You Can't Always Get What You Want: Comparing Citizen Preferences with Municipal Website Offerings

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Introduction

- E-government involves the government’s utilization of technology to operate efficiently while promoting effective governance and increased transparency (Pascual 2003).

- E-governance as applying technology to stimulate interaction between government and its citizens (Calista and Melitski 2007).
Citizen Engagement

Advantages

- informed management decisions (Callahan, 2007; Berman, 2005)
- transparency and fairness in policy development (Lukensmeyer & Tores, 2006)
- capacity building (Cuthill & Fein, 2005)
- increased trust in government (Keele, 2007)

Obstacles

- public administrators are conceptualized as experts insulated from the public (Callahan, 2007)
- bureaucratic processes are too rigid support citizen engagement (Timney, 1998)
- participation can be overwhelming (Callahan and Kloby, 2009)
## Range of eGovernment Applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Presence</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Transaction</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The provision of information in a passive nature.</td>
<td>Simple interactions between government and citizens, government and businesses, and among agency personnel.</td>
<td>An exchange between government and businesses or individuals.</td>
<td>Using technology for collaboration between the levels of government, across sectors, and with citizens.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of reports or informational brochures</td>
<td>Website functions that manage citizen queries via e-mails or interactive forms</td>
<td>Payment for license renewal, taxes, or other fees</td>
<td>Sharing best practices, citizen input</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Garcon, 2006
Open Government Directive

- Government should be transparent. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing.
- Government should be participatory. Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions.
- Government should be collaborative. Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government.

Source: www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/
Research Questions

- What do citizens expect of their municipal Web sites? How do citizens interact with municipal Web sites?

- In what ways do municipal Web sites meet these expectations?
Methodology, Part 1: Statewide Survey

- Omnibus poll conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute, February 2-7, 2011
- Statewide random sample of 801 adult residents.
- 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points
Key Questions

- If you needed information about your town government or local services, where would you go to find the information? What would you do first?

- Have you ever visited your town's official website?

- When you visited your town's website, what were you trying to do, or what were you looking for? How much of what you were trying to do on the website were you able to do?

- In general, how interested would you be in getting information or services from your town on a website -- very, somewhat, not too, or not at all interested?

- What information or services would you like to see on your town's website?
Methodology, Part 2: Analysis of Municipal Websites

1. **Content**
   - 100 attributes in four categories: informative items, citizen-centered items, interactive items, and social networking items.

2. **Source**
   - 49 websites in Monmouth County municipalities with an official web presence.

3. **Coding**
   - Five different coders were trained to use a simple content analysis to see how many of the 100 attributes were included on each website.
Details of the Analysis 1/2

Assessment categories

Examples of Items Examined on Municipal Web Sites

- City hall location and hours of operation
- Contact information of the mayor and council members
- Contact information of business administrators or city managers and department heads
- Meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, and transcripts
- Garbage and recycling schedules and instructions

Information

- Availability of a search box and a suggestion box
- Links to participate in or receive results of citizen surveys
- Sign-up opportunities for emergency alerts
- Publication of bidding opportunities for municipal contract

Citizen-centered Items

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WHERE LEADERS LOOK forward
Details of the Analysis 2/2

Examples of Items Examined on Municipal Web Sites

- Availability of downloadable forms or PDFs
- Online payment opportunities for parking tickets, taxes, or dog licenses
- Online applications (e.g., dog licensing)
- Online public records requests

Interactive Items
- Videos from online providers like YouTube
- Photo albums or sharing via Flickr or other providers
- Government sponsored mapping capabilities or links

Social Networking Items
- Population
- Budget size
- Total tax revenue

Assessment categories

*collected from outside sources
New Jerseyans are more Wired than the Nation

Never been online” in %

- New Jersey: 18%
- Nationwide: 23%

E-mail/Internet Usage

- More than once a day: 52%
- Daily: 14%
- Less than that: 15%
How New Jerseyans get Information about their Towns

- Internet: 58% (Mentioned), 36% (Mentioned first)
- Visit town hall: 55% (Mentioned), 25% (Mentioned first)
- Phone Call: 34% (Mentioned), 8% (Mentioned first)
- E-mail: 17% (Mentioned), 1% (Mentioned first)
- Letter: 12% (Mentioned), <1% (Mentioned first)
What New Jerseyans want

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Info</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity schedule</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official meeting info</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal budgets</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trash/Recycling info</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Stats</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School info</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Info</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Jerseyans want more Information

- 38 percent say they would be very interested in getting more information about their municipal government and services online and
- Another 34% would be somewhat interested.
Quartiles of raw scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentiles</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizen-Centered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17.62</td>
<td>20.35</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Quartiles reveal major differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Information</th>
<th>Social Networking</th>
<th>Interactive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tr>
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In % of max

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**Where Leaders Look Forward**
Conclusion

- Technology offers great potential as a new mechanism for government-citizen exchanges
- Citizens want more information
- Government websites are still evolving
- Social media is an area that requires further exploration and attention