



BUSINESS ONE STOP

INNOVATION FOR TODAY'S CONSUMER
OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

The Connecticut Secretary had a problem; she was losing staff left and right to attrition. Knowledgeable staff. Productive staff. And she could not plug the holes due to a statewide hiring freeze in the wake of the Great Recession. While she had the foresight to expand and update automated systems so that filings kept moving, customer service began to falter. There simply were not enough bodies to man the phone lines. Staff grew frustrated, customers grew frustrated, and the Secretary knew she had to act.

The Secretary studied the problem and before long noticed a trend: business startup calls could take anywhere from five minutes to 45 minutes each, draining staff time and causing busy signals that angered the entrepreneurs who needed startup assistance. The inclination was to support each caller, directing them to relevant agencies and providing phone numbers, web addresses; anything to help a new business get off the ground in a state that needed economic development, but there were not enough staff resources to provide comprehensive customer service. If there was only something she could do to alleviate the problem, for both her constituents and her staff...

THE ONLINE BUSINESS STARTUP TOOL TAKES BUSINESS OWNERS FROM THEIR GATEWAY AGENCY OF REGISTRATION ON A SIMPLE, GUIDED TOUR THROUGH THE MANY AGENCIES THAT STARTUP BUSINESSES NEED TO CONSIDER INTERACTING WITH.

The Secretary acted swiftly. She put a plan together and enlisted the assistance of her automation vendor to address the problem. Within six months the Connecticut Online Business Startup Tool was launched. It was developed as a Business One Stop portal with a Wizard-style user interface that guides entrepreneurs through the important stages of startup, across many agencies, allowing her staff to pivot startup callers to the portal and eliminating that nagging busy signal for good.

The Online Business Startup Tool takes business owners from their gateway agency of registration on a simple, guided tour through the many agencies that startup businesses need to consider interacting with. The portal anticipates and answers most typical startup questions with simple on-screen guidance and contains links to the appropriate landing pages at other filing, permitting, and licensing agencies. Connecticut's Business One Stop model also provides value-added links to organizations that help startups to draft business plans, locate a suitable physical plant, seek government program funding and private finance assistance, and much more.

Soon after the advent of the Online Business Startup Tool, the phone traffic began to diminish and constituents began to call with compliments instead of castigations. The Secretary was honored for her efforts that year with a Merit Award from the International Association of Commercial Administrators (IACA) for her innovation in fostering this wildly successful technical solution

THE PROBLEM

Today's consumer of government services is savvy and has worlds of information at their fingertips. Government agencies must be able to provide lightning fast, super-easy service if they are to meet the expectations of the modern constituent. Stephen Goldsmith was a two-term Mayor of Indianapolis and served as Deputy Mayor of New York City. He summed up the problem this way in an article for the Harvard Business Review:

VOTERS WILL TOLERATE SOME INEFFICIENCY AND UNRESPONSIVENESS FROM GOVERNMENT, BUT THEIR PATIENCE IS WEARING THIN.

"Customers apply for bank loans at automated teller machines but still endure slow, one-size-fits-all service at the motor vehicles bureau. Construction companies order supplies over the Internet but still lose time and money waiting for permits at city hall. People can call 24-hour help lines at most service companies, but government is still strictly 9 to 5. Voters will tolerate some inefficiency and unresponsiveness from government, but their patience is wearing thin. They are demanding better value for their tax dollars from those they elect."

Government has by-and-large transformed from paper processes to digital processes, but that transformation is "so yesterday." It is no longer good enough to be automated. Now, government must be optimized for the Internet. An agency that supplies speed and a user-friendly interface on its own website is to be commended for its efforts. However, that alone will not maximize efficiency for customers or for staff. Agencies lose the leverage of their automation if they cannot provide inter-agency operability.

THE SILO EFFECT

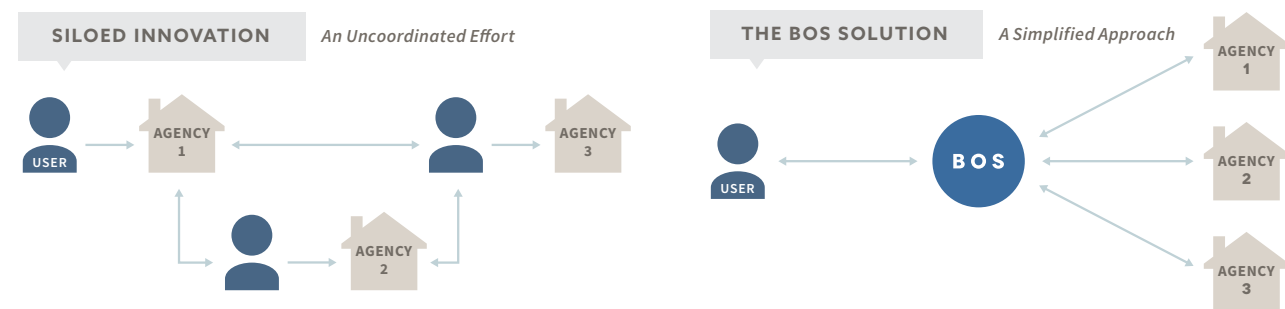
The problem is that agencies classically adopted automation at different rates, as a product of the innovative spirit of their leadership and as they were able to secure tech innovation funds. As a result, agencies within the same state lacked the opportunity to coordinate automated government services. The result is a broken landscape of disparate technologies, with no apparent vision for connecting services across agency jurisdictional boundaries. Services are organized by jurisdictional authority rather than the business need of the customer. Each agency is an automated island unto itself; a silo. “The Silo Effect refers to a lack of information flowing between groups or parts of an organization. On a farm, silos prevent different grains from mixing. In an organization, the Silo Effect limits the interactions between members of different branches of the company, thus leading to reduced productivity.”ⁱⁱ

WHEN VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS DON'T COLLABORATE, THE RESULTS ARE INEFFICIENCY AND POOR CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Just like private organizations, state governments can suffer from the Silo Effect. When various departments don't collaborate, the results are inefficiency and poor customer service. Ellen Perlman contributed a piece to Governing magazine entitled, “The Anti-Silo Solution: Coming up with the cash and willpower to build IT projects across agency lines.” In that article, she makes the point that executive branch agencies remain siloed despite usually operating under the aegis of a single authority figure in the state Governor. Citing her interview source in the article, she states:

“The executive branch is no better. Each department or agency has its own budget to protect – and its own IT projects to push... ‘you end up with independent technology kingdoms.’ Those are expensive kingdoms to run. While automating processes and putting basic constituent services online can reduce costs, allowing agencies to build duplicate systems is counterproductive... a state government stands to benefit fiscally if agency funds and IT processes are pooled.”

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ENTER, THE BUSINESS ONE STOP SOLUTION

One way to overcome the Silo Effect and bring new efficiencies to state government is through the development of a Business One Stop. Like the Connecticut Online Business Startup Tool, a Business One Stop cuts across silos and agency jurisdictional boundaries to provide a clean, easy, and efficient user experience for consumers of state government services.

Business One Stop models come in all forms. Many combinations begin with a gateway agency like the Secretary of State's business filing office, and initially pull in other agencies that allow customers to sensibly accomplish business needs in a single-session, single-transaction environment. Examples include the state revenue department and the state departments of consumer protection, labor and environmental protection. Between these five agencies, an entrepreneur can fill out universal forms that satisfy all of their registration, licensing, and permitting requirements. The technology pre-populates data already entered by the customer into the corresponding fields of the other agencies' forms to diminish repetitive data entry.



A Basic BOS portal provides links but little or no integration. The Intermediate adds integration with early partner agencies and links to other agencies, allowing prospective partner agencies to observe the success of the core portal and later commit to full portal integration, as with the PCC Advanced BOS.

Another backend use for a Business One Stop solution might be to marry the voter registration database to the Department of Motor Vehicles and Vital Statistics agencies to create an automated and accurate system to cross-validate voter registrants. While this does not have an immediate customer-facing benefit, it promotes efficiency and saves tax dollars by unifying a system around a state business need rather than around agency jurisdictional borders. And all citizens benefit from an accurate voter database!



Some states have coordinated efforts across human service organizations, or emergency operations and public safety agencies. Once the Silo Effect is overcome, there are many permutations that would benefit and generate new efficiencies for the state and for its citizens.

SIMPLICITY IS CRUCIAL

An effective Business One Stop solution will deliver clean, simple transactions in a single-entry, customer-centric environment. In June 2016, Governing.com ran a column by William D. Eggers entitled “Digital Government and the Virtues of Simplicity.” The column was an excerpt from his book entitled Delivering on Digital: The Innovators and Technologies That Are Transforming Government. In that, Eggers states:

“Any mechanic knows that simple systems are harder to break. Digital thinkers apply that ethos to everything they do. It’s a core value of every successful technology company: If the user is not happy, or is in any way slowed down or frustrated by the technology, then the whole business crumbles. So they try to design simple and intuitive experiences.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Also in that piece, Eggers quotes Jen Pahlka, the CEO of Code for America. She states, “Our government is addicted to complexity in a way that isn’t serving us well... and the complexity itself is actually the problem.” He goes on to retell the example Pahlka provides, noting, “She [Pahlka] believes that the best digital services make complex transactions and interactions simple and elegant. Think of Uber, which has made the potentially complex process of getting from place to place without a car as simple as opening an app on your smartphone and pressing ‘request an Uber.’”

When it comes to government services in particular, Egger leaves us with a sobering reminder of our duty to get things right:

“...[T]here’s more at stake than clean design. The massive complexity of government is not just frustrating. It can have tragic consequences, whether it is a veteran trying to navigate his way through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ 1,000-plus websites or a caregiver trying to find the right mental-health services for a loved one. Small and simple will always succeed where bulky and overwrought fail.”^{iv}

The moral Egger imparts suggests that it is important to entrust the design and execution of your Business One Stop solution to an experienced vendor partner. If planned and executed well, a Business One Stop solution can bring tremendous benefits of efficiency and enhanced customer service. A failed effort, however, can have devastating consequences, not only for future efforts to collaborate across agency borders, but also for the constituents you are trying to help.

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CONCLUSION

Secretaries-past claimed glory for transforming paper processes to digital processes, bringing new efficiencies and savings to state government. Their legacies outlive their administrations. As ground-breaking as those foundational automation efforts

INNOVATORS WILL HEED A NEW CALL; THE CALL TO MODERNIZE, TO BREAK DOWN THE ARTIFICIAL CONSTRAINTS OF PRIOR, SILOED THINKING, AND TO PROMOTE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR TODAY’S CONSUMER...

were, innovators will heed a new call; the call to modernize, to break down the artificial constraints of prior, siloed thinking, and to promote excellent customer service for today’s consumer of state services. A Business One Stop solution will restore your agency’s primacy and extend its reach and influence, all while serving the best interests of your constituents.

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This white paper was prepared by GCR Inc., a leading national provider of state and municipal market government sector software. Our aim is to develop, implement, and support advanced automation solutions that assist agencies to administer their business with maximum efficiency, while driving unprecedented levels of transparency and public access to data. GCR Inc. is experienced in working with state clients to design, implement, and maintain effective Business One Stop solutions across the country. For additional information, contact Sales Executive **Seth Klaskin** at **(860)580-7301** or sklaskin@gcrincorporated.com.

ⁱ Stephen Goldsmith, "Can Business Really Do Business With Government?" *Harvard Business Review*, May-June Issue, 1997.

ⁱⁱ Eleanor Feldman Barbera, PhD, "How to Eliminate the 'Silo Effect' in LTC Organizations," iAdvance Senior Care, eNewsletter of the Institute For The Advancement Of Senior Care, (<http://www.iadvanceseniorcare.com/article/how-eliminate-silo-effect-ltc-organizations>), March 26, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ William D. Eggers, "Digital Government and the Virtues of Simplicity," http://www.governing.com/templates/gov_print_article?id=382404331, June 15, 2016.

^{iv} Id.

^v Id.

^{vi} Id.



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