

## Government Portals: Points to Consider

Digital government isn't about building a website or portal, it is about transforming government service delivery through the use of information and communication technology. It is the utilization of technology in a way that will transform Government's fundamental relationship with its citizens, businesses and even visitors. A government portal could be defined as a dedicated service that coordinates and presents information and services from various government agencies into one interface, typically a website. It is a one-stop shop for clients 24 hrs a day 365 days a year. The information and services are generally categorised in accordance with a given criteria, like topics, geography, or other subjects related to the users' needs. Examples of government portals around the world include:

- Canada ([www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca))
- United States ([www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov))
- Singapore ([www.gov.sg](http://www.gov.sg))
- England ([www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk))

From Singapore's portal for example, persons can access all government services from a single website. With just a few clicks you can pay a parking fine or register your company or if you are a visitor, get customs information or visa and entry requirements.

Some of the elements that are considered when developing government portals are: -

### User Needs

The needs of the end-users, both internal and external to the public service, must be considered when designing a portal. Governments cannot assume that "*if we build it, they will come*" when developing a government portal. Around the world, when citizens contribute to the design of online services, there is greater uptake

and higher approval ratings. The methods governments are using to obtain citizen feedback include online surveys, focus groups, telephone surveys and self-administered surveys. In Canada a bi-annual customer survey is conducted to understand how citizens view the services they receive from government.

### Reviewing Government Processes

Processes within the public sector have to be reviewed and, if required, transformed/ reengineered for effective and efficient provision of information, goods and services 24/7. Review of these 'back-office' functions and processes are essential for efficiency gains to be met. Processes should be re-organised around the needs of customers and be integrated so that users can seamlessly access services on-line.

### Resistance to Change

Portal development as stated above will result in changes in the way the public sector functions and operates. Processes will be reengineered and jobs redesigned to enable e-services to be provided 24/7 on-line through the government portal. Therefore provision would have to be made to manage the impact of those changes on departments. The methods used to achieve this include:

- Involving stakeholders including the unions in portal development;
- Training staff in the new processes and technology; and
- Communicating and marketing the portal project with management and staff affected by the changes.

## Marketing

It is important to consider how the portal will be promoted to citizens. A marketing and communication strategy should be developed to “sell” the e-services to the public. Advertising on television, radio, and in newspapers and other media is a tool commonly used by governments.

## Security

Security of information and trusted transactions are both expected and demanded by users. In the era of hackers, spoofing, identity and credit card theft it is essential that a safe and secure environment be provided for users. A secure web portal, where citizens, businesses and employees can perform transactions securely and easily can improve the satisfaction and trust in government thereby increasing the uptake of the services provided online.

The Data Processing Department is in the process of fundamentally changing the way the Government of Barbados provides its goods, services and information with the establishment of the Barbados Integrated Government (BIG) Portal. This facility when implemented will allow the Government of Barbados to present a single official face to the world. It will provide electronic services and information securely, not only to the citizens, businesses and visitors to the island but also to public officers through its intranet facility. Every effort should therefore be made to ensure that this project is a success as Government seeks to reform its service delivery with the establishment of the BIG portal.