BUILDING A FOUNDATION
TO TRANSFORM THE CITIZEN EXPERIENCE

Citizens today demand convenient, well-integrated government services. Meeting that need requires a dedicated, high-capacity data network that unites the enterprise.

Like their counterparts in the private sector, government leaders are working hard to please an ever-more demanding and discerning customer base.

It's no secret that leading-edge companies such as Amazon have radically transformed the concept of customer service. Whether they're shopping, checking a credit card balance or ordering takeout, customers today expect quick, convenient, well-integrated services they can access at any time, across a variety of channels — in person, by phone, via a web browser or through a mobile app.

Now governments are coming under pressure to offer the same excellent customer experience, designing services around the needs of citizens rather than agency silos.

Governments working to achieve that goal start by giving their employees the tools and information they need to respond quickly and efficiently to citizens' requests. For example, a business owner in a small town who wants to study local flood plain maps shouldn't have to drive several hours to the state capitol to see them. Electronic versions of those maps should be readily accessible.

Excellent government service also means giving citizens opportunities to conduct transactions for themselves through a variety of channels, including mobile. It also means breaking down bureaucratic silos — allowing different agencies and/or jurisdictions to share information and collaborate on service delivery, so citizens can enjoy a seamless experience.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

As governments begin to transform service delivery, they naturally turn to the latest advances in digital technology. Digital transformation requires you to leverage new technology to accomplish a fundamental change in the way you serve your citizens. It isn't simply a matter of bringing incremental efficiencies to the work you do today by conducting the same processes faster and at a lower cost. It's also about creating new services and channels for serving citizens' needs.

As an example, the consulting firm Deloitte suggests that governments might use wireless technology to develop a fleet of mobile offices — perhaps housed on vehicles similar to food trucks — that deliver services to residents. Instead of operating

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a one-size-fits-all service from a central office, a mobile fleet allows a local government to tailor the services that each truck delivers to the specific needs of the community it serves.[1]

In 2016, research firm Gartner recommended 10 ways that governments can use IT innovations to transform the way they do business. Among those suggestions are: giving citizens a chance to engage with government through the channels they prefer, using social media to gain a better understanding of citizens' needs, using data analytics to gain new insights into the effectiveness of government programs, and using the Internet of Things to drive services such as smart waste bin collection and remote monitoring of elderly people in assisted living.[2]

THE TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE

While governments have been using IT to automate citizen services for many years, those efforts often miss the mark. According to a survey conducted by the McKinsey Center for Government, many citizens say they find government websites confusing and difficult to use. They also complain of processes mired in bureaucracy, requiring conversations with several government employees to get their questions answered or their business matters resolved.[3]

One challenge many governments face as they try to achieve true digital transformation is successfully leveraging massive amounts of data. The legacy systems in place at many agencies today can't handle that kind of volume. In a Center for Digital Government survey of more than 200 state and local government IT decision-makers, 59 percent of respondents said that when attempts to deploy new technology failed or ran into serious problems, inadequate infrastructure was at fault.[4]

BRINGING DATA TO THE CITIZEN

Before it can achieve digital transformation, a government agency must develop a solid strategy for distributed

enterprise networking. The agency needs to connect all of its business locations and appropriate stakeholders to the systems, enterprise applications and data required to deliver a broad variety of next-generation citizen services. To achieve that aim, it should develop the right combination of dedicated broadband and Wi-Fi connections to cloud-based data centers and business locations, including the mobile workforce.

One example of a government enterprise that uses the distributed enterprise model to support an ever-growing portfolio of citizen services is the Borough of State College, Pa. The Borough's IT department provides services to a variety of local government organizations, including several neighboring townships. In the past, all entities shared a 20 Mbps wide area network (WAN) and a 30 Mbps internet connection. As local governments added more e-government services, however, and employed more cloud-based applications, the burgeoning data traffic started to overwhelm the network. Backing up data, accessing police records from remote sites and retrieving large files such as aerial maps all became cumbersome processes.

As citizens continue to expect more from their interaction with government, agencies need to make their services fast, convenient and easy to use, and put mission-critical data in the hands of public employees, wherever they work.

The slowdown was particularly a problem for agencies that were replicating data backups to different sites, to ensure quick recovery in case of a disaster at the primary site. Government employees needed to accomplish those backups quickly without slowing other government processes that simultaneously relied on the network.

To gain the capacity it sorely needed, the Borough implemented a 100 Mbps Ethernet dedicated internet line and linked seven locations with an Ethernet network service. Not only did this strategy get data flowing freely for the local governments, but it also opened opportunities for new capabilities, such as allowing local police departments to share video streams from their surveillance cameras.

CONCLUSION

As you plan to develop a distributed enterprise network, the decisions you make early on will determine the difference between gaining merely incremental improvements and achieving true digital transformation. A sophisticated technology partner can help you make the choices that provide the best results. Here are some attributes to look for in a partner that can help you develop a reliable, flexible network with scalable bandwidth to handle all the complexities of digital government, at an affordable price:

- The provider focuses on the fundamentals of distributed connectivity, such as tailoring the right connections to suit specific locations and enable the free flow of data across an organization — its employees, partners and customers.

- It uses the cloud to provide maximum flexibility and mobility, and to minimize up-front investments.

- It offers private, secure network connections to protect all data on the network.

- It deploys a suite of managed services to help users allocate their resources to gain maximum benefits from new technology.

- It provides nationwide coverage and direct connectivity to all major cloud services providers.

As citizens continue to expect more from their interaction with government, agencies need to make their services fast, convenient and easy to use, and put mission-critical data in the hands of public employees, wherever they work. Governments are working to engage citizens in all sorts of initiatives — from economic development to neighborhood improvements to public safety — and using technology to support those initiatives in ways that were never before possible.

A robust distributed enterprise networking strategy — developed with the aid of a trusted industry partner — will provide a solid foundation.

This piece was developed and written by the Center for Digital Government custom media division, with information and input from Comcast Business.

Endnotes

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