

E-government alters service inside and out

E-government is touted as a way to provide more and better service 24-7, and as a powerful tool of direct democracy. But political scientist Loleen Berdahl points out, "The other side that is important, but doesn't have a public face, is how government is [altered by technology] on the inside." Berdahl led a study of municipal e-government in Western Canada for the Calgary-based Canada West Foundation, where she is research director. She participated in the Western Government Gateway conference in May, a forum for governments to share e-government lessons.

"Technology has a lot of promise in getting things coordinated and allowing departments to work together," Berdahl says. It can level silos. "That could help us have a more efficient government, a government with more capacity." It also frees public servants from menial tasks. "It's a very important internal revolution for governing" – gradual enough to avoid upheaval, but recognized in retrospect as a revolution, nonetheless." The fact that governments are learning from each other across levels, and internationally, benefits them all.

"So much of the power of technology is not associated with automating what we're already doing, but rather serving as a catalyst to cause people to rethink what they're doing," a Microsoft Corp. executive

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told the conference. Bob McDowell, vice-president, executive relations, says the Internet lets government interact in new ways with the customer/ citizen and with suppliers. "The big opportunity is in rethinking some bureaucratic processes – looking at [the Internet] as a complement to existing services. From a government perspective, it's improving the quality of service to citizens, and from a seller's perspective, access to selling the product."

Berdahl cautions that e-government adds cost during the transition because even though one segment of the public is excited about getting information whenever they want it, "for at least another generation, another group of people will insist on having someone at the kiosk or on the phone, so governments have to [offer service] both ways." In her opinion, anything governments can do to become more accessible is worth the cost. "There's tremendous public cynicism about elected officials and government. [E-government] can bring politicians and the public service closer to the people." The public safety aspect is also valuable; for instance, doctors' typing in prescriptions for pharmacists, and having patients' prescription history available to them on-line.

McDowell expects citizens to shape e-government by virtue of how they use it, but says it's up to the supplier to teach customers – including governments – how to take advantage of their capabilities. "So much of what technology is about is sitting unused." —Melanie Collison

W3C: creating "one size fits all" government websites

For many people with disabilities or physical limitations, using the Internet is not always as easy. Those who rely on adaptive technology to go online often come across websites not programmed to be compatible with software that supports a voice-activated mouse and screen readers. Plain-old bad design can also lead to problems for those with poor eyesight or limited hand mobility.

To address these obstacles, federal government websites are currently being revamped to include the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Introduced in 1999 by an international consortium based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the guidelines are now part the Treasury Board's "Common Look and Feel (CLF)" initiative, scheduled to be in place by December 31. The goal of CLF is to ensure continuity in both design and the way a website is navigated.

According to Mary Frances Laughton, chief of Industry Canada's Assistive Devices Office, the W3C guidelines are an effort to make sure online information is available to people who use non-standard software and hardware, "With the standards, anyone who can access a computer will be able to access a government website," she said, noting that about 20 percent of the population now has problems accessing the Internet: people with disabilities, and seniors. She suspects that number will grow as baby boomers age and have increasing vision problems; arthritis and disabilities.

The Bank of Montreal's MERX website, used for federal and other government tenders, will not be affected by WC3 standards. Jocelyne Limoges, spokesperson with Public Works and Government Services Canada said, "This could be corrected in the future," with incorporation of W3C guidelines possibly being included in a future MERX-type contract. Mike Edmonds, senior manager, media relations for MERX, said the site's information will be available through other means such as phone and faxes. "We are extremely sensitive to the customization needs of clients. Those with difficulties can notify a call centre and have a file set up to make sure they get the information they need," he said.

Ellen Passmore of Ontario's Accessibility Directorate, said official websites should incorporate W3C by the fall, when the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* comes into full effect. By then, all municipalities over 10,000 in population have to have an accessibility advisory committee in place, which will most likely address Internet access. Ottawa adopted W3Cs principal checkpoints upon amalgamation in 2000.

In Nova Scotia, Geoff Kerson, Chair of the Web Review Committee, said the province's website standards are being reviewed, and W3C standards are being examined closely. Saskatchewan adopted the most important W3C components in 1999.

Geoff Waddington, CEO of Real Decoy, an Ottawa company that evaluates accessibility and overhauls sites, also points out that improving the design for people with disabilities will actually benefit everyone. "Poor web design is generally one of the biggest obstacles to e-commerce," he said. —Celeste Mackenzie

Alberta supports programs with CGI's help

NEW WORDS CGI (www.cgi.com) recently won a four-year IT contract valued at \$12 million from the Alberta Human Resources and Employment Ministry. CGI, which already has long-term IT agreements with five Alberta departments, will provide application maintenance services for the Ministry's systems. These systems support such integral programs as labour relations, financial benefits, training, and safe workplaces. ❧

Web-enabled supply chains

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) implemented Ceecom Systems' (www.ceecom.com) *Quartermaster*, a web-enabled inventory, warehousing, and supply-chain system for police forces. The system makes police procurement more efficient and secure by allowing supply managers to respond immediately to requests over the OPP Intranet, enabling officers to order for themselves, and ensuring that controlled items may be tracked until delivery.

Canadian hospitals and suppliers continue to implement Global Healthcare Exchange (www.ghx.com), an e-procurement tool for healthcare products. GHX aims to reduce supply chain costs in the Canadian healthcare system by providing an efficient, web-based exchange and access to an industry standard catalogue. The 28 suppliers and 60 hospitals involved believe GHX will increase overall transaction volume and reduce cycle time. ❧

Schools get it together with IT

Canadian colleges and universities are catching the IP telephony bug – over 20 educational institutions across the country switched to the new technology, which uses Cisco's Architecture for Voice, Video and Integrated Data (www.cisco.com). IP telephony, which allows data, video and voice to converge on the same network, simplifies network management and increases organizational flexibility, resulting in cost savings and productivity gains. Seeking similar efficiency, 24 Quebec colleges adopted Novell's Campus Provisioning Solution (www.novell.com) to organize divergent data sources, applications, and databases. ❧

Saskatchewan's LAND provides Ukraine food for thought



The province of Saskatchewan applied Swiftview viewing technology (www.swiftview.com) to its Information Services Corporation's state-of-the-art LAND system. LAND integrates the province's land titles and land surveys online, automating 50 million paper documents. Using Swiftview and GIS technology, customers can access geographic images of any property in the province – including information on forest, soil and water cover – encouraging faster real estate transactions and new economic development projects in Saskatchewan. A Ukrainian delegation recently visited the province to study this system and incorporate these ideas in their own land registration efforts. ❧

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In 2000, two naval centres in San Diego spent US\$68 million in government purchase card transactions, including purchases of cosmetics, clothing, and compact discs. Despite attempts in the last year to fix lax internal controls and poor oversight, personnel continue to abuse the charge cards, which allow employees to spend up to US\$2,500 per transaction without going through procurement paperwork. The Department of Defense has suspended the charge card program in these locations until proper controls are in place.



The US Coast Guard (www.uscg.mil) awarded a US\$11 billion contract to Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman after a performance-based contract competition. Over the next 30 years, Lockheed-Northrop will rebuild the Coast Guard's aging fleet and construct the next generation of ships and aircraft.



To increase homeland security, the Bush administration suggested a government-only intranet, GovNet, but security strategists in the private sector believe that GovNet will isolate the government from valuable local and state resources. They suggest strengthening authentication tools and encryption on the Internet instead.



USF Holland recently installed a FuelMaker compressed natural gas (CNG) refuelling station (www.fuelmaker.com) for 40 forklifts at its Milwaukee terminal. The move was prompted by economic, health, and environmental considerations – CNG use offers considerable fuel savings, reduces carbon monoxide emissions by 95 percent and prevents back injuries by eliminating manual gas cylinder handling.



The Department of Defense has granted IBM a US\$50-100 million contract to overhaul the department's financial system. Currently, the DoD has 1,000 feeder systems, a number the department hopes to reduce by 90 percent, simplifying the department's financial organization and making it more efficient and cost-effective. The new system should be widely installed by 2005.



Apple's (www.apple.com) new dual processor, rack-mountable server, Xserve – with generous processing and storage capacities and the Mac OS X operating system – is intended mainly for the data centres of the US federal government. Despite competitive pricing, Xserve must still competes with PC giants Dell, HP, and Sun Microsystems, who make similar servers.



A General Accounting Office study found that IT contractors are afraid that intellectual property (IP) rights for research undertaken on a federal project will belong solely to the government. Thus they are reluctant to work with the government on IT projects such as homeland security measures. The report suggests that federal procurement officers undergo training in IP policy to assuage contractors' concerns.

And the winners are...

Materiel Management Recognition Award

Marc Whelan is Transport Canada's Director, Materiel and Contracting Services and is known as a leader in leveraging current technologies, resulting in significant financial and materiel savings for the department.

Environmental Recognition Award

Jacques Labonté, Manager of the Materiel Management Division in PWGSC and Departmental Fleet Manager, was responsible for setting up and chairing the Departmental Green Procurement Strategy Working Committee aimed at promoting green procurement and sharing best environmental practices.

Environmental Recognition Award for a Team

Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) ship's engineers under the leadership of Patrice St-Pierre, worked with Advanced Biological Solutions Canada to implement a new approach to the disposal of solid, chemical and oily waste from ships on three CCG vessels that now meets and exceeds both national and international standards.

Excellence in Service as a Materiel Manager

Award sponsored by *Summit*

Russell Faulkner, Regional Manager, Materiel Services with the Department of Fisheries & Oceans, Maritimes Region, has practiced his belief in client satisfaction and teamwork for over 20 years. He is responsible for the regional management of integrated materiel management services in support of Maritimes Region management, staff and clients and their programs, operations and facilities.



French treat Halifax water

Ondeo (www.ondeo.com), the water division of French utility company Suez, has been awarded a 30-year, US\$304 million contract to

build and operate water treatment plants in Halifax. The three new plants will tidy the environment around the city, which sees 150 million litres of untreated waste poured into the harbour daily.



Buying fleets just got better

The business of fleet procurement just got easier, faster, and cheaper. The Directorate of Support Vehicles Program Management (DSVPM) at the Department of National Defence (DND) extended their revolutionary, cost-effective Long Term Standing Offer (LTSO) solution to involve other government departments and the acquisition of complex military vehicles.

The standing offer itself is not new. Government departments have been awarding exclusive contracts for years in such areas as business supplies and staff cars. The LTSO takes the customary standing offer and lengthens it, applying the idea to large vehicles and bundling equipment with service and parts. The largest LTSO award went to Sterling and Western Star for heavy trucks, a 5-year deal worth \$50 million.

The new idea is paying off for DSVPM – the department saved millions last year on 613 pieces of equipment through LTSOs and achieves, on average, a five percent discount on equipment, parts and servicing through bulk buys. LTSOs reduce costs by limiting paperwork to one initial contract award. By dealing with one winning company, LTSOs homogenize fleets, allowing for easier training and maintenance. For greater flexibility, the LTSO is optional for customers (unlike in a single sourcing solution), may be accessed by the customer directly, and allows the customer to anticipate need and order in advance.

The LTSO substantially speeds up delivery on fleet vehicles. Under a typical contract, a truck takes 38 weeks to be delivered; under the LTSO system, the process takes 15 weeks, and often only two to four weeks. This rapid, efficient delivery and shorter contractual process allows supply managers to order and acquire what they need in the limited time they have to spend devolved funds.

Customers are impressed. “When they wanted something, a global contract was already there,” says Lynn Fonger, senior capital procurement officer at DSVPM. “They could feed into that what they wanted and get it delivered in a couple of months rather than a year.” DSVPM recently diversified their long-term agreements to include re-life projects, custom military vehicles, and other machinery such as backhoes, forklifts, and graders.



Many complex vehicles, such as the state-of-the-art Multi-Purpose Engineering Vehicle (MPEV), a militarized backhoe that travels 100 km/hr, could not have been acquired under the previous system due to time and funding constraints.

DSVPM hopes to expand the LTSO project to the Internet and to agreements with municipalities, and aims to increase volume discounts and the number of custom vehicles in DND's fleet. *—Bindu Suresh*

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