

## Case Study #14 – REACH AGENCY /PUBLIC SERVICES BROKER (IRELAND)

### 1. Background

Reach is a crosscutting project set up to deliver specific eGovernment services in Ireland. It aims to improve the quality and efficiency of services offered by public service agencies to one another and to the general public. The Reach project was established following government decisions in 1999 and 2000 to re-launch the Integrated Social Services System (which addressed certain commonalities across the health, social security and tax systems) as the Reach initiative. It was also decided that the *Public Service Broker* (PSB) model would be the framework within which integrated electronic public services, to citizens and businesses, should be delivered. PSB is an integration framework and shared services platform that has been fully operational since mid-2005. It is designed to facilitate high volume, secure transactions with citizens, businesses and public sector agencies in Ireland.

The Reach initiative is one of the keys to the Government's Information Society strategy and is closely linked with the Strategic Management Initiative (which is essentially a modernization program for the Irish Public Sector). Reach responded to the need to take advantage of available and emerging web-based solutions to provide improved customer service and better value to the taxpayer. This was to be done by providing a single point of access to services and information about services, and by building generic type infrastructure that could be reused across the public sector, thereby facilitating more rapid development of new services at the lowest possible cost.

Reach evolved at a slower pace than anticipated and with a considerable degree of revisiting the original technical vision in the context of significant shifts in IT Industry thinking in relation to the interoperability of systems.

### 2. Organizational Design and Governance Arrangements

The Reach agency is a unit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) and its budget is ring-fenced within the Social and Family Affairs vote. While Reach originated within the social services sector, it is firmly positioned within the broader stream of public service reform and modernization. It is as much concerned with the broader service delivery modernization program of the Strategic Management Initiative and Quality Customer Service as it is with the development of e-government and the Information Society. Policy is developed in close partnership with the Department of An Taoiseach and the Department of Finance.

No legislation governs the Reach initiative but it is 'front and centre' in terms of the Information Society strategy. (Note that Reach has 'sponsored' relevant legislation in support of its activities). This central role was made explicit in 2004 when the Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach issued a letter to heads of Departments setting out the Government's policy as to how public service agencies are expected to interoperate with and use the shared services offered by the Broker. This provides

Reach with the framework within which to engage with public service agencies. There is a good level of interest and willingness by Departments and agencies to use the Broker services and there are a number of high impact services in the pipeline for future deployment.

Reach is managed by a Board, (which is chaired at Secretary-General level) and consisted until recently of a senior representative from each of the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, Finance and Taoiseach. The Board has recently been reconstituted and is now comprised of representatives from Social and Family Affairs, Agriculture, Justice, Health and Local Government.

The Director of Reach reports to this Board for policy matters relating to the Reach work program. He is accountable to the Secretary-General of the Department of Social and Family Affairs for financial and personal matters. The Secretary-General of DSFA is responsible to the Public Accounts Committee of Dáil Eireann (parliament) for expenditure on the Reach program. He also reports on progress to the Cabinet Committee on the Information Society.

### **3. Business Model**

The major principle underpinning Reach's business model is improving the quality and efficiency of services offered by public service agencies to one another and to the general public.

#### *3(a) Activities*

The services that Reach offers to public service agencies are an interagency data and document exchange service, an online identity management service, a life events data service, customer relationship management services and the Information Portal – Agency. The services offered to citizens are a secure online account, a call centre Help Desk and the Information Portal – Citizen. Reach operates a portal site – [www.reachservices.ie](http://www.reachservices.ie) - which offers a single point of access to public services in Ireland

A key element in the PSB service is the establishment of a valid and secure identity for the customer at the outset. This provides for more cost effective development and delivery of online services by all agencies as they can rely on the confirmed identity service (and other shared services) provided by Reach and do not have to develop such services themselves.

Reach provides the Revenue Commissioners with online identity validation through the PBS. To date approximately 10% of the adult PAYE population have been registered with reachservices, which allows them access to Revenue's self-service PAYE Online service. Through its Help Desk, reachservices provides comprehensive customer support on a 9-5, five day per week basis. The Reach Help Desk team handles up to 600 telephone calls each day.

Reach also provides an interoperability platform enabling government agencies to share data and services reliably and securely. An example is the provision of the messaging service currently used to electronically transmit Birth Marriage Death information from the General Records Office to many departments and agencies. There are currently thirty-two agencies receiving these services and realizing program savings by early termination of pension payments, medical charges and one parent family payment. Revenue and the Department of Agriculture also use the service for transmission of relevant tax refund and meat export data respectively. This greatly reduces the time and bureaucratic overhead for the agencies themselves and for the commercial entities involved.

The messaging service is currently being extended to the justice system. The first phase will exchange documents between the An Garda Síochána (Police) and the Courts. This has considerable potential for savings by eliminating the need for re-keying data and is estimated to free up almost 80 Gardai when fully deployed.

Although the emphasis in this first phase of development has been on the self-service online channel, multi-channel access remains a fundamental aim of the Reach initiative.

Reach's portal site - [Reachservices.ie](http://Reachservices.ie) - has two main elements, a services index and a registration service. The services index contains comprehensive information on about 1400 public provided services. There is a home page for each service providing information on the nature of service, who provides it, links to the agency website, links to other related services and service providers, and contact details. Customers can choose to register with reachservices, which provides additional functionality on the portal.

### *3(b) Funding*

The Reach initiative is funded from appropriations. Its funds come from general taxation as part of the DSFA Vote. There is no objection in principle to the implementation of a suitable charging model but for the moment Reach is focusing on the engagement of new agencies and the deployment of new and varied services.

### *3(c) Human Resources Issues*

Reach is comprised of a combination of a small core team of civil servants (10 or so) and, where necessary, contractors with relevant skills. These include Security, Technical Architecture, Project Management, Operations and Help Desk skills and experience that are not otherwise be immediately available within the Civil Service.

### *3(d) Performance Measurement*

The operation of the system is monitored continually on a managed services basis to ensure 9.999 availability. Any reported divergence from agreed standards is dealt with as appropriate.

### 3(e) Use of Information Technology/Web 2.0.

The PSB infrastructure consists of a central integration framework that in turn supports a number of linked services based on a services oriented architecture. The whole Reach initiative is predicated on the provision of a centrally developed infrastructure offering a range of common/shared services to which agencies can subscribe. A key principle in the architecture of reachservices is that agencies may connect to the infrastructure by means of 'adaptors' and that this reduces the need for significant extra investment in the upgrade of existing systems.

### 3(f) Partnerships

Partnership arrangements are being developed and put in place across the public sector as suitable services are identified and appropriate project streams are put in place. In the Irish Civil Service context (given the scale of the organisations and the relatively tight communications networks that obtain) it has been possible to secure very effective co-operation across agencies to implement useful services which also play a role as "anchor tenants." An example is the Births notification stream of the Inter Agency Messaging System that provides an automated single point of entry notification of certain births data to the General Registrar's Office, the Central Statistics Office and the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The notification also facilitates an automatic increase to Mothers of the Child Benefit for second or subsequent children.

Reach has also benefited from public-private partnerships. Firms such as Capgemini and Bearing Point have provided resources to Reach that were not either immediately available to it from elsewhere in the civil service or, as in the case of certain technical skills, may not have been available in the civil service at all. The private sector role to date therefore has been largely one of provision of certain expertise. For example, Reach worked in partnership with Capgemini to procure and build the PSB.

Reachservices are only provided within Ireland at this time and there are no plans currently for the provision of services externally. However, Reach is aware of the potential of services such as Reachservices to interact with appropriate EU institutions and thus it maintains an interest in any relevant proposals emanating from the EU.

## 4. Community Engagement

Reach is not actively involved in community engagement activities at this time.

## 5. Issues Encountered/Challenges

The need to align business and IT streams across a number of organizational and service environments. The preparedness of organizations in terms of their business transformation strategies. The need to build and maintain goodwill with early adopters especially as we had to clarify/rescope the original vision in the context of available

resources, the capabilities of the technology and the capacity to develop and implement within the agreed timeframes.

## 6. Critical Success Factors

To date, major considerations in Reach's success have been

- The sound technical architecture designed in collaboration with private sector technical consultants
- The focus on integrated service delivery through the PSB
- The strategies espoused by other departments (e.g. for service transformation), the flexibility of their own information technology environments, and trust in the feasibility and reliability of certain common/shared services.

## 7. Next Steps

The initiative is currently under review by a senior Civil Service Board and it is expected that the analysis and recommendation of next steps will go to Government by the end of 2007.

### Contact:

Seamus O'Farrell,  
Senior Business Manager,  
Reach  
E-mail address: [seamus.ofarrell@reach.ie](mailto:seamus.ofarrell@reach.ie)  
Telephone: 353 1 6141513  
Fax: 353 1 660 1881.