E-Government:
A Go-to-Market Strategy

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Five years ago, the term "electronic government" was not in our vocabulary. Today, "e-government" has become a battle cry for digital age governments around the world. Elected and career government leaders are working feverishly to create competitive advantage for their citizens and businesses in the growing digital economy and society.

The stakes are high. Without a full understanding of the scope of e-government, the peril is that many good intentions (and many investment dollars) will fall by the wayside. Remember "managing by objectives," "total quality management," "customer service," and "reengineering?" Examples abound in both private and public sectors where organizations only superficially understood and marginally implemented these strategic initiatives. However, those who embraced real transformation were big winners.

E-government is about a lot more than online services. The e-government leadership agenda has multiple dimensions. Each dimension demands leadership, cross-boundary coordination, and know-how, combined with a technology strategy to take vision to reality.

Economic Competitiveness

Economic development used to focus on attracting a few large corporations to build plants and bring jobs to a jurisdiction. Although still a building block, the tide has turned toward small and medium-sized businesses - the fastest growing economic sector worldwide. With tens of thousands of small businesses within a jurisdiction, leveraging each as an e-business and helping them grow by adding just one job each per year produces healthy economic growth.

In collaboration with economic development groups (such as Chambers of Commerce) governments can facilitate outreach strategies to businesses. These businesses need affordable technology - web development, hosting, and high-speed Internet access. Individually, they have little bargaining power. But through organized aggregation of demand, negotiation for these capabilities can become a reality.

Becoming an e-business is one thing. Establishing brand recognition is quite another. In the economic shift to e-business, small and medium businesses are losing customers to heavily-advertised Internet brands. Search engines are still primitive and frustrating. Chances are the local resident will go directly to a known Internet brand instead of searching for local e-businesses. Sales taxes are only one part of the issue. These companies are also not paying state income taxes or business license fees. They don't employ your citizens. Their employees aren't shopping at your local malls. There is a lot of economic growth associated with the purchase of one book online. The answer is not simply changing tax laws. It's helping businesses get online and then connect them with your citizens.

People no longer have to work where they live. In the United States alone, 10 millions jobs are associated with the Internet; and, there are 850,000 vacancies. Jobs can be filled anywhere in the world. This dramatic and growing shortage of skills is affect every country. Jobs displaced in the digital economy are being replaced with new Internet-related jobs at much higher pay. Education, of course, is key and why that's a number one priority of government leaders everywhere. An education system that produces a competitive workforce is undeniably core to economic growth.

Governments also need strategies to attract new knowledge workers and high-tech businesses into their jurisdictions. This new breed still looks at traditional economic development indicators -- good schools, transportation, low

crime rates. However, increasingly, a state-of-the-art broadband infrastructure and a government that demonstrates they "get it" are key decision points around where to locate a business or raise a family.

Policy

All the rules are changing. E-government requires a regulatory and public policy environment conducive to electronic commerce, protection of rights, and an enabling legal framework for the digital transformation of government operations. Policy agendas include issues such as privacy, security, digital signatures, consumer protection, international trade, telecommunications, taxation and the digital divide. Industrial age laws, their interpretation and intent are many times not applicable or, worse, detrimental to a growing digital economy and society. Investment in the education of legislators around technology issues is a pre-requisite to successful e-government.

Online services

Online services is the perhaps the best understood aspect of e-government. A cautionary note, however, is not to limit the e-gov strategy solely to electronic services.

On average, a single government may have anywhere from fifty to seventy different agencies or departments. The typical first-generation government Internet presence was characterized by a proliferation of departmental websites, each with a different look and feel, offering its own department information and online services.

Today, governments are planning to move hundreds and even thousands of services online. The challenge now is how to organize this transition. Instead of launching online services on a department-by-department basis, they are aggregating services across departments, accessible through a common portal.

From the e-government portal citizens or businesses click ***once*** to access any available service, regardless of department. So whether you need to pay a parking fine, apply for a building permit, or renew a license, the citizen simply clicks the desired transaction. A form pops up. The citizen completes the transaction and gets confirmation right then and there. They don't need to know, nor do they care, what department actually processes the transaction. In the background, the transaction is processed using Web-enabled tools which access, update and transfer data to and from disparate legacy systems and databases of the responsible department(s).

Not all government operations consist of one simple form and one payment. Many government activities require nonlinear, complex collaboration among departments, with external parties, and even across government levels. The overall process, service quality and delivery time to citizens and businesses are key ingredients to the transformation to an e-government.

People are not just citizens of a government. They are parents, volunteers, neighbors, consumers, students, sports enthusiasts, senior citizens, and children. They weave the rich tapestry of society. Once a portal infrastructure is in place, the marginal cost of adding other components is low. You may not save money , but it won't cost you much either to reserve a book at the library, register a child on a soccer team or arrange meals on wheels for the elderly. In the physical world, these activities encroach upon shrinking leisure time for people whose lives are already overextended.

Digital Democracy

No e-government vision is complete without attention to digital democracy. The spectrum ranges from voter registration, voting, public opinion polling, communication among elected representatives and their constituencies, universal

access to technology from public libraries, wired legislative bodies, and legislative processes that encourage greater citizen participation. Online hearings, submitting expert testimony online, opinion polling and open communication and information provides opportunities for real-time participation throughout the democratic process - not simply disseminating information after the fact. There's a big difference.

Legislative bodies are beginning to understand how technology can transform themselves as members gather to debate and vote in floor sessions. The predominant use of technology inside legislative bodies is largely limited to electronic systems to tabulate floor votes. Even then, output from these aging systems many times must be manually entered into other systems for reporting purposes and then translated into a different format for posting to Web sites. New technologies allow legislators - during formal sessions - to communicate silently with staff back in their offices, conduct real-time research on issues on the Internet, negotiate terms with members of their own or opposing parties while debate continues.

Integrating Strategy

A competitive e-government leadership agenda does not simply address each of these components individually, but integrates them into one go-to-market "brand." Using e-government as a foundation, governments leverage their entire population and all their businesses to stimulate economic growth, provide convenient, cost effective services, link customers to businesses and people to their communities, and preserve the democratic process.

And, keep an eye on the horizon. Citizen and business access to high-speed connectivity will open the doors to the next generation Internet. In this new environment, imagine a government road crew in the field linking with a supervisor back in the govt office and the contractor two states away by

videoconference, streaming live video of the construction site, and sharing engineering drawings to make on-the-spot design changes-- all on the screen of a handheld wireless device. Citizens will go beyond clicking on a form to clicking an icon whereby a government service representative will appear on the screen for live help. That's the future of e-government.

Governments have a historic opportunity to transform themselves, their businesses and their relationships with citizens into world-class players in the digital economy and society. Anything less will result in a seat on the sidelines.