

CIVICENGAGE[®]

WHITEPAPER

How Smart Governments are Cutting Costs While Better Engaging Citizens



Abstract

What is eGovernment?

eGovernment (e-Gov) is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve the activities of public sector organizations. Some definitions restrict e-Gov to Internet-enabled applications only, or only to interactions between government and outside groups. Regardless of the definition nuances, over the past decade digital technology, the Internet, enterprise mobility, and social media have all changed the ways that local governments interact with their citizens. Municipalities need to learn to harness the power of e-Gov and its digital channels to better engage citizens and reduce bottom line expenses.



Introduction

The ways that citizens interact with their local governments are changing. Gone are the days of arriving at city hall between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. to take a number and wait in line. Much like the business sector embraced technology to change how it interacts with customers, local governments are finding ways to better the citizen experience using digital technology solutions.

The key to this improved service is e-Gov, the process of [delivering information](#) and [processing government transactions](#) digitally through the web and mobile applications.

e-Gov services make it [easier for citizens and businesses to conduct transactions](#) at any time of the day or night. Use of e-Gov services continues to increase, as does the demand for new digital self-service options. Citizens have come to expect online

transactions with their local governments to be both efficient and user-friendly. Citizens want to help themselves, which means local governments need to make it possible.

To learn more about how mobile technology is changing how governments interact with citizens, download our eBook: **The Realities of a Mobile-First Society for You and Your Citizens.** →



When asked about preferences in conducting business online vs. offline, a citizen of Merriam, KS said, "Anything that can be done online—do it!"

Opportunities to Achieve Greater Satisfaction Levels

According to [Statista](#) and its survey of overall U.S. customer satisfaction with e-Gov websites, as of the first quarter of 2017, customer satisfaction with e-Gov services reached a score of 75.8, as measured by the customer satisfaction index. Despite this relatively high satisfaction score, the United States still lags behind other global leaders in offering robust online citizen self-service tools. According to the [United Nations Public Administration Network](#), more countries than ever are demonstrating high levels of electronic engagement with their citizens, however, the United States, which ranked seventh in 2014 and second in 2010, has slipped to 12th in the latest rankings.

At a time when budgets, hours, and staff are shrinking, local governments are finding it increasingly difficult to manage the process of receiving, reporting, tracking, and resolving citizen-reported community issues and concerns.

In CivicPlus® studies, 70 percent of respondents indicated that with more digital interactions available on their local government website, they are more likely to interact.

Learn how implementing a citizen request management solution can help in today's digital-first society. ———>

Economic Advantages of e-Gov

Today's digitally-savvy citizens have a greater-than-ever expectation for [online services](#). According to [BigCommerce](#), 51 percent of Americans prefer to shop online, and according to [Credit Union Times](#), 56 percent of all bills are now paid online.

There are a number of [potential benefits of online services for consumers, businesses, and government](#). Benefits of online services include financial benefits to government (cost avoidance), financial benefits to consumers (both real and perceived), social benefits, and the contribution to broader government objectives. Let's break down those benefits for a closer look.

Benefits to Government

Cost avoidance is the cumulative difference between the costs of providing a service online and the costs for providing the same service offline (e.g., in person at a government office, by phone, or by mail). Calculating cost avoidance resulting from the conversion of services to an online format is not an easy task. There are differences in perception of perceived quality (level of service, efficiency, etc.) and price (actual cost, reduced time) that cannot be included in a simple calculator.

Still, a quick example can show you the potential cost savings available when local governments move some of the more common tasks online.

For example, if Service A is performed 2,000 times over a five-year period and the cost avoidance for this online service is \$10 per transaction, the total cost avoidance for this service is \$20,000.

In addition to the cost avoidance savings, moving services online can lead to other valuable benefits at the local government level.

In working with over 2,500 communities, CivicPlus has noted the following additional benefits:

- Decreased phone and foot traffic
- Improved and streamlined workflow
- Maximized employee accountability
- Improved staff efficiency
- Increased transparency

Benefits to Citizens

The major benefit of e-Gov that online [consumers enjoy is self-service](#) at any hour of the day or night, including weekends and holidays. This avoids waiting on hold or taking time away from busy schedules to visit city hall. Savings to the citizen can be calculated in time, transportation expense, loss of work productivity, etc.

The less obvious benefits include citizen involvement, a sense of community, and the opportunity to offer feedback and interact on a digital forum. These benefits can be incalculable for both the citizen and the government.

In its most basic form, citizen input requires a citizen to act—to give some sort of information or energy to his or her government. Simple transactions are a smart place to start. As BigCommerce reports, 96 percent of Americans have made an online purchase in their life, and 80 percent in the past month alone. Citizens are expecting online self-service conveniences to be available in the private, and public sectors. When handled well—with trustworthy e-Gov applications, seamless interfaces, and timely, reliable responses—these online exchanges engender trust in local government. Citizens see that they can turn to their city or county to easily accomplish required tasks, such as bill payment, fine payment, license registration, etc.

e-Gov and Connecting to Citizens via Social Media

If e-Gov is about using digital technology to better engage citizens, no discussion regarding engagement is complete without mentioning the impact of social media. Today, local governments are effectively using social media platforms like [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#) to connect with citizens and even [advertise their local government initiatives](#). Why the switch to social media and the replacement of traditional marketing dollars to digital? Social media marketing offers direct targeting, little waste, and better visibility than such traditional formats as television, radio, and outdoor. In other words, for public sector communications managers that need to validate the spending of every taxpayer dollar, social media offers a higher return-on-investment.

Want to learn more tips to help you market your local government? [Click here to register for our free Marketing for Local Government online course.](#) →



“Implementing the CivicEngage Mobile app was part of our goal of making information more accessible to citizens.”

Susan Weis,
Communications Director,
Town of Fuquay-Varina, NC

[Click to learn more about how Fuquay-Varina uses its mobile app to engage citizens](#) →





Enterprise Mobility

Today, thanks to the ubiquity of mobile technology and advances in enterprise applications, private and public sector employees can work better, faster, no matter where they are, and what type of computing device they're using. 2014 was the year when digital time spent on a mobile device first surpassed time spent on a desktop computer, according to researcher comScore. In 2014, 60 percent of our digital activities were conducted on a mobile device. Since 2014, that number has only continued to grow.

[Click here to read how Cranberry Township, PA uses its enterprise mobility solution to alert citizens to traffic hazards.](#) →

The greatest benefit of mobile technology for private and public sector workers is the ability to work better, faster, from anywhere, on any device.

Consider these enterprise mobility statistics:

- According to [TopRank Marketing](#), 64% of decision-makers read their e-mail on a mobile device
- According to [Fliplet](#), 60% of workers use apps for work-related activity
 - 53% of those who work on a mobile device say it helps them do their job better
 - 25% of workers use department-specific apps for such business activities as:
 - Event support
 - Marketing campaigns
 - Financial reporting
 - Training
 - Creating proposals
 - Product management
 - Project management

By enabling employees to access valuable software systems and collaboration tools through their mobile devices, local governments can increase employee productivity. The result of such process efficiencies? Reduced labor costs and higher profit margins. Based on a study conducted by [Radius](#), entities that execute business mobility plans are realizing an average return on their investment (ROI) of 150 percent. The cost benefits include a decrease in total management costs and an increase in business benefits such as worker productivity.

Environmental Benefits

There are many social benefits to engaging your citizens online. But let's focus on one that we hear more about in the news every day—going green. Energy efficiency and our carbon footprint are on everyone's mind. People are asking, "What can we do to help the environment, or at least to have a less negative impact on the earth?"

One thing everyone can do to help is to use less paper. For businesses and government, an effective way to start is by using digital communications rather than printed communications. Consider these startling facts from [The Paperless Project](#):

- The average office worker continues to use a staggering 10,000 sheets of copy paper every year.
- 45% of the paper printed in offices ends up trashed by the end of the day. This daily lifespan occurs for over a trillion sheets of paper per year, worldwide.
- In the U.S., companies spend more than \$120 billion a year on printed forms, most of which outdate themselves within three months' time.
- Each misfiled document costs \$125. Each lost document costs \$350 to \$700, and large organizations lose a document every 12 seconds. In addition to the copious amount of paper produced for business.

A Note About Security and Financial Implications

A fear for many local government leaders is that the more reliant their administrative operations are on digital solutions, the more at risk their data is from hackers and cyber extortionists. Such attacks are not without their financial consequences. According to the [SunSentinel](#), in 2015 Ft. Lauderdale, FL spent \$430,000 to improve its computer security systems after the city's website was attacked by the hacker group "Anonymous." The cyber-attack, which took place on December 1, 2014, forced the city to shut down its online site for hours to make sure sensitive city files were protected. The costs included:

- \$366,989 for specialized security consulting and oversight services
- \$45,398 for software licenses to manage and control computer activities
- \$17,907 for hardware to strengthen the computer infrastructure

While an increasing number of local government websites are being attacked by cybercriminals, a fear of an attack should not be the reason a community fails to take advantage of all the benefits of e-Gov services. Know that choosing a reliable third-party website hosting service that creates a barrier between the threat of attack and your local network can help to minimize the risk of a data security breach.

Do the Math Exercise:

What cost savings could be realized in your community?

In an 8-hour period, how many phone calls did your receptionist take that could have been eliminated if the service was provided online:

\$

In an 8-hour period, how many in-person visits did staff deal with that could have been eliminated if the service was provided online:

\$

Add lines 1 and 2. This is the total # of offline transactions conducted in an 8-hour period.

\$

Multiply line 3 by \$13.20. This is the total amount saved in an 8-hour period if these same tasks were moved online.

\$

Multiply line 4 by 250 business days. This is the total potential savings in one year if tasks were moved online.

\$



"I'm more confident now, especially because I know CivicPlus puts significant resources into maintaining the security of its systems. And I know that an attack vector can't happen here on my local network. That footprint has been removed."

Bryan Brayton
IT Director, City of Plattsburgh

Click to read the full story [————>](#)

Do the Numbers Add Up?

As technology changes and the digital divide disappears, governments throughout the nation are finding more reasons to provide services online. The potential benefits of e-Gov for citizens are numerous, such as saving time and money, ease of use, and convenience of accessing services 24 -hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week. Beyond these benefits, e-Gov produces significant cost savings for state agencies.

“For both government and citizens, eGovernment is a smart choice.”

About the Author

CivicPlus is the integrated technology platform for local government, working with over 2,500 local governments including municipalities, counties, and municipal departments. CivicPlus has been selected by Inc. Magazine as “One of the Fastest-Growing Privately Held Companies in the U.S.” since 2011. For more information visit CivicPlus.com.



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