

The Application Quality and User- Adoption (AQUA) Test



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Are your users happy with your filing system?

How your system is viewed by your various constituents in terms of quality, performance and effectiveness can help you answer this question. And only by objectively answering this question can good decisions be made with regard to providing best value solutions for citizens, government workers and other valuable constituents.

The attached self-administered AQUA Test is an attempt to help the SOS office gather the right insights to help make the right strategic decisions.

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The Application Quality and User-Adoption (AQUA) Test

Why do some applications hit the mark, whereas others fail to deliver? Why is it that many enterprise software deployments cost so much – both directly and indirectly – whereas other simple solutions deliver the same value for far reduced effort and outlays? Why is there little correlation between dollars spent on a software solution and the value derived from it?

In this challenging economic climate, how can we ensure our dollars are well-spent? Having this insight could help the Secretary of State office determine how to best allocate precious resources for their filing system.

We believe we may have some answers. In developing systems for our military clients, we noticed that there was little correlation between cost of a system and the value derived from it. Often large systems integrators spent tens of millions of dollars on a system for the soldier on the ground, only to see that next-generation system sit idle on a desktop at the base back home. After studying the issue over time, we did notice those systems that glossed over one or two types of constituents actually failed to deliver tangible results for every other constituent. For those applications, user adoption plummeted and value ultimately went to zero. On the other hand, the systems that achieved their anticipated value accomplished something of importance for each type of constituent served. These applications, many of which were simple to build, yet award-winning and life saving, were “fully balanced.”

Lessons learned on the battle field can be applied in civil government. Like a tire on a car, if the perceptions of each civil government constituent are not measured and balanced properly, the system will ultimately blow out and lead to a wreck. With the tire balancing, it's easy to physically assess treads or run computer diagnostics to determine where the tire needs rebalancing. But secretary of state systems require some focused discussions throughout the organization and with each of five types of constituents to determine where any warping is occurring.

The attached AQUA Test is an attempt to help identify unbalanced systems before they blow out. We recommend sharing the questions with various members of your SOS organization – and at every level – to see where the systems strengths and limitations are. What's each constituent's perception of the system, and what might they be telling “off-the-record” to all of their friends and neighbors about it? Knowing that is important, as the reputation of the Secretary of State office is largely driven by it.

For their particular role, have each person score their perceptions on the scale from 0-4, based on the guidelines provided. Then add up the total scores from each of five constituent groups to see the total score for your SOS system, versus the maximum score of 100. These simple insights may validate your strategic direction, or they may help identify critical shortcomings in it.

1. Citizen Users – Individuals who file or handle initial filings and various amendments with your office.

	0	1	2	3	4	Scores
Who I Am	"I like computers, but I don't like this system."	"I don't know much about computers, and this took some getting used to."			I don't like computers, but this system is simple.	
What I Can Do	"I actually have to mail in most things."	"I can only do initial filings or edits online, but not both."			"I have just saved a tree by going 100% paperless."	
Am I Gratified?	"I have to call into a black hole for an update."	"I have to wait days/weeks for status"			"Status is immediate."	
How the System Works With Me	"I complete and email in a PDF."	"I complete info on the web, but it doesn't catch my mistakes."			"Wizards drive end-to-end completion"	
My Thoughts of Online SOS	"I have to"	"I need to"			"I want to"	
Sub Total Score (20 Max):						

2. SOS Leaders – Secretaries and their senior leadership team

	0	1	2	3	4	Scores
Who I Am	"I'm a filing firefighter."	"I can only focus on collecting filings."			"I'm a source for insights, not just filings and documents."	
What I Do	"I play catch-up 100% of the time."	"I just wish I could think ahead."			"Time is spent thinking ahead on admin rules and unusual situations."	
Getting Information	"It takes IT forever to design, build and run new reports."	"Reporting takes a lot of my time."			"I can get whatever I need on my own - instantly."	
How Things Get Done	"IT has to do everything."	"Small changes in the office require big changes in the system."			"On the fly, I can change fees, permissions and work queues"	
My Thoughts on Our System	"Garbage in and nothing out"	"Good stuff just goes into a black hole."			"Insight is flowing out faster than stuff is going in."	
Sub Total Score (20 Max):						

3. Employees in SOS Office – Rank and file employees who interact with filings and constituents

	0	1	2	3	4	Scores
Who I Am	"I'm actually a data entry clerk."	"I'm frustrated with the limitations of our system."			"I watch over citizens doing all their own work."	
What I Do	"I reenter data from paper filings and PDF forms."	"I review every file for accuracy."			"I think of ways for the system to catch something new."	
Working With Constituents	"I'm always reacting to calls from upset constituents."	"I'm customer care for the system, not just the customer."			"Phone calls are just for crazy policy-related issues."	
How I Prioritize My Day	"The squeaky wheel gets the priority."	"Depending on deadlines, it's either feast or famine."			"My work queue is balanced, fair and reasonable."	
My Thoughts on Our System	"My inbox is still bigger than my outbox."	"Life hasn't changed a whole lot with this system."			"This thing does something for me, not to me."	
Sub Total Score (20 Max):						

4. Information Subscriber – Organization or professional in community, such as a banker or real estate investor, looking for insights from corporate or secured party filings.

	0	1	2	3	4	Scores
Who I Am	"I can't get any data."	"I can get some data some of the time."			"I see the SOS office as a wealth of insights."	
How Easy It Is to Acquire Info	"I have to personally know someone to get any info."	"After talking to live body, I can usually get somewhere."			"I can sign up, download and pay for everything online."	
What I Can Retrieve	"There are a few canned reports, but it's mostly unusable garbage."	"The information I can retrieve is relevant, but not telling."			"There's a big laundry list of interesting things to acquire."	
In What Ways I Can Retrieve Info	"I have to wait for a CD."	"I only get information through PDF reports or XML data dumps."			"Any web or mobile device will work."	
Thoughts on the SOS Office	"I choose to avoid the SOS office."	"SOS is a non-issue in my life."			"SOS is my partner."	
Sub Total Score (20 Max):						

IT Department – Individuals in the State’s IT organization who support the SOS office

	0	1	2	3	4	Scores
Who I Am	“I am an order taker.”		They call me when they need something.”		“I’m a strategic partner with the SOS office.”	
How Stable is Our Application	“We’re scared.”		“It’s stable, but that’s because we rarely make changes to anything.”		“It’s always up and running properly.”	
How Configurable Is Our Application	“Almost everything seems to be hardcoded.”		“It’s configurable in some cases, but our IT team or support provider needs to do all the work.”		“The admin users can make most changes on their own.”	
How Extendible Is Our System	“It’s not. We’re locked in with something that’s pretty proprietary.”		“We can add simple features, but nothing complex.”		“It’s based on SOA principles and is built on the latest software platform”	
My Thoughts on SOS’ System	“It’s a dinosaur.”		“We have a minimalist system.”		“We’re ready for the unknown of tomorrow, like S. 569.”	
Sub Total Score (20 Max)						

Score Calculations:

Citizen Sub Total Score: _____

SOS Leader Sub Total Score: _____

Employees in SOS Office Sub Total Score: _____

Information Subscriber Sub Total Score: _____

IT Support Sub Total Score: _____

Total Score (100 Max): _____

AQUA Score and Recommendation:

0 – 40 The system is not acceptable to all stakeholders; look to replace immediately

41 – 75 The system suffices for now, but it won’t keep up with constituent expectations; budget to significantly upgrade or replace in 1-2 years

76 – 100 The system appears to meet constituent requirements; maintain existing system and continue to monitor for future needs