

Using Network Technology to Advance Mexico's Good Government Agenda

Executive Summary

Citizens' needs are at the heart of Mexico's drive to transform itself into a **connected government** that promotes public trust and cost-effective service delivery, and the challenge is not only to offer more information to constituents, but to utilize a multichannel approach to put them in direct contact with the civil servants and agencies that provide those services. The Fox administration turned to Cisco Systems[®] as an expert provider of communications technology and—equally important—as a valued advisor regarding best practices initiated by other national governments and the private sector. The result was a blueprint for successfully sharing information in a more effective, cost-efficient, and citizen-centric way.

The administration of **President Vicente Fox** has brought federal services closer to the Mexican people, electronically opening more than 1000 government services to public access and scrutiny, creating digital signatures to help streamline the processing of individual citizen requests, and fostering public trust through the implementation of a transparent, online government procurement and bidding process.

CHALLENGE

Abraham Sotelo, Coordinator of Digital Government for the Government of Mexico, says the trend in democratic governments across the globe is to build a better way of communicating with citizens, understanding their needs, and responding to them more quickly and cost-competitively. "In the past, every agency defined its own strategy," Sotelo says. "In the Mexican government, every institution has its own budget, and we didn't have a common understanding about the role of technology."

Inefficiencies bred frustration for constituents who had to wait in line for routine government services like the issuance of drivers' licenses, and the economy was affected by slow government approvals for start-up businesses. Worse, the disconnect between government agencies and the general population contributed to a reputation for corrupt practices. "One of the problems we have in Mexico," Sotelo says, "is the middle person who interacts with you when you want to get something from government. They ask for extra money to get something done quickly or ahead of other people."



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In fact, the problems faced by Sotelo and the Mexican government tracked closely to drawbacks being dealt with by other national governments on their way to what Cisco Systems® and the Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) have defined as the **Connected Republic**—a 21st-century democracy that puts people and communities in the middle of new networks of knowledge, service, trust, and accountability. It is a vision that depends for its success on four key goals: putting citizens at the center, connecting people, empowering them, and delivering public value.

According to Sotelo, “It was very important for the Mexican government to bridge the problem of providing access to all kinds of services and technology for citizens in general.”

SOLUTION

Mexican authorities began by identifying best practices in other national governments, which helped them to envision what may be coming next in the area of **e-government** trends. That ‘next wave’ involves delivering more value to the citizen in the form of a leaner government that works more efficiently, but also ensures people receive the kind of services they want. It revolves around citizen satisfaction, operational flexibility, and actually having constituents involved in the shaping of service delivery.

“Cisco played a strategic role as a vendor of technology,” Sotelo says, “but beyond that—and probably most important—it provided us with methodologies that have been implemented in other sectors, government and private. Right from the beginning, we were able to build a roadmap for our initiatives.”

Getting Up to Speed

In terms of public services that could be accessed electronically, Sotelo says the current administration started with almost none. “At the end of 2004,” he notes, “we accounted for more than 1000 e-services,” including tax filings, job postings, and applications for drivers’ licenses.

According to Sotelo, the Mexican government’s tax filing and payment initiative is one of the most innovative in the world. “Right now, more than 90% of regular taxpayers and companies do it online through Citizen Portals. Customer evaluations show that people in general are happy with the service because it simplifies life for them and saves time.”

The federal government’s electronic procurement system, Compranet, is the result of a network-based re-engineering of bidding and purchasing processes into a functioning e-marketplace that opens the procedure to public scrutiny. “The government is obliged to publish what it’s going to procure so everyone can bid. It helps to avoid corruption,” says Isidro Quintana, Head of Mexico IBSG practice.

The most sensitive services, like tax payment and procurements, use a secure digital signature, which has engendered a sense of trust in citizens that their transactions are being handled accurately and fairly. And by eliminating that troublesome ‘middleman’ through direct interaction with government programs and personnel, individual citizens derive a personal sense of eradicating corruption, contributing to fair treatment and reducing the overall cost of intermediation.

Putting It All Together

At the same time, Sotelo says, the government is pursuing an initiative to interconnect agency networks through virtual private networks to deliver cost-effectiveness, speed, and improved customer satisfaction. “The Mexican government is quite large and we have many networks, not only in Mexico City but across the nation and overseas. We didn’t have a model for linking all those networks,” Sotelo says, “but we learned from Cisco how to interconnect mutual networks in a more advanced, cost-effective way.”

In addition, the Mexican government supports network connection to more than 8000 digital community centers in cities and localities across the country. “People from different regions, particularly the ones that would otherwise have very little communication access, go to these centers,” says Sotelo, “not only to get government services, but to connect to other services in the areas of education, health, jobs, and business.”

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Abraham Sotelo, Director of Digital Government, Government of Mexico

BUSINESS VALUE

Two of the key objectives of the nation’s Good Government Agenda and Cisco’s Connected Republic, Sotelo notes, are citizen empowerment and the promotion of public trust. The Mexican government’s decision to use networks and the Internet to more openly and cost-effectively deliver the information and services people want has proved to be a real enabler—not only of citizens, but of government employees. “We are transforming from a society that came from no access to information to an all-access society,” says Sotelo.

Chambers of commerce and business organizations in particular, he adds, are “very aware of how technology has improved competitiveness in government, and helped government to become a partner in enabling new business in Mexico.”

NEXT STEPS

According to Sotelo, the main challenge facing the Mexican government is to invite more citizen contact by extending information channels past the Internet to telephones and public kiosks.

“The specific area we’re focusing on this year and next year is increasing the adoption rate of government services by citizens,” he says. “That’s not so much a technology issue as a cultural issue.” Sotelo says the plan is to heighten marketing activities, promote easy-to-access channels like telephone, and create incentives for people to use existing e-services to take advantage of their convenience and usefulness.

Beyond that, Sotelo says the idea is to expand collaboration and service levels to other government jurisdictions. “We want to extend the notion of connected government to align with what the federal government is doing with state and local efforts.”

MORE INFORMATION

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