

ON AIR
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E-government:
delivering public services

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Foreword

We live in an age when most of the old dogmas that haunted governments in the past have been swept away. Distinctions between services delivered by the public and the private sectors are breaking down in many areas, opening the way to new ideas, partnerships and opportunities for devising and delivering what the public wants. Just as private enterprises must pay attention to the relationship they have with their consumers, governments must place equal emphasis on its relationship with citizens.

Getting Government services online is an integral part of this – and the Prime Minister set the target of getting all services online by 2005. Progress is already being made with 42% of services already available. Not only are we maximising efficiency, but more importantly we are making Government accessible 24 hours a day from the home, office and elsewhere. But we have a long way to go.

As this vision becomes a reality Government and the citizen will reap the benefits through improved services to citizens, more joined-up government and through initiatives such as e-procurement. How best to harness the opportunities that new technology offers is a challenge that affects all sectors. This ACCA booklet aims to outline and assess how the UK Government is meeting this challenge.

Director of e-Government, Ann Steward

Introduction

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The Internet is changing our lives. It offers new pastimes and opportunities. Those with poor mobility have a virtual means to get out and about, to visit museums or see concerts without leaving their homes. Many more people are choosing to work at home, exploiting e-mail and the world wide web to create a virtual office.

Businesses, too, have a lot to gain from the Internet, either by buying and selling online or providing information about their products and services.

Governments are possibly the single biggest organisations that can benefit from this electronic revolution – a fact that has been

taken up with gusto by Tony Blair's Labour administration.

For years, both local and central government in the UK have battled against a perception that they are becoming more remote from the communities they are supposed to serve. Many commentators feel increasing voter apathy and declining turn-outs at elections are evidence for this.

That declining election turn-outs may be the result of voter frustration is not the only issue. Citizens are also frustrated when they potentially have to inform any number of government departments and agencies – their local council, health authority and the Inland

Revenue, for example – if they change address. They reasonably ask why they cannot inform one government body that will share the information with others.

Public services can seem overly bureaucratic. Relatives of an elderly person who needs long-term care do not wish to be told by their local hospital that they must contact council social services in order to get them a place in a residential home. This should happen automatically.

Hence, the government's programme of modernisation – joining up the activities of central departments so that more information can be shared and

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health and social services work more closely together. The public should receive a seamless service, regardless of the fact that several different government departments or agencies, other public and private sector bodies or voluntary organisations are working in the background to deliver that service.

Of course, all governments worldwide are trying to reduce their costs so they can make tax revenues go further and an efficient, technology-enabled system should allow the UK administration to release savings that could be spent on public services, benefits or given back to the taxpayer in reduced taxes.

Information technology will play a major role in making this vision a reality. That much was announced in the white paper *Modernising Government* in 1999. This proposed that all government services be available in electronic format by 2008. On 30 March 2000, the Prime Minister announced that the target date had been brought forward by three years to 2005.

There are four guiding principles behind the government's plans:

- services should be focused on citizens and built around their requirements
- services should be made more accessible

- social inclusion should improve as a result of the initiative
- government departments and agencies should be able to manage information better.

This is undoubtedly a challenging agenda. The Internet in particular will be the driving force behind a wider revolution that should result in public services being moulded around the user rather than users having to work their way through a cluttered, bureaucratic system that reflects the structure of government rather than their individual needs.

Politically, the will to implement the initiative is strong. The Prime Minister has taken a leading role in developing the strategy and receives

monthly updates on progress. He has appointed an e-Government Minister and an e-Minister, and a Minister for e-Commerce and Competitiveness, overseeing a specially created unit in the Cabinet Office – the Office of the e-Envoy (OeE) – which is charged with seeing the initiative through to completion.

The e-Envoy, Andrew Pinder, is driving through the process. Each government department has appointed an information age champion, charged with galvanising their colleagues into action. Departmental progress will be monitored by the Treasury through Public Service Agreements.

Targets have been set, £1 billion of public money is available and the political will to drive through the initiative is strong – but the time is short. However, if the government's electronic vision can be achieved by 2005, government, the public and the business world will all benefit.

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What is the government trying to achieve?

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Perhaps the first thing to note about Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) is that employing new technology is not the goal. Nor is this a project simply to replicate existing services in electronic form.

The driving force behind the initiative is the desire to improve the experience of public services for users and to make the services themselves more efficient. And by tailoring easy-to-use services to the needs of individuals and businesses, ESD should also produce better quality services.

Different parts of government will need to work more closely together and embrace the private and voluntary sectors – working together

they can provide new, more efficient and convenient ways for both citizens and businesses to communicate with government, pay bills and receive information and services.

THE PROBLEM

Most government departments and agencies had an Internet presence by the time *Modernising Government* was published in 1999. Most provided a range of information, from press releases to reports and consultation documents, but there was no overall government 'corporate' strategy.

Each department and agency developed its own methods and protocols, resulting in systems and

services that were incompatible and not integrated. If departments could not share information, they could not deliver the joined-up government agenda and improve service delivery.

THE SOLUTION

A fundamental revamp of government IT infrastructure was needed and that is what Tony Blair promised in *Modernising Government*. All government services would be available in electronic format but they would not be mere ciphers of current services – they must be rethought and redesigned around users' needs.

The responsibility for implementing the initiative falls to a special unit

What is the government trying to achieve? (continued)

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within the Cabinet Office – the Office of the e-Envoy. This is split into two sections: delivery and policy. The two sections work side by side with the same stated goal of making the UK the best place in the world for e-commerce.

The Government Secure Intranet (GSI) is the major highway along which information can pass between departments and agencies. The emphasis is on services available via the Internet, though other means such as digital TV will be used if they are more appropriate.

WHAT CAN I DO ONLINE NOW?

It is difficult to make an assessment of progress on implementation of

ESD as new services are coming online all the time. But given that qualification, there are two ways of looking at what has been achieved to date.

It is true that a lot of government information is online and some transactions can be carried out. However, the Office of the e-Envoy acknowledges that the number of two-way dealings that can be enacted is comparatively low when compared to the total number of government services, though it is increasing. It also acknowledges that some of these are specialist services useful for, but not available to, the general public.

However, the government's achievements look more positive when they are put in an international context. Compared to sites run by foreign governments the figure is high, as is the volume and quality of the material. The Second Internet Intelligence Test of European Union Governments carried out by the University of Amsterdam (www.amsu.edu/jac) put the UK second behind Sweden.

Many of the pledges made in *Modernising Government* have already been achieved, such as the ability to electronically file self-assessment tax returns and some Companies House returns. Services now online include the following:

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- NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) gives users advice on healthy living and can help them decide whether they can treat themselves at home, need to see a GP or go directly to casualty
- information and advice for small businesses via the Small Business Service (www.businessadviceonline.org)
- employers, their agents or payroll bureaux can send PAYE end-of-year returns and a range of other PAYE forms over the Internet via www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk. Employers using the Internet to send in their 2000/2001 PAYE end-of-year returns and who

- made at least one electronic payment of tax for 2000/2001 qualified for a one-off discount of £50
- the Land Registry database (www.landreg.gov.uk) can be searched for residential property prices in the latest quarter at regional, local authority or postcode levels. Access can be gained to nearly 17 million computerised registers of property titles, while users can also lodge official searches and view details of pending applications
 - the award winning Companies House database (www.companieshouse.gov.uk) of over 1.5 million registered companies and 5 million

- documents per year is available. Users can get company reports, details of directors and information about disqualified directors. They may file some returns now and there are plans to expand the service
- minor crimes can be reported online at www.online.police.uk
 - employers can obtain guidance on health and safety issues at www.hsedirect.com
 - maps can be bought online at www.ordnancesurvey.gov.uk
 - individuals can search for jobs, and businesses can register vacancies at www.employmentservice.gov.uk.

In addition citizens can book driving and theory tests, get

What is the government trying to achieve? (continued)

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information and advice about
benefits and apply for training
loans – all online.

3

Developments in technology

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Much of the technology needed to support the government's electronic vision is already ubiquitous. The Internet, websites, links to other sites and even the software needed for transactions are well established. What is novel about ESD is the way in which these are being used and will be used to reach out to citizens and businesses in order to make government open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

UK ONLINE

There are two distinct themes to the UK Online programme. The first is the website (www.ukonline.gov.uk), the second the government's attempts to give access to the Internet to everyone who wants it.

The UK Online initiative brings together government, industry, the voluntary sector, trades unions and consumer groups with the aim of making the UK one of the world's leading knowledge economies.

The UK Online strategy identifies five key priorities:

- modern markets – encouraging the use of e-commerce
- confident people – enabling citizens to use new technology
- successful businesses
- getting government online
- world class supply – efficient use of technology.

It has launched a number of initiatives in order to achieve these

aims, including a network of UK Online centres (there are currently 1500 of these), which provide opportunities at local level for training and access to information and communications technologies. UK Online for Business aims to encourage e-business, offering expert and impartial advice face-to-face, online (www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk) and by telephone.

The UK Online website (known as the citizen portal) is a new way for the government and agencies to provide information to the public on the net. To date, information has been tucked away on each department or agency's site – a way of organising information that

Developments in technology (continued)

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assumes the citizen knows which department is responsible for the information they wish to find.

Ukonline.gov.uk offers a single point of entry to all government information and also includes links to UK Online for Business and the Government Gateway, through which transactions with, for example, Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise can be carried out in a secure environment.

While UK Online contains more “traditional” links such as departmental websites and a government newsroom, it also offers users a number of common scenarios. One click on these “life episodes” will bring up further

links enabling the user to hone down their search quickly to what they want to know.

For example, someone moving house may wish to learn about council tax in their new area or to find out how long it will take them to get to work on the train and how much it will cost.

The life episodes available so far are:

- going away
- dealing with crime
- having a baby
- moving home
- learning to drive
- death and bereavement
- looking after someone
- looking for a job
- pensions and retirement.

Ann Steward, Director of e-Government at the Office of the e-Envoy, says the decision to base UK Online around these life episodes was a deliberate one.

“In the UK Online citizen portal we are packaging information through life episodes so they are meaningful to the citizen and to business. This is in response to users’ information needs – it is driven by the views of all users”, she says.

“UK Online is a response to what citizens have told us through our consultations, such as, the People’s Panel and other consultation mechanisms. It is not just restricted to government sites

Developments in technology (continued)

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– we have links to private sector service providers where it is appropriate.”

“The focus is on service delivery. A user wants to get the information they are after as quickly and as easily as possible”, she continues.

The creation of the portal has brought unforeseen benefits.

“The citizen portal has helped us work collaboratively by getting information together across different departments. All the information is designed so that it is relevant to people wherever they are in the UK.”

Users can personalise UK Online, enabling them to go directly to their favourite parts of the site. One of these could be the Citizen Space, which could become an important milestone in the development of e-democracy.

“We have a formal feedback process through the Citizen Space which will be important in the development of e-democracy. It is an opportunity for citizens to have a say on emerging policies or express their points of view”, Steward adds.

THE GOVERNMENT GATEWAY

Like the citizen portal the aim of the Government Gateway is to join up departmental IT systems so

that services can be provided through a single entry point. The Gateway provides a number of key e-business functions, including authentication, data privacy and security, and single sign-on, as standard infrastructure services. It is the middleware that sits between departmental back office systems and front office applications, such as departmental websites, portals and commercial applications. It has been designed to enable secure joined-up transactions between government and the citizen (including business).

The Gateway went live in January this year and it is a phased implementation. The first

transactions for HM Customs and Excise, for VAT filing, began in March while the first transactions for Inland Revenue and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (formerly MAFF) began in April.

E-GOVERNMENT WORLDWIDE

Compared to many other countries the UK is well advanced in its move towards e-government, though there are a number of countries that are further on in their development, including Sweden and Singapore (see case study below).

In the EU, only Germany is investing more in e-government, while UK public sector spending

per capita is the highest outside of Scandinavia.

The United States and Canada have been particularly active, with the demands of delivering public services over such a vast, and sometimes sparsely populated area being a driving force.

The Canadians say that 41% of Internet users regularly access government information. In the United States, Arizona has had a pioneering project known as Service Arizona since 1996. This enables users to carry out a range of transactions on the web, including replacing lost ID cards and ordering personalised number plates. Some 15% of vehicle

registration renewals are now being carried out online, saving US\$5 per transaction or around US\$1.7 million a year.

As in the UK, many countries have an e-strategy that aims to boost skills and e-business. Aside from the savings and improvements in quality that governments can make from their e-government strategies, there is also an international dimension to their benefits.

Countries can learn from each other and share their experiences – the UK government is a keen exponent of this. Better, faster communications between countries could help them co-ordinate the fight against cross-border crime,

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such as drug trafficking over the Internet.

Case study: Singapore

E-government in Singapore is one of the most advanced in the world. It launched its civil service computerisation programme in 1981, while a powerful central body, known as the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), promotes the use of technology across public and private sectors.

The IDA formulates policy, acts as a regulator and works to ensure that Singapore's e-industry is a major contributor to economic growth. It also initiates and co-ordinates e-government and e-business projects.

In 2000, the government announced a three-year programme for e-government, with five strategic "thrusts":

- pushing the envelope of electronic service delivery
- building new capacity and capability
- innovating with infocomm technology
- being proactive and responsive
- innovating and harnessing new technology in public services continually.

A visit to Singapore's website (www.sg) is certainly worthwhile. The home page demonstrates just how much information the island state has online. It includes

directories on business, arts and entertainment, the government and tourism, as well as a people finder and information on Singapore's history.

Delve deeper into the Singapore government website (www.gov.sg) and you will find things that you would expect – information, press releases, ministers' speeches – and some things you would anticipate a wired-up government to have – such as a directory of online services and a government shop. But there are some surprises, including an opportunity to create an e-greeting card, with a choice of more than 100 photographs of Singapore, which can be sent to friends.

THE POTENTIAL FOR ELECTRONIC SERVICES

How much potential is there for electronic services? The answer could be, "How long is a piece of string?" But there is a degree of pragmatism in central government about which services should be available in electronic format and which would be either unsuitable or have little demand.

Future developments will mainly depend on persuading the public that electronic transactions, whether they involve money or the exchange of information, are secure.

An example of this could be the widespread use of electronic

voting. This is already used in some areas of the United States and there have been pilots in local government elections in Bury, Salford and Stratford-upon-Avon (see case study below).

There may be widespread uptake of a new generation of smart cards in the near future. These could be similar to credit cards but as well as bank details could include a form of identification, medical information such as allergies and NHS number and digital signatures.

Preventing unauthorised access, particularly to such sensitive information, would be critical. Similarly, the development of

digital certificates, which could be used to verify that a person filling in an electronic benefit form, for example, was who they said they were, would be crucial to extending the capacity of e-government. But security worries would also apply.

Governments around the world have tried to regulate the Internet as its use has become more widespread. In the UK as elsewhere this has become a difficult balancing act between encouraging legitimate use of the web and cracking down on criminals looking to exploit the Internet. Encryption is one such area where balance is required. It is vital for security and public

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confidence in e-commerce but encryption is also one of the tools used by Internet criminals, particularly paedophiles.

The UK government has acknowledged its dual responsibilities and in July 2000 passed the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. The then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, said that the Act balanced individuals' rights to privacy with law enforcement agencies' need to intercept electronic communications.

Interception of e-communications are now subject to strict rules and must be personally authorised by the Home Secretary. Anyone

served with an appropriate notice must also provide a plain text version of any encrypted communication. However, an independent tribunal will deal with complaints.

Case study: Electronic voting

The controversy over paper ballots in the 2000 Presidential elections in the United States led many to wonder why the most powerful nation in the world was not using technology to make the election of its President clear and simple.

In many parts of the world e-voting has become standard. In the Netherlands, local and general elections are held in most areas using electronic voting in polling

stations. And in the UK, councils in Bury, Salford and Stratford-upon-Avon used e-voting in polling stations for the local authority elections in 2000.

There are many advantages to e-voting. Counting becomes quicker, which should reduce costs. This would be important if proportional representation becomes more widely used. Also, if the ballot is complicated – say, a local election and a parliamentary by-election are held on the same day – it may help clarify for the voter which issue they are voting on.

Some believe e-voting will increase turnout. However, feedback from the UK councils that used e-voting

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in the 2000 local authority elections showed that while participation was not increased, the cost of staging the elections rose.

Use of the Internet or voting through digital television could be the key to increasing turnout. A Democratic party primary in Arizona found that an online ballot increased turnout to six times its usual level. A survey by KPMG Consulting in 2000 found that almost half the people in the UK with Internet access wanted to vote online.

However, authorities have shied away from holding ballots over the Internet. There are some

fundamental problems associated with it, particularly security issues, such as identification of voters and the risk of viruses spreading. Though the Dutch government is said to be considering the Internet for elections, it may be some time before it is used in the UK.

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What are the benefits of e-government?

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E-government is not an end in itself but a means to make the interactions between citizens and businesses on one hand and local and central government departments and agencies on the other easier, less bureaucratic and tailored to the users' needs.

Everyone can benefit from this, but the level of gain will depend on many factors, including business and public willingness to use the technology, ease of access and ease of use.

THE BENEFITS FOR CITIZENS

We now live in a 24-hour society, which is being driven by the customer focus of service industries in the private sector.

The private sector has responded to the fact that customers were fed up with taking time off work, for example, to go to the bank, query a bill or get to the shops before they close. Working hours are less rigid. Work often stretches into the evening, while many more people work shifts or part-time in the evening.

As a consequence you can now get a statement on your bank account, pay bills and arrange a loan from many banks at three o'clock in the morning using either a secure Internet link or by phoning a call centre. Yet government tends to shut down after 5pm, a source of frustration for would-be information seekers, bill payers and form fillers.

One of the central themes of the e-government programme is that the public has the right to expect the same level of service as they would receive in the private sector. Ann Steward, Director of e-Government at the Office of the e-Envoy, says flexibility will be the cornerstone of ESD.

"The benefits for the citizen is that they will be able to access information and services where and when they want, at a time they want, and in a way that suits their lifestyle", Steward says.

"They will receive information and services in a meaningful way, in a language and style that is not bureaucratic. Also, it will enable

What are the benefits of e-government? (continued)

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them to have access to facilities and services, whether it is through the Internet or any combination of electronic and manual means.”

Better use of information could also relieve the public’s frustration at having to give the same details each time they contact a government department or agency. Services should appear seamless.

Social inclusion is another of ESD’s guiding principles and by insisting that this digital revolution does not exclude sections of the population, the government may be able to break down the barriers felt in some areas of society.

Through its Citizen Space, the UK

Online portal could, for example, give hitherto unheard groups a voice to get over their opinions to policy makers.

E-government means greater access to government information, whether this be about hospital waiting lists, a guide to capital gains tax or how to go about getting probate. Parents, for example, may be interested in www.schoolsnet.com, which provides an illustrated guide to every school in the country, the national curriculum, information about universities and discussion groups for parents and teachers.

Case study: Tameside
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council’s website

(www.tameside.gov.uk) was the only local authority site classified by the Society of IT Management as transactional in its 2001 survey.

On the site local people can pay their council tax, housing rent, business rates and car park fines using credit and debit cards. They can also purchase goods and services, such as scaffolding permits and composters.

The council insists that the users’ card details are safe – the information is encrypted and the council does not store credit card details after it processes payments. Once approved by the credit card company, payments are processed within one working day.

What are the benefits of e-government? (continued)

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The site also offers a range of other services, including information on tenders for council work, details of road works and a database of forms that can be obtained online.

Three types of form are available – forms that require signatures so they must be printed out and posted back to the council; fully electronic forms that can be completed and submitted online; and documents available only in PDF format, which must also be printed out and posted back.

A variety of forms are available. They are divided into six categories – benefits and grants, education and careers, environment, feedback, leisure and

miscellaneous. Under environment, for example, residents can make a litter bin request, while they can make an application to hold a car boot sale in the miscellaneous section.

THE BENEFITS FOR BUSINESSES

One of Tony Blair's stated ambitions for the e-government initiative is that it will make the UK the best country in the world for carrying out e-commerce. Some of the elements of the UK Online programme will facilitate this. These include the development of:

- modern markets – developing a legal, regulatory and fiscal environment in the UK and

globally that facilitates e-commerce

- confident people – helping individuals and businesses take full advantage of the opportunities opened up by information and communication technologies, and ensuring that those opportunities are available to all
- market analysis – ensuring that government and business decisions are informed by reliable and accurate e-commerce monitoring and analysis.

UK Online for business aims to help businesses make the most out of the e-commerce revolution and improve their productivity. Its

What are the benefits of e-government? (continued)

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targets include getting 1.5 million small to medium-sized enterprises online by 2002, with 1 million of these trading online.

The e-government strategy's focus on users' needs will benefit businesses. The information gathering process will be streamlined and increasingly companies will be able to file returns or electronically respond to consultation documents, for example.

Business may also benefit from gaining access to government information, though obviously this will not extend to personalised information, such as electronic medical records. Twenty-four hour, easy access to government surveys,

reports and censuses could be a boon for business planners.

Some commercial websites have already grasped these opportunities. For example, www.upmystreet.com uses data from the Land Registry, Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills (formerly Department for Education and Employment) and works the information into an approximate profile of where you live using postcodes. The website www.homecheck.co.uk offers environmental data and discusses flood risk and subsidence risk using postcodes.

The Cabinet Office recently made it easier for businesses such as

publishers, dot coms and libraries to use government information. They can apply for a licence at the Stationery Office website (www.hmso.gov.uk), allowing them to use data about health, house prices, schools performance tables, crime, census results and guidance issued by departments. Most of the material can be used free of charge.

Improving skills levels in the job market and ensuring that school children leave education with at least a basic knowledge of computers are an important part of the government's strategy. This will hopefully create a better-equipped workforce able to meet the demands of employers desperate

What are the benefits of e-government? (continued)

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for employees with computer skills.

“One of the critical aspects of our online agenda is moving away from the bureaucratic approach towards a citizen and business centred model. We will not be applying the model we have for our administrating or functional activities”, Ann Steward says.

“Economically, the country will be better placed. Not only will the community be e-enabled, e-aware and e-active but the programme will be beneficial in terms of productivity because we will be cutting out the arduous processes and making them as streamlined as possible.”

E-government also offers businesses new commercial opportunities to work with the public sector to provide the services expected by the public. One example is the new decision support system provided by Axa Assistance to NHS Direct, the health service’s nurse-led phone helpline.

The seven-year, £68 million deal produces gains for both sides. Axa gets to demonstrate its system in a working environment to potential buyers worldwide, while the NHS will receive up to 20% of all overseas sales. This could amount to £10 million over the seven-year contract. The Department of Health also claims it will save £50

million in running costs by March 2004.

THE BENEFITS FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In some respects, e-government could be seen as a panacea for the public sector.

There is little doubt that the move to electronic government should produce savings. At the same time services to the public should get better, citizens should be more engaged with the work of government departments and agencies, IT skills should be boosted and new opportunities for information age businesses should be created.

What are the benefits of e-government? (continued)

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Of course none of this will be achieved simply by turning on a series of computer servers in Whitehall, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast that are linked to mini-versions of the same in local authorities. The drive towards ESD is an opportunity to rethink government and how it interacts with citizens and businesses.

The government itself, perhaps mindful of hostages to fortune, is keen to focus its ambitions to e-government's four guiding principles (citizen focus, accessible services, social inclusion and better management of information). In truth, putting in place a system that achieves these goals will be difficult enough, though if they are realised

they will have a significant effect on the way services are delivered.

The four principles may be categorised as one aim – modernising government services. Some of the initiatives already in hand can be seen to encapsulate both this aim and the four principles.

The Citizen Space on UK Online, for example, should improve communication and services between members of the public and the government. It provides a citizen focus by asking the public what they feel strongly about and improves access to a group of people who can seem remote from Joe Public. It will potentially give a

voice to the socially excluded – people with disabilities, for example – and enable government to manage information better by receiving responses to policies quickly and in an easily storable format.

Case study: Open Britain

The foot and mouth crisis that gripped Britain's countryside in 2001 had many far-reaching consequences, not only for farming but also for the tourist industry. Surveys showed large numbers of tourists, particularly Americans, cancelling visits to this country following the outbreak of the disease.

Of course, tourists who came to Britain found that most visitor

What are the benefits of e-government? (continued)

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attractions were open but how do you get that message across to those thinking of cancelling or postponing a holiday here?

At the height of the crisis, the government launched its Open Britain website (www.openbritain.gov.uk) which aims to attract visitors by detailing tourist attractions. When it was launched, the site pointed out a British Tourist Authority survey which showed that 80% of attractions were open and 91% of events were going ahead despite the crisis.

As well as giving tourists from home and abroad information about events around the country, it

gave information and advice on preventing the spread of foot and mouth disease.

Though not developed specifically to counteract the adverse publicity of the foot and mouth outbreak, it has been a useful tool in spreading the tourist industry's message that it is open for business.

In the first week alone a million online-tourists visited the site, which the then Culture and Media secretary Chris Smith hailed as a turning point in the fortunes of the industry. "The million hits to the openbritain.gov.uk website prove there is real interest in visiting Britain", he said.

"The site is a great way of finding out instantly where to go, what to see and what is open. The success of the site is a real tourist triumph at a time when the industry badly needs a confidence boost. It is now up to everyone in tourism, working together with local and national government, to help translate interest into real visitors."

What challenges must be overcome?

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As stated in the previous section, ESD is not simply about switching on a few computers in government departments and agencies. There are a number of challenges – organisational, cultural, technical and social that must be tackled if the initiative is to be a success.

As Ann Steward puts it: “It is a challenge and that is not just about functional change. It is broader than that because cultural change is needed and technology should not be seen as just a bolt-on. The challenge is to re-engineer our services and processes so that we deliver citizen centric, by that I mean, user friendly, services.”

ORGANISATIONAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Making all government services available in electronic format three years earlier than expected is a tough challenge. Ann Steward is confident it can be achieved, though she acknowledges it will take a lot of hard work and a focus on those key services where there will be greatest benefit and take-up.

Government is obviously a very complex business, many areas overlap and in the past departments have not been good at talking to each other in order to reduce duplication. Though superficially departments may continue to look the same, if they

are to produce the seamless service demanded by the public they will need some degree of “horizontal” organisation which will allow them to co-operate more closely with each other. This will, of course, require changes in the culture of local, central and devolved governments.

“From our perspective the change culture is a very positive step forward”, Steward says, though, “it needs to be carefully managed. Change can be a little disarming for some people.”

“Joined-up government must be a help in producing efficient, user-focused, accessible services”

What challenges must be overcome? (continued)

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“If we can get our act together and provide significantly improved, citizen focused services it has got to be a major achievement. Different things will happen in our front offices – different skills sets will be required because they will have to deal with a query or an individual in a more holistic way. Departments are addressing that as part of their e-business strategies. But we want the changes to be smooth so the citizen doesn’t see all the back office changes, but rather uses the service and responds positively, ‘I like this service, I’ll use it again’.”

Departments must approach e-government in an integrated way.

“Each department and agency must ask how their [e-government] strategies reflect their business programmes – they must not be a bolt-on but at the heart of it. Not all their services will be available in electronic format because not all are suited nor do citizens want everything to be in electronic format”, Steward adds.

“Its potential is rich. A lot can be done but the principle issue is to be responsive to what the citizen wants. Some services will not be e-enabled because they are not suited – you can’t do the practical part of the driving test online. We have a lot of work to do but we are in a good position. The framework is in place, the infrastructure is in

place, it’s now a question of getting our heads down and getting going.”

WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local authorities are an important part of the e-government strategy, a fact that in itself will require a change in attitude in both local and central government. Relationships between the two have rarely been harmonious, with central government often regarding councils as junior partners that should do its bidding and local government regarding the centre as being out of touch with the views of voters.

Of the £1 billion the government has made available for the e-

What challenges must be overcome? (continued)

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government strategy, £350 million will be used to support local government initiatives. E-government is an important element in the modernisation of local government, which includes initiatives such as the introduction of Cabinet-style administrations, directly elected mayors and Best Value. Indeed, with its citizen focus and quality objectives, e-government is already imbued with the principles of Best Value. This has been reflected by the introduction of an electronic service delivery Best Value Performance Indicator (BV157) for 2001–2002.

Central and local government are trying to improve communications, setting up Promoting Electronic

Government (PEG) as a central–local government collaboration that will run to April 2002. It aims to develop a toolkit to support internal change within local authorities to help them gear up for electronic services. It is a partnership between the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR – formerly Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions), around 30 local authorities, the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency, the Federation of the Electronics Industry and consultants CDW & Associates.

Some local authorities, such as Thameside Metropolitan Borough

Council, are well ahead of the game and are attracting interest from central government. A Society of IT Management (Socitm) survey found that 441 of the 467 local authorities in the UK had a website in early 2001 (www.socitm.gov.uk). But while many interesting and innovative uses are emerging from local government (see case study below), Socitm classifies only one – Thameside – as transactional, that is offering routine online payment facilities.

Most sites (76%) contained only basic information and perhaps a few downloadable files, while 20% of councils had sites that offered some online transactions, more

What challenges must be overcome? (continued)

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detailed information and perhaps a library of planning applications, for example. Local authorities clearly have some way to go before they can claim to be e-enabled.

In March 2001, however, the DTLR announced that 105 councils would take part in 25 pathfinder projects to develop better, more accessible local services through new technology. The goal is to produce generic e-models which can then be scaled and replicated across the local government community.

Some £25 million was made available for the initiative in 2001–2002. The DTLR has also appointed a private sector

consortium led by Vantagepoint to support the work. The services the councils are piloting include smart cards for public transport passes and to pay for school meals and one-stop shops in rural areas. Success for these schemes could bring local e-government a lot closer. More information on pathfinders can be found at www.press.dtlr.gov.uk/0103/0164.htm.

Case study: Local authority websites

While many local authorities are struggling to provide interactive services online, there are many good examples of innovative thinking coming out of town and county halls.

North Wiltshire, for example, (www.northwilts.gov.uk) has a photo gallery of the lost and stray dogs picked up by the local dog catcher. The tower on the Shetland Islands town hall building in Lerwick is closed to the public but the council has installed a web cam allowing visitors to enjoy a panoramic view over the island (www.shetland.gov.uk).

Web cams are also very much in evidence in Brent (www.brent.gov.uk). The London borough has installed a web cam in its Registry Office so relatives or friends who cannot make it to a wedding can attend at least in a virtual sense.

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TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Given the legacy of disparate computer systems they have used in the past, one of the biggest technical challenges was to give government departments and agencies the ability to talk to each other.

The government aims to overcome this with a set of technical policies and standards to achieve coherence across departments, agencies and the wider world. The e-government interoperability framework (e-GIF) is the cornerstone of the e-government initiative, allowing the seamless flow of information across government.

The e-GIF standards are mandatory and should allow public sector bodies to concentrate on changing their business process to reflect citizen and business needs.

In layman's terms, the standards are those used on the Internet and world wide web, reducing cost and risk and allowing the widest access possible via the Internet.

To support implementation, the Cabinet Office has set up the UK GovTalk initiative, a joint government and industry forum which produces toolkits and best practice guidance. More information on the e-GIF and updates of the standards can be found on the GovTalk website (www.govtalk.gov.uk).

These standards are reflected in the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) which provides departments with e-mail and Internet access.

"The GSI enables us to work in a secure environment and we are also working to enable us to have a secure link to local government", says Steward. "The development of the interoperability framework sets out how we are going to use specific technologies for browser-based systems and services. This policy has been developed in conjunction with the private and public sectors and academics."

In addition, the e-Government Metadata Framework sets out a plan to develop an extensive

What challenges must be overcome? (continued)

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metadata element set for government, in line with international standards. The goal is to enable citizens and businesses to find information and services without burdening them with the need to know about government structure or departmental nuances. Using standardised structures and terminology will also improve efficiency within government in that it will lead to standardised record keeping.

A further technical challenge will be to speed up Internet connections. Though many businesses and large sections of the public are already connected to the Internet, use can be discouraged by slow connections.

It is estimated that a third of our time online is spent waiting for information to download, but this will be a thing of the past with the advent of broadband technology. In February 2001 the government published its broadband strategy, *UK online: the broadband future* (available at www.e-envoy.gov.uk), committing it to ensuring that the UK had the most “extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005”.

Broadband services offer significantly quicker data transfers and “always on” Internet connections. Because it can handle more information, more quickly, the technology could make services like video streaming and

video conferencing a reality in many homes and offices.

Digital Subscriber Loop (DSL), for example, is a “broadband” technology that is being installed in local exchanges around the country, which will enable ordinary telephone lines to provide high speed Internet access and video on demand.

The government is attempting to foster greater interest in broadband and is keen to maintain competition in the provision of services using the technology. It has auctioned off broadband wavelengths and set up a Broadband Stakeholder Group to oversee the implementation of the

What challenges must be overcome? (continued)

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broadband strategy and to recommend further developments to ministers.

The government's broadband strategy will continue to evolve and it is likely to play a major role in getting the UK online.

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

A fundamental problem associated with any project driven by newer technologies is that it tends to exclude some groups in society – the poor and the old particularly. Their involvement is crucial to the success of the initiative. As potentially the biggest users of the services to be available electronically, these are also the groups of people that the

government wishes to reach with its ESD agenda.

The government has decided to tackle the problem head on and to make social inclusion one of the guiding principles behind e-government.

“We want to get to the entire population. This is about our social exclusion agenda, making sure we don't create a digital divide and don't use technology in an ineffective way”, explains Steward.

“We want to give access to people who would not normally have access to technology and we have a broad range of initiatives in order to achieve that.”

The UK Online centres will play a major role in offering these opportunities.

“People who have never had access to a PC can come off the street and do some basic awareness training. Others will be able to take up more sophisticated training. A lot of the work focuses on impoverished and rural remote communities and so far there are 1,500 UK Online centres, which will rise to 6,000 by 2002. We have a range of Wired up Communities throughout the UK and the government is making available computers to be re-used – 100,000 recycled PCs will be allocated to low income families in low income areas throughout the UK.”

What challenges must be overcome? (continued)

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Some of the earliest beneficiaries of the Wired up Communities programme included east Manchester, Framlingham in Suffolk, Alston in Cumbria and Kensington in Liverpool, where 2,000 homes were provided with a computer. People with Individual Learning Accounts can also get an 80% discount on computer literacy training.

Case study: Digital TV

Only about 45% of the UK population has access to the Internet and despite the government's ambition to get everyone online there will be many who will not want to have Internet access or feel they cannot afford it.

However, most people have a TV and with the government planning to switch all channels to digital by 2010 at the latest, television could offer another route for e-government to reach into the home.

Digital TV is interactive and already a quarter of UK households are using it to surf the web, order pizzas and shop for holidays.

The government is in the process of organising some pilot "digital neighbourhoods", where households will be supplied with a free set-top box to enable them to watch free-to-air digital channels, use interactive Internet services such as shopping sites and send and receive e-mail.

Using this service, they may soon be able to view the NHS Direct TV channel, which will offer advice on health and where and how to access health services. It may also offer videos describing simple ways to treat yourself at home for simple ailments and links to support groups.

From September 2002, pupils will be able to back up their studies for GCSEs on their digital TV, home PC or school computers. The Department for Education and Skills plans to make available digital course materials in six GCSE subjects, giving teachers and pupils instant access to sound, video, interactive and 3-D educational materials.

Financial issues

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The e-government programme is a complex and challenging agenda for everyone involved in the delivery and management of public services, but it also raises many issues for those who manage public finances.

The government is investing £1 billion in the initiative – this is a huge amount of money to manage, particularly over such a wide range of government departments, agencies and local government.

Despite this large investment, local authorities in particular will find they must forge partnerships with the private sector in order to raise the funds they need. These partnership agreements will need

to be watertight and be able to withstand proper probity.

SAVINGS

If e-services take off, the potential for savings in the public sector are huge. It is feasible that job losses of up to 20% could result from the implementation of e-government. Of course, the health service will continue to employ doctors and nurses, while councils will still need refuse collectors, but will public bodies require so many secretaries and admin staff?

Ann Steward says that savings in public sector costs are inevitable and her department is working to develop a transaction cost model to identify savings made from the

enabling of services so they can make an accurate cost-benefit analysis.

However, she stresses that this is not the driving force behind the initiative.

“There will no doubt be savings but it is also about overall social issues; the benefits of an enriched community that is an active participant in national and international issues and better productivity because goods and services are brought to market much quicker.”

These benefits are not to be ignored. The International Labour Organisation predicts that by 2004,

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70% of the EU's workforce will be Internet users, compared to 28% at the end of 1999. The European Commission expects e-commerce in Europe to grow from US\$17 billion at the end of 1999 to about US\$360 billion by 2003. By 2006, the EU predicts that 90% of new jobs in the UK will require basic IT and keyboard skills.

E-PROCUREMENT

Perhaps the greatest scope for savings will be made in the area of e-procurement. At the moment, many public sector bodies still use a paper-based requisition and order system in which details have to be entered time and time again.

The paper system is laborious for other reasons. It is slow because requisitions are passed between budget holders for approval. It is difficult for an organisation to increase purchasing power by buying in bulk because orders for the same purchases can come in at any time. Stock control is difficult and automated re-ordering of frequently used goods unheard of.

But a wave of e-commerce is sweeping out of government and into agencies, local authorities and the health service. In April 2001, the Office of Government Commerce, which has a target of delivering £1 billion in value-for-money gains by 2003, launched a web-based pilot electronic tendering

system – OGC TenderTrust – to replace the traditional paper tendering system used in the purchasing of products and services by civil servants in central government.

Peter Gershon, the OGC Chief Executive, said the system could produce savings in the region of £13 million over four years.

The OGC also aims to reduce the burden on suppliers – cutting their tendering costs by £37 million through slashing the paper trail on tendering exercises and improving management information.

Case study: NHS e-procurement
In England, the health service

spends £5.6 billion a year on goods and services but it is not buying efficiently because most trusts still use a paper-based purchasing system.

The Audit Commission believes it costs the NHS £40 to raise each order and the Department of Health is determined to drive down this administration cost. It hopes to award a contract to provide an integrated finance and e-commerce system across the NHS in England by February 2002 in a move that could save up to £1.1 billion a year – 20% of its annual spending on goods and services. The money would be ploughed back into patient care.

Oxford Mental Healthcare NHS Trust has introduced a limited e-purchasing system. Faced with spiralling bills and a need to save £4,000 a month in catering costs, managers at the Trust turned to the Internet.

Catering is notoriously difficult to rationalise as trusts have been known to use up to 30 suppliers because of the variety of foodstuffs they buy. This can generate substantial paperwork and administration costs, so in 2000 the Trust held a trial of the Supply Direct system.

Catering manager John Poole says the web-based food distributor cut the number of suppliers the Trust

deals with from 14 to 1. The company receives orders over the Internet, guarantees costs over a 12-month period and guarantees levels of quality and hygiene.

“The process enabled us to cut back on costs and the quality of the menus was extremely impressive”, says Poole.

“We did have one or two teething difficulties as would be expected in a large project like this but overall our problems of quality and cost were solved.”

With the system being rolled out across the Trust, he is confident that the catering department will reach its savings target and adds

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that an Audit Commission value for money study has praised the scheme.

“The Commission was very impressed, particularly at the high levels of quality and the ease with which the Trust could monitor costs”, he adds.

MANAGEMENT OF RISK AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The public sector does not have a good record when it comes to implementing IT schemes, so commentators will be keeping a close eye on the introduction of ESD. However, Ann Steward says the structures are in place to ensure probity and accountability.

“One of the key requirements is the need for the major projects to have a Senior Responsible Owner assigned. This ensures strong lines of accountability are in place and visible”, she says.

She adds that the public sector has to “take a bolder approach to risk, but that is a managed risk approach.”

“The issue is not to be risk averse but to be risk aware and we are working with the National Audit Office and a range of other people to try to instil that across government. It is better to have tried something carefully and if it doesn’t quite work to understand exactly why to ensure we learn lessons for the future.”

Conclusion

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Governments across the world are waking up to the possibilities offered by the e-revolution. The UK is no exception, having embarked on an ambitious plan to provide all appropriate government services electronically by 2005.

There are many reasons for implementing this complex plan. Electronic service delivery should not only provide improved services, but also, release savings for both government and business by removing many of the laborious processes that characterise contact between government agencies and individuals or commercial organisations.

E-government should also make public administration smarter – allowing agencies to talk to one another and provide the seamless service demanded by the public. But it must be remembered that introducing the technology is not the goal in itself but the means of producing more efficient public services that are better equipped to meet the needs of all citizens.

The government wants its strategy to be underpinned by improvements in access to services and a reduction in social exclusion. But this will only be achieved if it can convince people in the lower income brackets, who tend to have a higher demand for public services, to use these new technologies.

The UK Online centres and initiatives such as “wired-up communities” will offer improved access for the socially excluded but it is difficult to predict how successful they will be. Interactive digital TV, a familiar and popular medium, may be a better bet but if the government fails to make ESD popular with all classes, it will risk creating a new social division between the e-poor and the e-rich.

List of websites

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The website addresses referred to in this publication are listed below. Please refer to the main text for further information.

www.amsu.edu/jac

the Second Internet Intelligence Test of European Union Governments carried out by the University of Amsterdam

www.brent.gov.uk

Brent Council's website

www.businessadviceonline.org

information and advice for small businesses

www.companieshouse.gov.uk

Companies House database

www.employmentservice.gov.uk

job searches

www.e-envoy.gov.uk

e-Envoy website

www.gov.sg

Singapore government website

www.govtalk.gov.uk

information on the e-GIF

www.hmso.gov.uk

Stationery Office website

www.homecheck.co.uk

offers environmental data

www.hsedirect.com

guidance on health and safety

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk

tax service and information

www.landreg.gov.uk

the Land Registry database

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Direct online

www.northwilts.gov.uk

the North Wiltshire Council website

www.online.police.uk

police services

www.openbritain.gov.uk

offers information on tourist attractions

www.ordnancesurvey.gov.uk

online maps

www.press.dtlr.gov.uk/0103/0164.htm

offers further information on pathfinders

www.schoolsnet.com

information on UK schools and universities

www.sg

website representing Singapore

www.shetland.gov.uk

the Shetland Islands Council website

www.socitm.gov.uk

the Society of IT Management (Socitm) website

www.tameside.gov.uk

the Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council website

www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk

government website aimed at business

www.ukonline.gov.uk

government website

www.upmystreet.com

offers information based on data from the UK Land Registry.

£10

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