

A STRATEGY PAPER FROM

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The New Information Democracy

Using Enterprise Content
Management to Make a Difference
with Government Services



An app is displayed at the 2012 Austin, Texas, Code for America Hackathon where people came together and used technology to build innovative solutions to improve access to city government services and information.

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The New Era of Information Democracy

"Information is the currency of democracy," a statement attributed to both Thomas Jefferson and Ralph Nader, certainly describes the ethos of our times. Today, new demands for public content are prompting state and local governments to look for ways to better meet their responsibilities and improve services through online content information access.

Several trends are behind the movement toward information democracy:

- The growing use of mobile devices by employees, citizens, elected officials, media and other stakeholders is driving expectations for easier access to government information through Web portals and self-service applications.
- Mobility also offers simplicity and flexibility for employees to deliver services in new ways — online, in the office and in the field.
- Employee requests for "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) programs are increasing. Indeed, more than 60 percent of state and local IT professionals say their agency has or is developing a policy that allows employees to use personally owned devices for work purposes.¹

Additionally, recognition is growing



Loudoun County, Va., has been recognized by the Center for Digital Government as one of the most advanced digital counties for the past nine years. All county departments that interact with the public provide certain information online, as determined by the content owners within the department, or in some cases, across multiple departments.

that information is a key government asset and making it easily accessible and usable online is essential for improving government efficiency and transparency. Although it applies only to federal agencies, President Obama's 2012 Digital Memorandum is an example of increasing mandates for governments to go digital.²

What does information democracy mean to a government IT or records management professional? "When citizens are more informed, they are more empowered to participate in government decision-making," says Bill McIntyre, division manager of Enterprise IT for Loudoun County, Va. "What's different today is that governments have much better capabilities for providing that information, allowing

users to search, filter and aggregate content much more easily than older online or paper methods."³

However, greater Web and mobile access to government content cannot ignore the imperative to maintain appropriate security and privacy protection measures. "Security and privacy concerns by necessity mean that we can never achieve a complete information democracy," says Patrick Gray, business systems applications analyst for the city of Wichita Falls, Texas. "Security versus information availability is a tightrope you have to walk carefully."⁴

In whatever way a government defines information democracy, meeting that definition today requires a solid foundation of technology and practices for enterprise content management (ECM).

How Local Governments are Creating Information Democracies

Across many departments and varied types of content, governments are using ECM systems and the Internet to bring information to the people, instead of vice versa. Soon a trip to city hall or the county courthouse may be considered a quaint activity of the past.

Bringing Text and Video Content Online

Loudoun County, Va., has been recognized by the Center for Digital Government as one of the most advanced digital counties for the past nine years.⁵ All county departments that interact with the public provide certain information online, as determined by the content owners within the department, or in some cases, across multiple departments.

“Make sure all the stakeholders are involved in the key decisions about electronic content, including security personnel, department administrators, employee users and IT support staff,” says McIntyre. “This involvement helps to address the different concerns and fears they have about changing from paper to online information access and retrieval.”

For public documents, anyone can search or retrieve what is available on the county’s website, but only designated employees can post and

update that content. Online videos of public meetings are also searchable via the content management system based on keyword tagging and closed-caption text when available.

The county’s IT department supports a large base of mobile devices issued to employees and elected officials. For example, tablets allow members of the county’s Board of Supervisors to view the documents for each meeting as an electronic file, avoiding the thousands of print pages that previously were sent to each board member by courier.⁶

Using Online Content as a Public Service

Saint John is a major city in New Brunswick and the oldest incorporated city in Canada, with City Council records dating back to 1785. “We want to be proactive about delivering as much information as we can to serve the public because that gives citizens more insights into our City Council decisions and encourages more relevant feedback,” says Patricia Anglin, corporate records manager for the city.

Content management is also important because provincial standards require that certain documents (e.g., City Council meeting minutes) be maintained in both electronic and paper format, yet the electronic format is the preferred choice for public access. In addition, New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada,

so all information on the city website is posted in English and French. As citizens and local media become familiar with how to search for city information online, they are meeting most of their needs without assistance from city staff.

Of course, there are times when a constituent wants content that isn’t available online; certain information is restricted due to privacy legislation, says Anglin. “The trend for giving citizens more information online will continue to grow, and we must ensure the quality of the information that we make available.”⁷

By posting documents online, such as City Council meeting minutes, the city of Saint John in Canada is able to meet certain provincial standards. Additionally, since the city is part of the only official bilingual province in Canada, it posts all information online in English and French.





Santa Monica's GOREquest app allows the public to submit photos of issues they encounter like potholes and graffiti. "ECM removes the barriers of time, place and manner of access because users don't have to go through an employee to get the information they want," says CIO Jory Wolf.

Removing Barriers to Information Access

In the city of Santa Monica, Calif., an ECM system allows various departments to share information appropriately with all parties who need it. "ECM removes the barriers of time, place and manner of access because users don't

have to go through an employee to get the information they want, says Jory Wolf, CIO. "We also benefit because we can tie citizens to services through the content, which improves our ability to serve them in off hours and in a way that is convenient for them."

Managing content in an integrated ECM system also allows the city to be proactive about citizen communications through its website. Here citizens can sign up to receive alerts about 30 different topics related to public safety, health, community events and more. In addition to email, the alerts can be sent via text message or phone call to serve citizens who don't have easy access to the Internet.

Mobile applications are a new offering enabled by Santa Monica's use of an ECM system. For example, a real-time parking availability app uses wireless data collected from on-street meters as well as garages and lots. Another application allows the public to submit photos of potholes and other needed street repairs, complete with GPS location and a text comment. The submitted information goes directly into the workflow system for the Public Works Department, which speeds the time to repair or resolution of the problem.⁸

In 2011, Santa Monica was listed as one of the top digital city governments in the Center for Digital Government's Digital Cities Survey.⁹

Helping Citizens Find Information Themselves

Putting council records online has been a tremendous boost to the citizen service delivered by the city of Saint Paul, Minn. "When a citizen calls for an ordinance or council resolution, they get very excited when they discover they can get it on the city website," says Shari Moore, city clerk, who takes the time to teach citizens how to access this information on their own.

With this increased accessibility comes concerns about protecting privacy and avoiding liability problems. "With more and more information out there, people are asking for more and more," says Moore. "We diligently check each document we post to make sure a citizen's privacy isn't compromised and that it can be released to the public. We also rely on the security and user privileges features in our content management system to automatically protect access to sensitive documents."¹⁰

Saving Time and Expense with Digital Tablets

Judges in the Wichita Falls, Texas, municipal court use tablets and an ECM system to enable paperless processes for court case management and for administering remote judgments to prisoners. Court clerks also use a tablet app to enter real-time updates to case files, which have been configured by IT with the necessary compliance and security

features. This flexible, online process reduces the paperwork and time required to issue a judgment in non-criminal cases, such as traffic tickets, which in turn reduces case backlogs. The city also saves funds with less paper and fewer tasks for records processing and management.

The city expects to issue tablets to employees in the City Clerk's Office and Housing Department for processing key documents. Although Patrick Gray, the city's business systems applications analyst, is working on a BYOD policy, for now he expects to support only city-owned devices. "Security is always a concern when you put something online. We need to find the right balance of customer service with the philosophy of 'lock everything up and everybody out,'" says Gray.¹¹

The Foundation Technology: Enterprise Content Management

Becoming an effective participant in this era of online information democracy requires the right IT technologies and business practices for ECM. Today's ECM systems support many essential functions for information processing and delivery.

Information self-service. An ECM system provides easy online access to government data, documents, maps and public records through automated functions for document creation,

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– Shari Moore, City Clerk, Saint Paul, Minn.

scanning, storage, processing and search. Example records include council meeting agendas and minutes, development maps and plans, and financial reports. Easier online access to information and services by citizens and other stakeholders supports government transparency.

Information integration into applications. Data and documents are stored in an ECM system with meta tags that allow easy search and retrieval by online applications. Tagging reduces costs for records management and provides simpler and more flexible access to the many diverse types of government content. An ECM system can also automate workflows and application processes based on document tags and content, to allow more collaboration for improved government operations and service to citizens.

Mobile access. Citizens and employees alike increasingly expect the ability to view and interact with government data and forms from a



smartphone, tablet, laptop or special-purpose mobile device. Web access client software allows users to search, retrieve and work on stored documents through any Web browser. Governments can also consider developing their own mobile apps that provide access to online content and forms, for use by both employees and the public. Supporting mobile access also helps government officials and employees deliver services while working at events or in the field.

Security and compliance. An ECM system accommodates policies, user roles and other controls for maintaining data security, privacy and compliance with IT governance and regulatory standards.

Enabling Information Democracy in Your Government

Expanding information access and mobility services means developing strategic action plans and policies in five critical areas.

1 Identify information assets.

An enterprise content review will identify content, forms and data across departments and functions that are suitable candidates for online access and integration into applications. The review should also determine access needs of citizens, such as presenting key content in multiple languages.

2 Get buy-in from internal users.

When choosing which content, applications and processes will become part of the ECM solution, it's important to involve all key departments, officials and staff in the decision. This involvement helps to resolve differences in goals and priorities for ECM projects, as well as concerns that accompany the changes to "how things are done around here."

3 Choose an implementation method.

Government CIOs can consider cloud-based services, in-house implementations or a hybrid model for content management. Cloud services offer the appeal of reduced investments in servers and their supporting infrastructure, as well as fast and flexible deployment. On-premises implementations offer a more customizable solution and direct control over security and availability to users.

For ECM, cloud services may be appropriate for delivering limited-scope, shared content services or unique, department-specific content and workflow projects. On-premises solutions are more appropriate for large-scale content management across a department or government. A hybrid model is also possible, where cloud-based services simplify access to publicly available content while maintaining private data in on-premises systems.

4 Resolve the paradox of control and flexibility.

When it comes to supporting easier employee access to content, a key challenge is balancing the need for necessary control over mobility with user expectations for greater work flexibility. This balance means maintaining appropriate IT controls while providing mobile access to the content and applications necessary for employees to work effectively anywhere. Indeed, in a survey of business, education and government executives, 42 percent said their organizations are pursuing both autonomy and control when allowing employees to pursue new tools and methods for performing their work.¹²

5 Define and enforce standards.

As content becomes more standardized so too, gradually, will the associated systems and applications. This standardization can be helped by decisions made early in the move to ECM about elements such as data formats, application interfaces and user tools.

"Information democracy isn't an endpoint, it's something you'll continually strive for by improving your information delivery to citizens," says Loudoun County's McIntyre.¹³

Saint Paul's Moore offers these tips for achieving success in making public data more accessible online. "Don't bite off too large of a project at one time. You won't be able to digitally convert everything in your office at once, but eventually you'll get there," she says. Then, "Be thoughtful and don't rush putting your information online, only to find out that you didn't put it up in the best manner. Take the time and use the opportunity to rethink how you do things to find a better way to handle information." As a final step, she advises being persistent about pursuing your goals for content accessibility.¹⁴

The Benefits of Enterprise Content Management

State, provincial and local governments can realize several benefits from using an ECM approach in their efforts to create an information democracy.

User empowerment. Whether employees or citizens, an ECM system allows all users to receive information in the right context on their preferred device and in their preferred working style. Employees are able to work more efficiently with less training because information and tasks are better integrated in online applications.

Standardization. Systems, applications and data can be standardized, which creates greater consistency in

the information itself, how it is presented to users and how users interact with it. Standards also allow department staff to automate electronic creation and distribution of content, which requires significantly less time and expense than paper-based processes.

Cost savings. An ECM investment reduces long-term costs for public communication, information processing and records management, an important consideration given the likelihood of continued tight budgets.

Collaboration. Employees can securely share documents and data to accomplish their work with greater ease, collaboration and productivity.

Conclusion: Using Information to Make a Difference

Santa Monica's Wolf notes that for any government, there is so much more content and so many more ways to make it available that didn't exist even a few years ago. Now, governments can also use mobile devices to make that content more available to the public and employees, and engage everyone more easily. "Citizen expectations are a wake-up call for governments that aren't doing online information delivery," says Wolf. "It can really transform your citizenry into a fully involved and engaged community that participates in decision-making."¹⁵

Endnotes

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