Chapter 88
Local Government Use of Web 2.0:
Los Angeles County Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 refers to various networked applications utilizing technologies such as application mashups, content syndication, videocasts, wikis, blogs, social networking, user tagging, social bookmarks and content and service rating. Such technologies are designed to reach, attract, and interact with a greater electronic user audience. The potential of these technologies for e-government applications at Los Angeles County is analyzed. The government model for leveraging Internet technologies is different from that of commercial enterprises or academia. Thus immediate utilization of seemingly attractive technological opportunities must be tempered by organizational, implementation, and social responsibility constraints. Appropriate attention needs to be paid to legal and operational issues. The main conclusion drawn is that Web 2.0 presents an opportunity for local governments such as Los Angeles County, but that there should not be a headlong rush to implementation without consideration of a variety of other issues.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, a set of technologies called Web 2.0 has been transforming how users interact and access information and services on the Internet. Web 2.0 is comprised of networked applications built on web technologies and design principles to exploit web-based business models, as well as facilitate community-based development and social networking. Web 2.0 technologies include, among others, application mashups, content syndication, videocasts, wikis, blogs, social networking, user tagging, social bookmarks and content and service rating. Increasingly, Web 2.0 technologies are embedded in Internet sites to enrich online user experiences and are becoming

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an important component in e-government offerings. Such technologies are designed to reach or attract a greater electronic user audience, thereby enhancing citizen outreach and increasing the effectiveness of e-government applications. The potential of these technologies for e-government applications at Los Angeles County are analyzed.

E-government is defined by the Intergovernmental Advisory Board, (2003) as *"the use of technology, particularly Web-based Internet applications, to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and services to citizens, business partners, employees, agencies, and other entities."* Spanning over 4,000 square miles, Los Angeles County has a population of over 10 million, making it equivalent to the eighth largest state in the nation. Los Angeles County government is comprised of 39 departments providing wide ranging services including, among others, health and human services, housing, law enforcement, public works and various municipal services. Los Angeles County has established a significant presence in the area of e-government. A complete inventory of current e-government applications in Los Angeles County can be found at the Los Angeles County Portal at www.lacounty.gov.

The potential of Web 2.0 technologies for e-government applications at Los Angeles County is analyzed. The government model for leveraging Internet technologies is different from that of commercial enterprises or academia. Thus immediate utilization of seemingly attractive technological opportunities must be tempered by organizational, implementation and social responsibility constraints. Application mashups are regarded as a good business opportunity for the County, and content syndication offers a convenient way for the County to share and disseminate information to the public. Wikis, blogs and social networking also offer advantages but require more resources for implementation and present a variety of legal and control problems. Appropriate attention needs to be paid to issues such as loss of ownership control and authenticity of the final products.

Most existing e-services in Los Angeles County would be described as being of the Web 1.0 genre. However, Los Angeles County has included some Web 2.0 technologies in its shared portal infrastructure, which was launched in January 2009. The County continues to evaluate how Web 2.0 technologies can be leveraged to transform the way it provides online information and services, as well as interact with its constituents and stakeholders. From an academic point of view, providers of e-government services have been urged to avail themselves of the capabilities of Web 2.0, and, as recommended by Chang and Kannan (2008), "just go do it". However governmental agencies have challenges and responsibilities that are inherent in providing such services and that leads to the caution "not so fast". In the remainder of this chapter, we examine various Web 2.0 capabilities and describe factors that should be considered before any "gung-ho" foray into Web 2.0 is made.

FRAMEWORKS FOR ASSESSING WEB 2.0

An evaluation of e-government, including Web 2.0 technologies, should include an assessment of the maturity level of e-government deployment, as well as a framework for evaluating specific web technologies that can be leveraged to further the business objectives for e-government. A determination of the maturity of the current stage of e-government deployment is critical to developing strategies and a roadmap for deploying e-government capabilities. An e-government roadmap can be used to identify challenges, barriers and risks, as well as mitigation strategies. An e-government assessment framework facilitates the implementation of the e-government strategies and roadmap by facilitating a tactical analysis and prioritization of initiatives and projects.