

CAN MARKETING SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EFFECTIVE EGOVERNMENT? ANALYSIS OF THE SINGLE POINT OF ACCESS PORTAL FOR ROMANIAN ELECTRONIC PUBLIC SERVICES

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The advances in technology hold great potential for helping Romanian government respond to its challenges namely, better service delivery, better procurement, efficient working and better communication with citizens and businesses. While the European Commission develops the main strategies on eGovernment, every member state has the freedom to identify its own necessities and decide according to specific social, administrative and economic context. Designing, cost setting, choosing the best supply channels or communicating with involved actors, are all marketing instruments which, if used accordingly, can ensure modern and efficient public services. This paper presents an analysis of the degree of development of public services available at the “www.e-guvernare.ro” portal, the single point of access for specific Romanian electronic public services.

*Key words: electronic government, public services, marketing instrument, development, internet
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1. Introduction

Since the advent of the Internet about 40 years ago (Ho, 2002), the number of services that rely on information and communication technologies (ICT) has increased significantly, making today's society an IT savvy one. While in the 90's, the Internet, has led to the outbreak of the eCommerce revolution, a type of commerce embraced by private and multinational organizations, with the beginning of the new millennium we witnessed the affiliation of the public institutions to the same eBusiness principles by introducing national eGovernment initiatives (Weerakkody, et al. 2008). Defining eGovernment extends from "using ICT to free the flow of information and to overcome the physical limitations of traditional paper-based systems" (OECD eGovernment Working Group) to "using technology towards enhancing the access and delivery of government services so as to benefit citizens, business partners and employees" (i2010 eGovernment Action Plan). The universal thesis underlying these definitions is that eGovernment imposes the automation and digitization of current paper-based procedures, in which case it is necessary the development of new leadership styles, new ways in debating and choosing strategies, new concepts regarding the development of the business environment, new ways of behavior research and facing the needs of citizens and communities, new ways of organizing, collecting and providing information (www.unesco.org).

In order to highlight the specific marketing strategies and tactics and how they can influence the development of eGovernment, a brief overview of this area's development is necessary. In retrospect, we notice that the cyclic evolution of the economy underpins the development of marketing. Initially, the role of marketing was to generate demand for the organization's products. The 4 P's, developed by McCarthy, explained concisely the generic practices: product development, pricing, promotion and organization of supply (placement) (Kotler and Keller, 2008). Given that businesses generated revenues without considerable efforts, nothing additional could have been asked for from marketing. Everything suddenly changed when the economy was weakened due to the 1970's oil crisis. Generating the demand for goods had become increasingly difficult and it required and led to exceeding the 4 P's frame. No matter whether the reasons regarded the changes in the consumer's behavior or some errors in the product design, saturated distribution channels or the lack of effort to promote, the environment forced specialists to

remodel their optics, to reflect and to create better concepts. The original 4 P's were joined by other Ps: people, processes, product elements, public opinion, political power. However, the profound change has occurred by replacing the product with the customer as the center of marketing efforts. Therefore, new disciplines have been introduced, disciplines like Customer Management, which includes strategies such as segmentation, targeting and positioning. Marketing has converted itself from a purely tactical approach into a strategic process (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2010).

It isn't difficult to make a parallel between the tough times that have led to the development of marketing as a domain and the perpetual need, emphasized by the current economic crisis, to improve the services of the public sector. The knowledge area covered by the eGovernment instruments in some E.U. member states has increased considerably in recent years. This upward trend has accelerated in spite of, or perhaps, partly because of the financial crisis and the urgent need for governments to be competent, transparent, accessible and efficient. The demand for social assistance has increased, while revenues have fallen dramatically. Public sector commitments for stimulus packages and support of the financial sector have also raised the level of public debt (United Nation E-Government Survey, 2010).

2. Strategy and Objectives

The management taking place in government institutions aims to satisfy the public interest, without having in sight a material profit (Popescu, L. and Popescu, I., 2007). Hence the objectives of a public institution are materialized in satisfying the public interests by addressing the social needs. A social need, in order to represent the public interest, must be covered by the law. The objectives show what the organization wants to achieve, while the strategy is an action plan needed to achieve its objectives. Without insisting strictly on the various public services, it is important to identify the main strategies for eGovernment defined by the E.U. in the "eGovernment Action Plan":

Table 1: EU's eGovernment Main Policy Strategies

Strategy	Description
1. Inclusive eGovernment	Administrations from national, regional and local levels, together with their agencies and other intermediaries (NGO's, civil societies, volunteer associations, and the third sector in general) that deliver public services, are increasingly integrating ICT's into their processes, both behind the scenes and in their interfaces with the public. Although eGovernment services should reduce the complexity of the interactivity between citizens, organizations and administrations, there is a dangerous possibility that people without easy access to ICT's could find it even harder to deal with the government.
2. Efficiency and effectiveness	EGovernment contributes significantly with regard to the user's satisfaction, transparency and accountability, a lighter administrative burden and efficiency gains. Improving efficiency and effectiveness in any kind of activity that requires the knowledge of the current situation and specific targets for improvement, often established through comparison with counterparts that are seen to be "doing better" in a particular area. In eGovernment, the E.U. is taking a leading role in developing measurement techniques and benchmarks through which organizations can judge their performances. The E.U. fosters the development of efficient and effective eGovernment services by beginning with a two-pronged strategy. It promotes cooperation and exchange of experience regarding the best practices and technical standards established after assessing the impact of these services.
3. High-impact key services for citizens and	The Action Plan aims to create more widely available high-impact services for citizens and businesses, such as electronic procurement services for businesses, services delivered through mobile telephony, or social security services.

Strategy	Description
businesses	EGovernment will be critical in enabling the service providers to take advantage of the market opportunities outside their home country.
4. Key enablers	The plan also seeks to deliver the foundation upon which eGovernment systems will work together, and will form the connections between ICT systems in different public organisations and countries. Interoperable systems, electronic identification management, document authentication and archiving technologies are all critical so that all public services cooperate and share data. Open Source Software can provide a cost-effective method to support such interoperability and cooperation.
5. E-participation	In order to reinforce governance in Europe, the Action Plan will help to strengthen citizen participation and democratic decision-making by using new technologies to develop interfaces between democratic institutions, public bodies and citizens.

Source: E-government factsheet European Union (November 2008 Edition 1.0) <http://epractice.eu>

The marketing component is evident and ubiquitous in the vision proposed by the European Commission to the Member States. However, while the E.U. has defined strategies and goals valid for all Member States, each country has the ability and freedom to adjust them in accordance with the social, administrative and economic context specific features. Therefore differences have proliferated in terms of the scale of services offered by the implementation of eGovernment, the quality of new tools based on information technology or the efficiency (European Commission, 2008).

To construct a better picture of the development of eGovernment, EU grouped the various public services into clusters. A full list of the 20 priority public services is presented below:

Table 2: Essential Public Services

Citizens	Businesses
1. Income Taxes	13. Social Contribution for Employees
2. Job Search	14. Corporate Tax
3. Social Security Benefits	15. VAT
4. Personal Documents	16. Registration of a New Company
5. Car registration	17. Submission of Data to the Statistical Office
6. Application for Building Permission	18. Custom Declaration
7. Declaration to the police	19. Environment-related Permits
8. Public Libraries	20. Public Procurement
9. Birth and Marriage Certificates	
10. Enrolment in Higher Education	
11. Announcement of Moving	
12. Health-related Services	

Source: European Commission (2008), *The User Challenge Benchmarking The Supply Of Online Public Services*, 7th Measurement, Directorate General for Information Society and Media, <http://ec.europa.eu> (section information society).

3. Implementation aspects

Any service possibly offered through eGovernment requires a prior research to determine the actual need for its use, a sensible design, setting the level of implementation costs, establishing the best delivery channels and the right communication approach in order to make it easily accepted by the general public.

In countries that are especially concerned towards this kind of service, such as Australia, the Internet has already replaced the personal and phone contact and it represents the main way through which citizens interact with government (KPMG International, 2010). Understanding exactly the users' expectations and what is wanted from the informational system is essential for the success of any eGovernment project. If these requirements are not clearly stated, quantifiable

or do not meet the needs, results are similar for both originators, producers and target audience: frustration, waste of time, financial losses, loss of consumer confidence (Ho, 2002). Administration requires prompt, accurate and usable information about the targeted population segments, to take the best short-term tactical decisions and the best long-term strategic decisions. Discovering a relevant characteristic for and/or about consumers and understanding its implications will almost always result in a successful product launch with an accelerated rate of acceptance and use. The website “Grants.gov”, developed by the U.S. Administration, is a portal that provides the possibility to apply for one of over 1000 types of grants, scholarships or aid, within programs that have a total budget of \$ 450 billion, created by 32 government agencies. In an average month, the site processes about 200.000 electronic requests (Executive Office of the President of the U.S., 2009).

Unlike services offered by various organizations designed to meet specific needs of the targeted consumer groups, one would be tempted to say that public services address everyone, therefore the discussions concerning segmentation are redundant. The reality is almost always more complex, so, although for example, the need for social protection is valid for the whole society, the distinction between categories of beneficiaries must be made. It is obvious that the needs and preferences of students are almost always different from those of pensioners or farmers. Unlike the marketing of the private sector, public institutions can not eliminate segments on grounds of costs, so it should cover all categories of beneficiaries, establish, communicate and always serve, always focusing their attention towards increasing the benefit of the society and the state.

It is important to tackle eGovernment applications, but priorities must be set upon maximizing the acceptance criterion and their impact on society. By emphasising on the use of information technology in providing services to government agencies, eGovernment offers the opportunity to rethink the way these institutions deliver services. More precisely, it offers the opportunity to: examine its current operations and procedures, identify processes and practices that can be streamlined or simplified and implements them, and adopt new technologies to enhance these improvements. The Mayor of Baltimore has implemented the “CitiStat” program, a system that uses IT to monitor in real-time the document workflow and it is also a necessary tool to supervise the local government performance. Using information systems to track various performance indicators such as absenteeism and overtime, Baltimore's administrative expenses dropped \$ 13 million in the first year after the implementation of CitiStat initiative (Perez and Rushing, 2007). Later, after the Mayor became governor of Maryland, he created a similar system called “StateStat” (Office of the Governor, Maryland, 2008).

Increased access to information and administrative procedures leads to a greater accountability and transparency, as online automated processes eliminate the interference of government officials and provides monitoring groups and senior government officials with a mechanism to monitor possible abuses and corruption. Belgium's national portal called “My Belgium” provides a single point of access to information and administrative services. More than 9 million Belgians have electronic ID cards (eID), allowing them to download available authenticated documents from their own accounts, supported by the MyBelgium portal. Another example is provided by the Municipal Government of Seoul, South Korea, which has developed a website that provides citizens with a range of relevant information regarding rules and procedures, permit license application and processing solicitations. The portal also allows real-time progress monitoring of an application for a permit or license. Therefore, according to post-implementation analysis, the citizens are better informed, the administrative process is transparent and the temptation for bribery has been largely eliminated (United Nation E-Government Survey, 2010).

EGovernment projects are most often long-term efforts that require large capital infusion into software, hardware, infrastructure and training. There are various models for funding such projects in which the private sector plays a critical role. Under partnership agreements, the

private sector builds, finances and operates public infrastructure such as roads and airports, the costs being recovered through usage fees. Various financing schemes exist – from support and assistance loans for development from the donor/multilateral aid agencies, to partnerships and outsourcing contracts signed with private providers under the special financing conditions that can minimize the initial cost (Pascual 2004). In Germany, all eGovernment projects are approved only after a rigorous analysis of economic and financial aspects, according to a methodology developed specifically for this purpose and only in compliance with the minimum values of various economic and financial indicators. The methodology uses both the updated internal rate of return on investment, and a “broad economic analysis” by granting scores for items included in a catalog of elements that are specific to the implementation of these systems (Computer Society of India, 2008).

In case of a limited access to the Internet, devices such as mobile phones or personal digital assistants can play a very important role if governments are capable to adapt and innovate starting from a way of thinking focused on the citizen’s needs. An example is the Philippine tax collection office, which introduced a system of electronic confirmation via SMS which forwards the taxpayers that their payments have been recorded (United Nation E-Government Survey, 2010). Using a tool such as the SMS, involves obvious advantages, such as audience measurement at a rate of 100%. Secondly, SMS marketing is a highly personal manner of communication. The SMS is used as a communication channel for transmitting information. Naturally, the trend could be encouraged to cover the administrative system too.

EParticipation remains in an incipient stage in many countries, a finding which is related to the discrepancies between the government and the people. Governments should include surveys and feedback forms on their websites, or forums and blogs that allow discussions or display information of interest (Wylde 2006). More creativity in terms of how they interact with the public is absolutely necessary, perhaps by creating integrated portals or actively seeking views and opinions that can be used to design public services or to shape public policy. In this case, the governments of Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Kazakhstan, Korea, Singapore, U.K. and U.S. are leading by far (United Nation E-Government Survey, 2010).

4. The Romanian eGovernment Portal

In accordance with the level of development of specific eGovernment services, especially those delivered via the Internet, the literature describes several models of providing online public services, such as: the Layne and Lee model (Layne and Lee 2001) based on the U.S. experience, the Hiller and Belanger model (Hiller and Bellanger 2001) developed for U.S. federal government, focused on aspects of safety and protection of personal data in supplying public services through electronics means, the ANAO model (Australian National Auditing Office) (www.anao.gov.au) used for classification and evaluation of electronic public service by Australia; the SAFAD model (Swedish Agency for Administrative Development) (Persson and Goldkuhl 2005) used in Sweden to assess the level of development and evolution of eGovernment initiatives. In this paper was used the SAFAD model, adapted by Cap Gemini in the study “The 9th eGovernment Benchmark Measurement”, which identifies five levels of development:

Table 3: Maturity Model

Level	Description
1. Information	Necessary information’s to begin the procedure for obtaining the public service are available online
2. One way interaction	The website offers the possibility to download the forms, in order to obtain the print form needed to initiate the procedure for accessing the public service
3. Two way interaction	The website offers electronic access to the official electronic forms to start the procedure for obtaining public service

Level	Description
4. Transaction	The website offers the possibility of full accessing the public service through the Internet, including the decision to use it and its effective provision
5. Targetisation	It has a proactive nature, the public service is provided automatically

Source: adapted from Cap Gemini – The 9th eGovernment Benchmark Measurement, June 2010

The National Center for Information Society Management, an institution subordinated to the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, has as main task the national implementation and operation of systems that provide services for eGovernance (www.mcsi.ro/Institutii-coordonate/CNMSI). In this respect it developed the “www.e-guvernare.ro” portal, which is intended to “reduce the bureaucratic and administrative barriers and to increase access to information and public services” (www.e-guvernare.ro/Default.aspx). It contains 22 sections developed to facilitate citizens’ contact with various public institutions and their specific activities. The public services offered by the portal were examined using the model described above. The following table highlights the development and characteristics of each section evaluated throughout march 2011:

Table 4: Online Public Services Development

Section name	Description	The level of development	Other relevant comments
Online Services	Short listing of online public services available on the portal	Information	–
Information statements	Information on submissioning tax returns and institutions for whom they are intended	Information	–
Submit Forms	Taxpayers have the opportunity to electronically complete, certify and send 9 type of statements to 4 public institutions: 1. Statement for payment obligations to social security budget – National House of Pensions and Other Social Insurance Rights; 2. Statement regarding the nominal record of policyholders and the payment obligation for unemployment insurance budget – National Agency for Employment Occupation; 3. Declaration on the contribution to the health insurance budget – National Agency for Health Insurance; 4. Statement for payment obligations to the state budget – Ministry of Public Finance (M.P.F.); 5. Income Tax Declaration – M.P.F.; 6. Return concerning value added – M.P.F.; 7. Statement for payment obligations to the social insurance budgets and special funds – M.P.F.; 8. Statement of duty – M.P.F.; 9. Summary statement on deliveries / acquisitions of foreign goods – M.P.F.	Transaction	Requires obtaining eID
Virtual Payments Desk (VPD)	Intended for consultation and payment with a credit card of taxes and other obligations to local and central budgets. At the time of the study, only to four institutions payments could	Transaction	Not necessarily requiring eID

Section name	Description	The level of development	Other relevant comments
	be made: 1. National Research Institute for Informatics; 2. Sector 2 Bucharest City Hall; 3. Sector 6 Bucharest City Hall; 4. Targu Mures City Hall.		
Electronic Procurement	It refers to the registration and use of the Electronic Procurement System. It has two sections, one for contractors and one for bidders. It provides the public institutions in Romania the possibility to purchase products, goods and services by electronic means and the operators the opportunity to submit bids for electronic auctions.	Transaction	Requires obtaining eID
Transport Permits	Electronic Information System for the Assignment of Authorizations for International Transportation facilitates the transmission of transportation permits for international routes. Actions that can be made electronically are: reservation permit, confirming authorization, authorization request and permit cancellation.	Two way interaction	The authorization is not transmitted electronically ; it doesn't require eID
Online forms	This section provides the forms used in relation to public administration. It connects with local institutions and Central Government; forms are available as institutions enter the system.	One way interaction	Very few institutions have enrolled in the program
Public institutions	Complementary to the previous section. Provides contact details of institutions that have completed the registration form.	Information	–
Press Releases	Brief information on the legislation underpinning the National Electronic System	Information	–
Government of Romania	Link to the Romanian Government Portal	Information	–
Ministries	Short presentation of Romanian Ministries	Information	–
Institutions under the Government's coordination	Brief overview of the institutions working under the coordination of the Romanian Government	Information	–
Local administration	Brief overview of local administrative institutions subordinated to the Romanian Government	Information	–
Senate	Link to the Senate Portal	Information	–
Chamber of Deputies	Link to the Chamber of Deputies Portal	Information	–
Romanian Presidency	Link to the Romanian Presidency Portal	Information	–
Legislation	Presentation of normative acts regulating the electronic services offered by the e-guvernare.ro portal	Information	–
IT antifraud	–	–	It could not be assessed because it

Section name	Description	The level of development	Other relevant comments
			was not usable
Thematic Catalogue	Provides a collection of links to government websites organized by topics of interest	Information	–
Postal Codes	Link to the Romanian National Postal Company Portal, used to identify an address based on the zip code	Information	–
Intelligent electronic forms system provided by the National Trade Register Office	Link to the National Trade Register Office Portal, used to transmit specific forms on verification registered information, registration of companies, the release of provisions, transmission of information or submission of financial statements.	Two way interaction	Requested documents are not transmitted electronically ; requires obtaining eID
Electronic payment for local taxes	Links to Municipalities that allow electronic payment of local taxes. Although almost all Romanian municipalities are listed, only those present in the VPD provides this service effectively	Information	–

Main Findings

Although most sections provide information or make links to the websites of major public institutions in Romania, initiatives such as the transmission of statements, using the Electronic Procurement System and the VPD show a high level of development. A fully electronically provision proves the existence and implementation of a framework that can be used to extend the number of such services. The recent introduction of VPD, which allows online payments for various fees and taxes, is an essential service in boosting the efficiency of these transfers for both citizens and authorities. It is remarkable the easiness of using this service, the interface being intuitive and highly accessible. The main disadvantage relate to the fact that so far only four institutions are available online.

Important efforts were also made for the services provided by the National Trade Register Office and those relating to transport permits. These services were assessed as level 3 – Two Way Interaction – that offers complete, specific forms of endorsement and transmission to the respective authorities, but the release of requested documents can't be done electronically.

The Section “Online Forms” falls in the 2nd development level – One Way Interaction – and enables the transmission of forms to public institutions. It requires the enrollment of authorities in the system.

The remaining sections are found at the first level which implies the provision of information. Many sections carry links to the most important public institutions in Romania, which are also used purely for displaying information.

While most services can be found in the first stage of development, the computer capacity, required for acceding to an advanced electronic sophistication, has been achieved. One reason of concern is the withholding of public institutions, local and central, to adapt their internal processes in order to enroll in the system and adopt the electronic mediation of the public services they offer. Four institutions in the online paying program is a tiny number, the proportion of citizens currently served does not justify the efforts of creating the framework needed for developing and launching this service. We should also mention the need to obtain a

certificate of digital identification by the users in regard with most services at levels 3 and 4 of sophistication, except the VPD application, not as an impediment but an extra step to be made by future users.

Level four is the desired and pursued degree of development in the National Strategy and, the fact that there is a framework that can be used to implement public services accessed online, is a major leap towards the electronic standardization which the Information Society of Romania wants to become part of.

5. Conclusions

eGovernment value will become increasingly defined by its contribution to the development of integrated administration, economic areas and segments of society. Inclination to citizens, inclusion of disadvantaged or marginalized communities, government connected, universal access and use of new technologies, are the benchmarks through which innovative public services will be provided and evaluated.

Our country made important steps regarding the creation of the framework required for electronic development and delivery of eGovernment. Applications such as VPD or the possibility of submission fiscal declarations are spearheads and also examples to be followed. However, the awareness of the necessity to adopt these processes from public institutions is at an incipient level. This aspect, corroborated with the low number of services accessible related to the 20 priorities established by the E.U., rank our country in the lower quarter compared to other Member States. It is important to determine aspects regarding the use of information technologies, especially behavioral aspects that influence the adoption of information solutions by institutions and the acceptance and use of the new communication and delivery channels by the citizens.

Regardless the stage of accession of the Strategy on Information Society, whether trying to adapt general policies of the European Union to effectively serve the shortcomings revealed by the reality of each Member State, aiming to streamline the creation of major public services or specific services needed by small segments, making steps to reduce public expenditure, assessing and selecting the best delivery channels or promoting a social cause, eGovernment is the tool which marketing can adapt and use for sustainably developing the public administration.

This paper aims to highlight from a conceptual point of view, some of the most important aspects concerning the implementation of eGovernment services and the ways in which marketing's science and tools can contribute to the development of effective long-term solutions. The assessment carried out in March about the level of development of public services available online through the portal "www.e-guvernare.ro" is a first step necessary to the development of more efficient and consumer-centered public services.

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