

Case Study #20 – ACCESS WASHINGTON

1. Background

[Access Washington](http://access.wa.gov) - <http://access.wa.gov> is Washington State's award-winning Internet portal. It is the gateway to hundreds of online government services. From Access Washington, citizens can open an account for secure transactions with the state, order certificates, find a contractor, file a claim, reserve a campsite, report a fraud, find a job, get a business license, obtain a criminal history, file and pay State of Washington taxes, and more. Citizens can also access information from state agencies and gain an easy path to the Legislature and the courts.

Access Washington replaced a kiosk system in the summer of 1998. The new upgrade offered 24/7/365 availability to an internet-savvy public. Since public computer access was widely available in libraries and schools and there was also an above-national-average usage of home computers in Washington State, the new system was extremely beneficial. After conducting a usability study in 2004 with members of the public and business communities, Access Washington updated its navigation and graphics to better respond to navigation and intuitive demands.

Washington is a geographically large state, transected by a rugged mountain range, creating two distinctly different environments and needs. The state capital, Olympia, is located at the southern end of Puget Sound, which lies on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains. While citizens who live near the I-5 corridor can fairly easily access Olympia, it is 6 hours (or more) away from many areas of the state. Access Washington was created to make it easier for citizens to access government entities from their homes or businesses. With all state government information and services in one portal, customers can easily identify the state agencies and have ease of accessibility throughout the site.

Obtaining collaboration among a disparate group of agencies and stakeholders, none of whom was required to use Access Washington, became a major hurdle for the project. Identification of the best information and best service representation on each site in an understandable, easy-to-navigate format was an enormous undertaking.

2. Organizational Design and Governance Arrangements

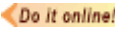
The Washington State Department of Information Services (DIS) owns, manages and maintains the Access Washington portal within its Information Technologies Division. Washington state agencies and departments are not required to use the Access Washington portal. However, their participation and use is recommended. The Governor, for example, promotes the use of Access Washington.

The DIS Information Technologies Division works closely with state agencies and departments to maintain accurate links to information and services. State information technology policies are set by the Information Services Board, and enforced by DIS.

3. Business Model

The overriding principle on which Access Washington is based is the commitment of DIS to deliver high quality, reliable information technology products and services to its customers. Access Washington is a core, mission critical state service and is operational 24/7/365.

Activities, Channels and Migration

Access Washington represents all state government services and information. There is enormous variety in the scope of the activities and services offered for business owners, private citizens, and out of state visitors. Many services, like the Department of Licensing vehicle tab and driver license renewal services, are directly self-serve. The “Doing Business” section, <http://business.wa.gov>, offers business owners and managers a “one-stop shop” for all of their licensing, tax, and permitting needs. Users are encouraged to use these services to increase processing time and offer convenience. Access Washington’s home page features online services with the  symbol.

Funding

Access Washington operates under a cost recoverable model. All state agencies are assessed a fee for their participation. A fair financing methodology was created to accommodate agency size, budget and referrals.

Human Resources Issues

DIS employs on-site, full time staff dedicated to managing and maintaining the portal as part of its Information Technologies Division. Specialized training is available if needed.

Performance Measurement

Customer satisfaction is measured through an online survey. To improve the satisfaction scores, site improvements are implemented based on the data received. Monitoring of the visitor sessions takes place on a monthly basis to review trends and cycles of use.

Use of Information Technology/Web 2.0

Access Washington uses several servers, hardware load balanced by a Cisco Content Switching Module (CSM). The servers run Microsoft Windows 2003 and the web environment is Internet Information Server (IIS) 6.0 running .NET 2.0. Access Washington also uses a shared search and content management service and AJAX techniques for displaying business terms with an online popup glossary.

Partnerships

Access Washington partners both at the community level and at a contract level. Some of the functionality on the portal is through vendor contracts. The 24x7 Help Center that offers 4 channels of support services (knowledgebase, toll-free telephone, live chat and e mail) is an outsourced service as are the foreign language translation pages.

4. Community Engagement

The usability, planning, navigation and content of the “Doing Business” section <http://business.wa.gov> depended heavily on close collaboration with business owners, leaders, and state agencies to design and establish the needs and outcomes for this initiative. DIS works with community groups and not-for-profits to extend awareness of and participation with the services and information offered on the Access Washington portal.

Sharing vast amounts of accurate information along secure pathways is critical for business leaders, agency managers and the public. This has been a key advantage in establishing solid, working relationships with stakeholders. Keeping those lines of communication open and processes strong is a challenge for the network administration.

5. Issues Encountered/Challenges

Keeping up with users’ expectations about emerging technologies has become a challenge for portal administrators. Upgrades and new functionalities are often restricted by policy or budget constraints which can be a source of frustration.

6. Critical Success Factors

Access Washington continues to increase its user base and customer satisfaction rating. By using a strict style guide and web presentation guide, the site is functional in nearly every available browser and browser version. <http://isb.wa.gov/tools/webguide/>.

Using diagnostic tools to insure the health of the site gives the portal strong operational vitality. Continuous monitoring and calibration are a regular business function that results in process and operational improvements.

7. Next Steps

DIS will continue to research new and emerging tools to either replace existing tools or to add functionality to the portal. Efforts will be made to expand personalization opportunities and continue to perform iterative usability studies and testing of the portal. Work to keep the customer satisfaction scores within target range will also continue.

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