



Chapter VI

Towards a Framework for Government Portal Design: The Government, Citizen and Portal Perspectives

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This chapter identifies and describes factors that inhibit and promote successful electronic government portal design. These factors are based on a review of recent research on both electronic government initiatives and corporate portal implementations. The result is a generalized framework for government portal design. To test its viability, the framework is used as a lens to analyze a current case study, specifically a portal project led by the Government of Canada to support Canadian youth citizens. The framework offers an effective preliminary construct by which to focus and pinpoint pertinent issues surrounding government portal design.

INTRODUCTION

As means of delivering more effective and efficient government services and encouraging greater democracy and engagement from citizenry, governments around the globe are starting to explore the use of Web-based information technology. For instance, numerous governments are focusing attention on the design and delivery of portals as a major component of government electronic service infrastructures.

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Portals are single-point Web browser interfaces used to promote the gathering, sharing and dissemination of information as well as the provision of services to communities of interest. Hagedorn (2000, p. 4) defines a portal as “a site for a particular audience, providing a path to all-encompassing content and services through one access point.” As such, portals can be thought of as a launch pad or gateway to information resources via a single point of access, namely through a Web browser interface such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Communicator. It is due to the proliferation of the World Wide Web and the burgeoning success of consumer portal sites such as Yahoo! and AOL (America Online) that portals are perceived by many as having the potential to serve as key enabling solutions for electronic government delivery.

The Government of Canada is set to lead the way in this area by planning to become the government in the world by 2004 that is the most electronically connected to its citizens.¹ Coined Government On-Line (GOL), the vision is “to continually improve the quality of interaction between Canadians and their government by enabling Canadians to request and receive services and information when and where it is most convenient for them, wherever they live” (Government of Canada, 2000). To reach this goal, the Canadian federal government has embarked on the development and implementation of Canada Site²—a portal to federal government information resources and services. The benefits of Canada Site are better service, better government and stimulation of electronic commerce activities across the country. As such, the Government of Canada is dedicated to a portal that will complement traditional service channels, protect citizens’ privacy and guarantee accessibility.

Governments, like Canada’s, are forging new ground. Lessons can be learned from both private-sector enterprises, in terms of the design and rollout of internal corporate portals to service the information needs and uses of employees, as well as the delivery of large consumer portal sites, like Yahoo!, to the general public. However, realizing that governments differ from business in terms of motives and the constituents they serve, governments should be aware that they must tailor portal implementations to address the unique concerns and challenges facing electronic government delivery today, such as the need to protect citizen privacy and the requirement to prevent government misuse of information. Further, due to the relative newness of this technology, there is little empirical research from the academic community to guide or inform the development of electronic government initiatives such as portals. Frameworks are required to help guide research and development in this nascent field.

As such, the primary objective of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework for government portal design that identifies and describes the factors that promote or inhibit successful electronic government. The chapter does this from three key perspectives. The first is the government perspective which addresses the organizational factors which affect portal design. The second is the citizen perspective which addresses user concerns that influences the degree to which portals are adopted and utilized. The third is the portal interface perspective which concerns itself with the extent to which features and functions offered by the portal satisfy both citizen and government information needs.

To reach this objective, background is given on the general benefits, public concerns and challenges of electronic government and the capacity of portals to serve as an enabler of government information and services delivery. From there, a framework for the design of government portals is made based on the above discussion. To test the viability of the framework, a case study is presented within the Canadian context with reference to the delivery of a government Web site for Canada’s youth, a specific project within GOL

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