

Issue Brief

The New Government Portal

By going beyond a “front door” role, portals can transform how state and local governments operate and serve citizens.

Moving Beyond a Simple Front Door

As they have increased in popularity, government portals have also expanded to offer more information and capabilities. Many portals started simply as a collection of “who to call” lists and links to department sites. Then, downloadable forms were added for printing, but a lack of online submission capabilities meant constituents still had to bring the completed paperwork to an office or staff had to manually enter data from paper that started as an electronic form.

Then came online transactions. Web-based applications could accept information entered by a citizen or business owner and then could do something with it, such as credit a payment for a utility bill or route a license application to the right employee. However, these transaction-processing applications had a major drawback. All were created with custom software and had limited, hard-coded interaction with back-end systems for finance, case management and document management.

The Limitations of Custom Development

Until recent years, custom software development was often the default choice for any project related to a public entity’s website. This choice was valid at the time — with so many detailed rules, multiple procedures and complex information to integrate in any government application, custom development of the portal website seemed the only way to get it all right.

But today, government IT managers are chafing under the limitations of custom development, which include:

- **Long development schedules.** It’s easy to see how developing a new custom application would take longer than simply implementing commercial software. But it also takes longer to make a change or add functionality in a portal because new code needs to be written and then integrated and tested with existing software and under volumes of users.
- **Hard to integrate.** The information and functionality in back-end systems are essential to deliver useful services in a Web portal. Yet many custom portals cannot easily take advantage of established integrations with these systems.
- **Hard to change.** Because of its complexity and fixed interactions with back-end systems, custom software cannot be easily or quickly changed to meet new business processes, laws or compliance requirements.
- **Hard to maintain.** Custom software often requires specialized technical knowledge, tools and skills, which

makes it difficult to maintain over the long term. Another risk: This expertise may be lost when internal staff leave or retire, or external consultants move on to other projects.

- **Single-use only.** Custom applications are not easily repeatable or adaptable for other departments or functions, which typically means new and separate development projects, even for very similar functionality.

New Expectations for Portal Services

The private sector has shown citizens that it is possible to access their information and conduct financial and other transactions online, simply and securely. Today, mobile content and apps are also becoming a baseline citizen expectation for government interactions. So when they encounter a government portal that they perceive as being “behind the times,” it’s no surprise they demand more and better functionality.

Yet making the move to new technologies to serve these public expectations isn’t necessarily a “no brainer” choice. Continued pressure on government staffing levels mean new technologies must expand productivity and efficiency throughout the organization, not detract from it.

A portal today must help a government transform the way it works internally and how it delivers services to all stakeholders. But unless the portal is integrated with the enterprise content management (ECM) system, it simply cannot deliver the information and document access that make an online transaction or information exchange truly useful for constituents and employees.

The New Government Portal: What It Takes

Integration of the portal with the ECM system offers many of the capabilities required to deliver greater efficiency, better communications and new opportunities for citizen service. Whether you are reviewing the options for a current ECM system or evaluating a new solution, several capabilities are essential for supporting an information-rich citizen portal.

- The ability to create electronic forms without writing custom code. In an ECM system, non-technical users should be able to easily create and change online forms, supporting limited IT staff.
- Flexibility to define workflows for online automatic document routing and archiving. This capability helps departments streamline document processing, avoid manual data entry and share common data.

- Automatic status and follow-up messages to citizens and others who submit forms, documents, comments and inquiries. These messages are generated in the portal based on information provided by the ECM system. Staff gain more time to do their core work instead of researching and answering phone and email questions.
- Scalability to handle the increasingly high levels and dynamic nature of online transactions that will be conducted through the portal.
- To meet citizen expectations quickly, check whether the ECM system offers a ready-to-go platform for connecting to portal services without custom development. Confirm this platform has undergone the functional and load testing necessary to support stakeholder confidence in the portal's performance and availability.

Benefits of Portal and ECM Integration

Integrating an ECM system with a flexible Web portal platform offers these benefits to state and local governments:

- Enables improvements in service delivery and operations by automating more tasks through the portal, even with constrained staffing levels.
- Improves efficiency for online transactions, information access and service delivery by automatically bringing together the right information for citizens and employees.
- Replaces paper forms with electronic documents that can be routed automatically by defined workflows for faster processing and response.
- Automates handling of many routine inquiries and service requests without the need for staff action; reduces the need for citizens to come into an office to submit forms or receive service.
- Allows single entry of documents that can be shared among multiple departments.
- Offers the ability to evolve the portal over time and add new services that leverage existing capabilities, documents and data, without the need for custom software development.

Delivering the New Government Portal

Web portals will increasingly become the primary way a government interacts with citizens, local business and other constituents. By integrating the website with a suitably designed ECM system, public entities can make the portal a truly useful entry point for information and services.

Government Portal Examples

In addition to handling common transaction services, an ECM-integrated Web portal can deliver value for many other government services.



Assessor's appeals for property taxes.

Connect property records and assessment notices with an owner's documentation in an online appeal case, visible to both the property owner and staff.



Health and human services. An applicant can complete an electronic application and upload supporting documentation that can be shared among multiple programs for eligibility determination.



Building development plans. Builders can upload plans and other required documents in an online permit file, which reduces lost documents and speeds permit processing.



Meeting documents. Council and commission meetings and schedules can be posted in a portal, complete with agenda packets and access to previous minutes for easy public review.



Local business documents. Licenses, registrations and filings can all be made through a business portal with all documents associated with the individual business account.



Case management front end. For a case management system, a portal provides a consistent and convenient way for employees and clients to share information and track document submissions without the need for an in-person appointment.

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One of the world's largest independent ECM software vendors, Hyland Software is the developer of OnBase. An award-winning suite of document and process management solutions, OnBase has a proven record of solving problems resulting from time consuming, costly and error plagued manual tasks. Available on-premises or as software as a service (SaaS), OnBase installs quickly, cost effectively and is designed to grow with organizations. Today, people at more than 11,000 organizations in 67 countries have the time to do the things that really add value thanks to OnBase. For these and other successes in its 22 year history, Hyland Software is a Leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Content Management, Q4 2015.