements with every agency. At the same time this will offer agencies a standard agreement that works across government, which they could sign or not sign.

“Getting It”

The idea of having governmentwide New Media tools illustrates the fact with New Media tools it won't be “business as usual”. Obama's memo says the policy will be governmentwide, so agencies will have to embrace openness and transparency.

Nasif said this will be a challenge for the vendor community. “The vendor community has to think about developing and selling governmentwide tools. There is an inclination to use agreed upon costs and make available of a standard set of tools that agencies can tap into, so that agencies can save money and be cost effective and won't have to start from square one.”

If your agency is just getting started with New Media, Nasif counseled that you start with your mission. “Ask what is it that I want to do and how you go about it with New Media.”

She thinks agencies should look at the CDC website. “They started with this is our goal and how are we going to use the tools. They aren't using them for the sake of it, but for getting information out to public.”

For example CDC used New Media during the recent peanut recall. “I'm standing in line at the store and I get a text from CDC saying 'don't buy that product'. How cool is that.” □

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or getting stock prices on your mobile phone. “These are very visceral experiences. So I think that one of the ways we used the technology was to make the data more presentable and to create visceral experiences.”

Elin says that what Sunlight does is make that data more understandable to people and sometimes that means putting it into a friendlier data format so that other developers can work with it. “Sometimes it means creating a web site as in the case of www.fedspending.org; sometimes it means creating visualizations like the earmarks. These are ways of presenting the information so that it becomes easier to work with - for example the Obama and Coburn sponsored Federal Financial and Accountability Transparency Act in 2006 which told OMB to create an end-user searchable web site of government contracting grants.”

Words Of Wisdom

Frequency drives efficiency – especially in information exchanges noted Elin. “If you have to design for information exchange up front, then you have to think about it in terms

of real time or near real time information exchanges,” said Elin. “Having to deal with the information exchange every day or every week that forces IT organizations and individuals to create efficiencies around that exchange, and that includes efficiencies of security.”

The bottom line according to Elin is Web 2.0 and transparency makes information exchange horizontal and if people really adopt the technology then the silos will begin to shrink because the information will be shared and people can comment on it, people can add to it, people can collaborate in real time as it is going on.

Finally Elin is realistic in terms of making changes. “You don't change everything at once,” he counseled.

“The best way to start sharing your information is to work with someone's information they are sharing and begin to add that value to your information with their information.

So start on someone else's project. And identify low risk interesting experiments that involve short term investment. Because everyone has to learn how these things work and understand what tools we have.” □

A World Of Choice, A World Of Opportunity

It's a time of unprecedented change and challenge for a still-new Obama administration. This country's leaders are under pressure to scrutinize every dollar spent while, at the same time, provide new levels of citizen services – at lower costs.

There is also excitement that this re-examination offers fresh opportunities for growth.

In this new environment, technology is an enabler. The rise of social networking tools in recent years creates the expectation of stronger interaction and collaboration not only with citizens but also within and across government agencies.

This vision of Government 2.0, with its core tenants of transparency, collaboration and participation, is driving deeper discussions around what open government can mean to the government enterprise. Microsoft sees three key pillars to a truly open government: Transparency, Choice and Interoperability.

True Transparency

The transformations that need to come about in government require thinking differently about what it means to unveil the data, and to take a hard look at creating efficiencies and accountability all across government. From cloud computing to on-premises infrastructures, government will be expected not only “to roll back the covers” to expose the underlying information government holds, but also to find ways to make that data meaningful for citizens and for meeting government's service goals.

Choice

As new tools for citizen engagement are embraced, government IT experts should take a hard look at how they structure their enterprises. Some will balance having a third party look after an agency's data (due to lower cost and lower risk), while others may choose to operate their own government cloud environments. And still others, based on management and perhaps due to mission critical considerations, may want a hybrid approach. The results of such decisions can range from cost savings to addressing new priorities.

Interoperability and Mixed Source Environments

Government customers don't take a simplistic view of their environments, nor can the industry. Because IT professionals and developers use products from a variety of vendors, success depends on interoperability. Government agencies are looking for software providers to deliver business value and to respect choice in a mixed source world, regardless of the underlying development, licensing or business model. Rarely are agencies making black and white decisions between Linux and Windows, for instance. They want to choose the best tool for a particular job. IT shops want interoperable virtualization technologies and systems management as well as cloud environments. Microsoft is working closely with customers, partners, competitors and developers, including those in open source communities, to deliver.

Today, more than 80,000 open source applications run on the Windows operating system. Beyond this, Microsoft has countless open source initiatives designed to meet the needs of IT customers...

- Introduced open source projects for JAVA and Ruby SDKs for Microsoft Azure .NET Services cloud platform
- Collaborated with Novell to stream the Presidential Inauguration live through Moonlight, an open source implementation of Microsoft Silverlight
- Enabling the development of more than 7500 projects on CodePlex, Microsoft's open source hosting site
- Supporting a wide range of document formats in Microsoft Office 2007, including ODF, PDF and XPS as of April 28
- 77,000 of 147,000 SourceForge projects run on Microsoft Windows

Collaboration with Industry and Government

Microsoft recognizes that being open to working with others helps customers and partners succeed in today's mixed source “world of choice.” Let the true collaboration begin as industry and government work together to realize the shared vision of a more connected, streamlined and open government.



To learn more visit

www.microsoft.com/government/opengov