

Chapter 47

Citizens and E-Government Service Delivery: Techniques to Increase Citizen Participation

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ABSTRACT

Without a plan for marketing the convenience, ease, and safety of online services, the goal of achieving an 80 percent adoption rate by citizens for certain e-government services (e.g., tax filing and vehicle registration) will remain a dream. Although states realize benefits from implementing online applications that reduce processing time and costs, the rate of growth in citizen e-government adoption rates seems to have leveled off. This chapter examines, from the state's perspective, successful techniques for increasing citizen use of electronic applications for two common activities – vehicle registration renewal and income tax filing – in four Midwestern states (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio). Usage patterns depend in part on an individual citizen's technological sophistication, whether digital naïf, digital immigrant, or digital native. Usage can be influenced, however, by state government investments to market electronic services (through awareness campaigns or financial incentives), establish alternative access points, and incorporate human use factors in applications.

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INTRODUCTION

The IRS restructuring and reform act of 1998 (also known as the taxpayer bill of rights – pub. L. 105-206 112 stat. 685) declared congressional policy “that it should be the goal of the service to have at least 80 percent of all federal tax and information returns filed electronically by 2007.” The target date for this achievement has now been pushed to 2012 and incentives implemented to make electronic filing a more attractive choice for taxpayers. The federal government is very clear about the importance of e-government adoption. A recent study about IRS efforts to promote e-government [IRS (2008)] describes “lessons learned” that may be applicable to state agencies.

States have not generally been as clear about their objectives and differ with respect to incentive programs. Better understanding about how to maximize return on investments made in e-government by identifying the most cost-effective marketing approach for promoting the use of online applications is needed. Existing studies have tended to focus on inherent characteristics of the service offerings, governmental structure, or population demographics to explain variations in citizen adoption of e-government services. This chapter examines the impact of marketing efforts made by state government agencies to expand citizen use of e-government service options. Successful results realized by the four case study states are then cross-referenced to the “lessons learned” from the IRS study.

Because of their scalability, e-government applications become more cost-effective with increased usage. A 2007 study, in fact, indicates that cost savings accrue from online service provisioning when citizen adoption rates exceed 30 percent: “while e-government is often implemented as a measure to provide efficiencies and to save costs (e.g., reducing the need for employees to perform some routine tasks such as customer service), actual dollar savings are not always realized by the states. However, e-government

presents management challenges, and costs savings typically do not occur until the later phases of e-government implementation when at least a 30% adoption rate is realized. [Seifert 2007, 4] it is important that states actively promote the use of online services.

Our intention in performing this study was to address the question: how have citizens responded to e-government service options when state governments have encouraged their use? We used behavioral data gathered by state agencies – citizen usage numbers for a particular e-government service – as evidence for favorable response from citizens. We also interviewed key state government officials about their respective agencies’ marketing programs. Where available, we have included details about the actual marketing investment made by state agencies to promote the use of e-government services. Finally, we chose two citizen applications for scrutiny – vehicle registration and income tax filing – that are relevant to a broader citizen population than more specialized or intermittent interests (such as, hunting/fishing licenses and vital records).

BACKGROUND

Literature Overview

A solid body of knowledge exists to describe the various stages of development that characterizes e-government activities at all levels of government (local, county, state, national). [see, for example, Accenture (al-Hashmi and Daren (2008), Damodaran et al. (2005), Irani et al. (2006), Layne and Lee (2001), Reddick (2003), Siau and Long (2005), Seifert (2003 and 2007), West (2004, 2004, 2005, 2008)] although scholars and analysts may differ on minor details and combine certain utilities differently, the following four stages are most frequently identified:

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