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LES GARDIENS ET LES GARDIENNES DE NOS COMMUNAUTÉS :

*du niveau local
à l'échelle mondiale*

62nd IPAC National Annual Conference

GUARDIANS OF OUR COMMUNITIES:

From Local to Global



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Unleashing the data stream

BY PAUL MACMILLAN

The free flow of information through Web 2.0 is making Government 2.0 a reality.

In the technological realm, knowledge obviously drives innovation. But in the world of information technology, it is just as true that innovation drives knowledge. When we have the ability to know more, we want to know more. From the inception of electronic media, there has been growing pressure on governments to be more transparent and accessible. Beginning with the advent of the Internet and accelerating with the recent explosion of social networking sites and applications, the doors of virtual government data stores have begun to open all over the world.

This not only presents governments with the opportunity to radically expand their own openness and accountability, it also gives public and private entities the ability to access, manipulate and mashup information into powerful new applications. The recent Deloitte report, “Unlocking government: how data transforms democracy,” explores the ways in which this increasing access to data is changing the relationship between governments, communities and citizens.

Open

In the past, access to government information often and simply meant that it was available somewhere, often in hardcopy or dispersed across departmental Web sites. Governments have not always kept pace with advances in information technology and social media norms. This is changing. While governments are naturally concerned about how, and how much, infor-

mation should be released, the benefits of making large amounts of raw data available are taking precedence, resulting in

- **a better informed public:** many independent organizations are designing applications that will allow individuals to access, manipulate and better understand data;
- **enhanced accountability:** government-designed applications let taxpayers see how their money is being used;
- **stronger communities:** which develop more readily with easy access to information on demographics, criminal activity, real estate values, transportation resources, public health and more; and
- **improved markets:** the public can be made aware of available companies, products and facilities as well as comparative performance statistics that should encourage service providers to improve.



In today's world, access should be simple. Data should be easy to find and in formats where they are easily extractable, and governments need to embrace the collaboration and creativity this access engenders.

Innovative

Governments will always need to manage their own information channels, but many are now relying on public users to disseminate and share information through social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Myspace and Wikipedia. This allows governments to:

- **tap the creativity of citizens** and conserve resources by letting users drive innovation;
- **break down government silos** that have made it hard for agencies to collaborate;
- **generate healthy competition** among citizens to analyze and produce value

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from raw data, as the private sector has done for years; and

- **change the data culture** within government, when data become public resources, opportunities to collaborate with citizen developers multiply.

Governments need to continue to find ways to encourage public creativity and let users drive innovation. Since citizen-derived applications are often the most valuable and adaptable, governments should maintain open dialogues with developers and create formal, easy-to-access channels for commentary and data exchange.

Responsive

The corporate world was quick to realize the data goldmine represented by social media sites, a vast repository of publicly-available information that allows them to fine-tune their products and services in response to what consumers actually think and say. Governments, though still catching up, have similar opportunities. Social networks offer a largely untapped source of public feedback, often in real time. Since the mechanisms exist, people expect to be listened to, and leaders cannot afford to be passive. Social media sites offer the perfect way for governments to not only show the public that they are paying attention, but to make real, qualitative, interactive change to policies, programs and services.

Social networks allow governments:

- **take the pulse** of the people on every topic imaginable;
- **obtain real-time feedback** on policy;
- **crowdsource ideas** by creating their own forums for public collaboration;
- **identify service delivery** problems through citizen-designed Web tools; and
- **communicate faster and better** when sharing emergency information with the public.



Governments looking to stay ahead of the curve are reaching out to the online community to encourage public input. By incorporating social media marketing practices into their overall strategies, they can target audiences whose input is relevant to particular issues or to the development of specific policies or services.

Smarter

While open access to data may represent a “goldmine” of information, much of it is buried so deeply within government infrastructures that it is not easily extracted—and certainly not easily contextualized and compared with other related data. Governments can counter this systemic inefficiency by making the development of core data analysis capabilities a priority across all agencies. The value in the stores of raw data that may be unearthed from within, or collected from, public sources cannot be maximized if the internal ability to share and manipulate these data does not exist.

Effective data analysis means decisions can be based on evidence and better outcomes are likely to result. By investing in the right software, people and processes, smart governments can leverage data analysis to:

- **make sense of disparate information** across agencies and from the public and corporate spheres;
- **increase effectiveness:** UK police departments use geographic data, census data, land use information, crime incident reports, crime initiatives and other sources of information to create accurate maps of where crimes occur; and
- **combat fraud** by combining and analyzing social and financial information

provided by government departments, organizations and private businesses.

A core competency in data analysis that is aligned with an agency’s individual mission can be a powerful strategic driver. If a government can get its own people to make data available across multiple departments and agencies, and can also leverage the creativity of the on-line community, the full potential of data analytics to make government smarter, and better, can be exploited.

Be sociable: it’s more important than ever

Mashups, crowdsourcing, data analytics—the potential for Web 2.0 services and applications to revolutionize the way governments, organizations and citizens interact is almost limitless; the opportunity enormous. But the challenge of effectively leveraging available stores of data to develop meaningful knowledge is daunting. In an information-driven age, the success or failure of governments may depend on their ability to adapt. **M**

To read the full Deloitte report, visit www.deloitte.com/view/en_CA/ca/industries/government/unlocking-government/



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