

CASE STUDIES

CANADA

eContact Project

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Overview

“Access is to government service what location is to real estate.”

**Citizens
First 2002**

eContact will be a web-based application, accessible to citizens directly through participating jurisdictions' web sites or indirectly through counter or telephone agents at all levels of government across the country. Citizens will enter their queries, they will be analysed, possibly clarified and responses provided which will direct citizens to the service location, phone number or web site that provides the service they are seeking. The project is entering its pilot phase and is expected to be in pilot locations in early 2004.

Project Catalysts/Drivers

Citizens First findings in 1998, 2000 and 2002 clearly indicate *ease of access* as a key driver of citizen satisfaction. Citizen satisfaction with programs and services is relatively high, once they have arrived at the correct source. However, satisfaction is significantly reduced when multiple contacts are needed to find a program or service, particularly as citizens shift from one channel to another. In fact, Citizens First findings for the past 6 years indicate that over 90% of citizens have difficulty in locating government programs/services. Also, anecdotal evidence obtained through discussions with federal, provincial and municipal practitioners supports the conclusion that

approximately 30% of citizen enquiries begin with the wrong jurisdiction.

The citizens' need, an efficient method to locate the service they are seeking, is the focal point of the eContact project. Two significant elements led to the proposed approach. First, the findings of the Blue Pages Redesign, Kingston Pilot Project indicated that citizens appreciated the integrated inter-jurisdictional data but continued to have difficulty understanding government nomenclature. The keyword approach assisted but did not noticeably impact this problem. Secondly, general agent assisted inquiry services, where citizen ambiguities were clarified with qualifying questions, is a business model that is successful in directing these citizens to the correct location.

Partnerships

TBS is conducting this project, working with the PSSDC and PSCIOC and further guided by the ISD Subcommittee and a Steering Committee drawn from members of both councils. The project is an excellent example of inter-jurisdictional collaboration. Staff drawn from British Columbia, Yukon, Whitehorse, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Winnipeg, Ontario, New Brunswick, Saint John, Industry Canada (Manitoba/Ontario Business Service Centres), Public Works and Government Services (Manitoba Region) and the Treasury Board Secretariat are all working together to design, develop and deliver the eContact project.

Challenges

Governance

The biggest challenge facing the eContact Project, and multi-jurisdiction integrated service delivery in general, is governance.

The eContact Project meets Treasury Board funding criteria of being both multi-jurisdictional *and* self-sustaining in the long term, and has therefore been able to secure funding until March 1995. While this will sustain the project through to the stages of piloting, ramping up and rolling out, the question remains of who will host eContact in the longer term (i.e. operate it from April 1995 on). Currently, nobody has the mandate to provide this kind of interjurisdictional service.

Making the Big Leap

Experience to date with eContact demonstrates that it is difficult to work simultaneously across a single jurisdiction and with other jurisdictions: support from other organisations does not automatically lead to support within the home organisation. Some managers may feel a general lack of comfort when dealing with things outside their particular span of control. Even though they may have vision in the silo world, it does not always translate into the peripheral vision required to work in an integrated world. This can be attributed, at least in part, to an ingrained and rewarded cultural resistance to change. There are fears about whether sharing turf, information, power and control really means “the beginning of the end of my job.” These concerns can manifest themselves as a desire to be seen to embrace change and integration while still maintaining the status quo. In other words, integrated service delivery is the right thing for other people to do. Compounding this are governments that do not generally provide incentives to change the behaviours required for true transformation to integrated service delivery. Rather, they reward the status quo and incrementalist behaviour.

Integrated service delivery has been advancing in Canada by baby steps. While there have been many successes, true multi-channel, multi-jurisdiction integration will require a larger disruption. At this point, there is a need to make this leap.

Going Mainstream

The Canadian Centre for Management Development has suggested that support for integrated service delivery is still closely enough tied to individuals that initiatives do not always survive regime change. Part of moving the ISD agenda forward has to include discussions about sustainability. A concrete example of the need for succession planning is the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service, where the corporate memory, network of contacts, relationships and trust is inextricably linked to the two individuals working there. The long-term goal would be that ISD becomes mainstream, and that everyone accepts that it is the way government business is done.

Recommendation

Resolving the issue of governance is critical to the eContact Project and, more generally, to making the leap of faith that true integration will require.

Next year, Effective Project Approval will be required from Treasury Board. This will have to include a plan for how eContact will operate on an on-going basis and address such issues as financial authority, branding, infrastructure, technology and authority to manage staff.

It is recommended that a new governance body of representatives from each jurisdiction be set up to operate eContact. This entity needs to occupy the space between the individual jurisdictions, while representing each jurisdiction at the same time. This governance structure would resolve several issues, the most important being that when different levels of government work together, the tension of past experiences is invariably brought to the table. A board that was not of one jurisdiction but representative of them all would neutralise this potential for friction.

Furthermore, if the trouble were taken to form a board to operate eContact, then it only makes sense to leverage that overhead and task the group to address other integrated service delivery needs. The group would respond to other opportunities and be a forum for discussing and approving proposals for interjurisdictional initiatives and then provide the structure under which they these initiatives could operate. This is the only way to make eContact sustainable and could represent the leap needed to further the ISD agenda across Canada.

Enablers

An active project management office is being set up in Summer or Fall 2003. There will be more information about project planning and approaching integration across multiple jurisdictions when the office is launched.

Victoria Connects

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Overview

“The idea is *to cut the red tape* so that you can get down to business of building a successful enterprise.”

Victoria Connects was launched in 1999 to respond to the needs of the business community. It provides a single access point to support business start-up and development in Victoria. Victoria Connects is a unique partnership between three levels of government, integrating the services of the Federal, Provincial and local governments under one roof.

The objective of Victoria Connects is to provide current information on government business-related products, programs and services. The electronic service delivery channels will help to reduce the amount of time clients spend submitting information to the provincial government. Entrepreneurs and small business operators can complete various registrations and obtain services electronically, by phone, or in person.

Services offered include:

- Information and research assistance to help entrepreneurs with most aspects of business planning, market research and business development, including international market data
- Business Reference Library
- Information on government programs and services
- One Stop Business Registration
- Business advisor on site
- Advice on how to start an importing/exporting business
- Free, informed second opinion on business plans
- Business name searches

In addition to improving convenience and service delivery for the clients, there are also tangible benefits for government. Service

integration reduces the cost of delivering government services, and the reduction in burden to the entrepreneur makes it easier for small businesses, an important factor in economic growth and stability, to focus on their core business.

Proof of the innovation Victoria Connects offers does not only come from being recognized by its customers for the quality of service provided. In May 2001, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) also recognized Victoria Connects with a Bronze Award for Innovative Management. This award is one of the highest-prestige recognition programs in Canadian government. IPAC established it in 1990 to recognize outstanding organizational achievement in the public sector, and judges praised the 2001 winners for exemplifying how governments are instilling new vigor in the public service, breaking down old boundaries and adopting ideas and practices not seen before.

Project Catalysts/Drivers

Victoria Connects was driven by citizen demands for the same kind of integrated service delivery in an urban setting as rural citizens enjoy through the BC Government Agents. It was also an opportunity for the BC government to showcase integrated service delivery to British Columbians, though the success of the Government Agents had already been recognised outside the jurisdiction.

In addition to addressing customer needs, there were other factors that made for fertile ground for this particular initiative:

- There was already a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Vancouver and Western Economic Diversification Canada that could be leveraged
- The ministry responsible for small businesses was already working with the Greater Victoria Economic Development Commission (Business Victoria)
- There were physical space issues (e.g. cost of leases) that could be addressed through the new relationship
- The partners were able to take advantage of common IT applications through the Memorandum of Understanding between the federal government and the provincial government for the Canada/BC Service Centre

Partners

- Canada/British Columbia Business Service Centre

- Western Economic Diversification Canada
- Ministry of Competition, Science and Enterprise
- Greater Victoria Economic Development Commission (Business Victoria)

Challenges

Culture among the three levels of government

There can be vast differences in culture between the three levels of government, and this project was no exception. By concentrating on the successes of the Centre and keeping the staff informed about the positive feedback on client satisfaction, a sense of pride developed in what was being built. This translated into the feeling that the transformation was positive, and that the new was better than the old.

Human Resources

The staff from the three levels of government all worked under different collective agreements, so there were differences in such areas as hours of work and compensation. This was addressed largely by choosing front line staff committed to solution finding and customer service. The staff felt a lot of pride in their innovative service solutions, especially when the Centre became a showcase in the service delivery community.

Support for the status quo

Resistance to change tended to be more strongly felt in the central agencies and technical support areas than it was on the front line. This made it more challenging to address such issues as technical glitches. Strong project leadership committed to integration was a large component in the resolution of this issue.

Critical Success Factors

- Staff commitment
- Customer satisfaction with results. Results measured with online offerings, exit interviews at counters, random response on telephone.

Achieving Integrated Service Delivery

- A key issue that needs to be resolved before Victoria Connects can achieve true integrated service delivery is trusted registration and authentication: customers are not yet comfortable with conducting their financial business online.

- More attention needs to be given to municipal partners and their inclusion in integration initiatives. Not the least reason for this is that municipal governments enjoy a much higher customer service satisfaction level than do the federal and provincial governments.
- The ISD community needs to continue its focus on government from the outside in – ensuring that service delivery is relevant, timely and cost effective and finding the right bundling of services to respond to citizen needs. Integrated Service Delivery will continue to be a priority, and the work Canada is doing in this area is really cutting edge. The community must continue to exploit this advantage and keep the momentum in order to push the agenda forward.