

Ontario Government Pioneers Next Generation of E-Government

The Government of Ontario (www.gov.on.ca) is becoming a networked virtual organization—dissolving organizational walls, reducing the size of government, increasing productivity, and building a client-service sensibility that's yielding high satisfaction ratings. And that's just the beginning. With a robust infrastructure powered by networking technology from Cisco Systems® and solid public and private partnerships in place, Ontario plans to add personalized and localized electronic services that integrate programs horizontally across jurisdictions, creating a networked virtual organization that will make life easier for the citizens and businesses that call the province home.

Customer View

"Implementation of e-government means turning the corner on old methods and creating exciting new ways to do business with the communities. It's sharpening our competitive edge. We're transforming large public-sector systems, such as health, education, and justice; changing internal government processes; and creating new channels for service delivery and citizen participation. We've increased the number of services we deliver to people, yet the number of civil servants is substantially smaller than it was 10 years ago."

**Gregory Georgeff, Corporate CIO,
Management Board Secretariat**

Background

The nation of Canada is an independent sovereign democracy and also a federal state with ten provinces and three northern territories. Powers of the federal and provincial governments are defined through the Canadian constitution, with provincial governments being responsible for, among other functions, health, education, municipalities, and numerous direct services to citizens.

Ontario is the second largest of these provinces in terms of geography and the largest in population, home to nearly 12 million people—almost 40 percent of Canada's total citizenry. Covering more than one million square kilometers or 415,000 square miles, its land mass is larger than France and Spain combined.

Challenge

In the mid-1990s, a new administration took power in the Government of Ontario with a strong agenda focused on four key initiatives:

- To reduce the size of government

- To improve the focus on citizens and taxpayers
- To eliminate silos
- To get to a balanced budget

The force behind these initiatives was to deliver outcomes of direct benefit to Ontario's citizens. "The clear emphasis was on becoming a client-service-driven organization, starting from the outside in," recalls Joan McCalla, the government's chief strategist. "The phrase 'quality service' emerged as a powerful theme."

In response to these four top-down challenges, every ministry in Ontario developed a business plan to focus on its core business objectives as well as supporting Information and Information Technology (I&IT) plans. In the spirit of eliminating silos to get the job done right, government officials joined forces in 1998 to build an information technology strategy that, for the first time in Ontario's history, set an enterprise model in place for how information and information technology would be planned, managed, and delivered across the provincial government.

“This was a real landmark,” McCalla notes. “It moved us from a context where technology was considered an administrative cost of each ministry to a view of technology as an enabler of change. We successfully made the case that only through the application of technology could we increase the capacity of government while reducing size and costs. And through an enterprise approach to technology, we could improve client service and break down organizational silos. It was the genesis of an important cultural transformation.”

The “outside-in” perspective was another factor that accelerated cultural change. The emerging external client focus created a reference point that transcended individual ministries or projects, sparking a sense of mission everyone could share.

Clear and broad communication of the new direction also became critical. “Our Secretary of Cabinet issued a report at the time called ‘Framework for Action,’ which became the vehicle for communicating the overall direction in terms of where we needed to go and how we were going to get there,” McCalla says. “The overriding emphasis was on becoming a quality service organization by focusing on continuous improvement.”

Solution

Ontario government officials began the long journey to what is being described as the third generation of e-government. This next-generation phase evolves from an initial focus on information management and basic online transactions (first generation) to an integrated, citizen-focused strategy (second generation) to a “networked virtual organization,” which draws government and partner organizations into complex patterns of collaboration that rely on shared systems, resources, processes, and knowledge, and also engages citizens in government (third generation).

Part of the I&IT strategy approved in 1998 was the integration of 21 separate ministry I&IT departments into 7 organizational clusters, each serving multiple ministries. At the same time, Ontario embarked on the development of common infrastructure to be used by all ministries, based on an enterprise architecture developed as an early deliverable. The highest common infrastructure priority was a robust, Internet-based highway with “on and off ramps” and “intersections” able to serve the needs of both government employees and citizens. No mean feat for a busy, 60,000-person organization serving a population of 12 million.

“We were building the channel and driving our business on it at the same time,” recalls Sharon Cohen, chief executive officer of the Shared Services Bureau of Ontario—perhaps the world’s largest public-sector shared-services initiative delivering business support services to Ontario ministries and employees. “If you put something

online and it’s working, if the performance is good, it’s very encouraging and the whole concept of building confidence as we move toward an e-world is enhanced. We want to give customers every opportunity to say, ‘This is working.’”

With a common infrastructure agreed upon, government leaders managing parallel change efforts joined forces to ensure the new technology would be put to best use in making Ontario’s vision a reality. “Our long-term vision is to become an integrated, client-focused, cost-effective government,” McCalla says. “And we have shorter-term initiatives to create victories and build momentum along the way. Our mantra is: think big, start small, scale fast.”

Ontario’s approach to achieving its goals includes:

- Creation of the Integrated Services Division within the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services to integrate or “cluster” routine information and services to individuals and businesses using multiple channels, including over-the-counter and electronic service delivery
- Sector change initiatives in Health, Justice, Resource Management, and Education
- Transformation of internal administration focused on improving human resource and financial management and other services to managers and staff through a Shared Services Bureau

“We look at every initiative in terms of whether it makes business sense, whether there’s a cost benefit, and how soon we can get a payback,” says David Mee, director of customer relations, Shared Services Bureau.

This emphasis on measurement is part of the government’s change strategy and includes a pay-for-performance system for senior managers to encourage cultural change. “You must set specific performance targets, measure against them, and then translate that into actual compensation,” McCalla explains. “In 2002, named individuals from across government who contributed to integrated electronic service delivery each received an extra 1 percent of their salary. It may not sound like a lot, but the symbolism is important, and it’s on top of other incentives.”

Governance is also a critical success factor in keeping diverse groups focused on a joint solution. “Every ministry produces a business plan, including performance measures in each one,” McCalla says. “Overall client satisfaction measures have been approved by Cabinet. It shows our leaders take this very seriously. Each ministry also prepares an electronic service delivery action plan, and each year must report on progress and update that plan. We assess both progress reports and plans and then provide a report card back as to how they’re doing.”

Results

At this point, Ontario's report card is resoundingly positive.

"We're really proud of what we have accomplished in customer satisfaction," says Paavo Kivisto, Deputy Minister of Labour. "We think we beat most private sector companies and most jurisdictions hands down on electronic channels. We serve over a million customers a year, and we are averaging about 95 to 97 percent satisfaction ratings for particular services." Overall satisfaction with government service is at 70 percent, and has been increasing.

A sampling of the Government's client-focused initiatives include:

- **Major Case Management System (MCMS)** enables Ontario's law enforcement agencies to join forces as part of a coordinated, interdisciplinary approach. Using technology to link 66 municipal police forces is enabling more focused criminal investigations.
- **Ontario Business Connects (OBC)** is a government initiative designed to simplify and streamline registration, renewal, and reporting processes for Ontario businesses. The majority of new business registrations are now done electronically. Processes that used to take weeks now take only a few minutes.
- **Life Event Bundles** allows citizens to access and complete online information needed for such "life events" as marriage, death, and the loss of a wallet. "The beauty of this is, it creates simple, seamless services for citizens and is completely customer-driven since we based offerings on repeated requests we were getting from citizens at our Government Information Centers," Kivisto notes.
- **Smart Systems** is an initiative sponsored by the Ministry of Health that is designed to improve patient care by building a province-wide, secure information infrastructure that will make critical information available online whenever and wherever needed. Smart Systems connects more than 150,000 healthcare professionals in 24,000 locations and, with its interactive videoconferencing capability, enables real-time consultation with medical specialists.
- **Early Fire Operation Support (EFOS)** is an Internet-based application that's helping preserve the environment. "EFOS is critical to ensuring resources are positioned around Ontario to provide adequate protection before fire activity emerges," says Bill May, Ministry of Natural Resources. "It combines data on lightning activity, force fields, and weather to predict hazardous areas up to 10 days in advance."

All government initiatives are carefully selected for greatest customer impact, then closely monitored and measured to ensure success.

"We're making great progress," reports Kathryn Bouey, secretary of management for the Board of Cabinet and deputy minister for the Management Board Secretariat. "Through customer surveys, cost analysis, and partner feedback we know our initiatives are working. This journey is an important one and we need to know we're on the right track."

Next Steps

"Through Smart Systems for Health, we are now in the process of putting in place a secure infrastructure across the health sector to connect providers, pharmacists, hospitals, doctors, and labs," McCalla says. "That is creating a networked virtual health organization made up of some very independent bodies under completely different organizations. What's tying this together is not just the technology, it is the patient record and the information management so that, at the end of the day, the outcome is improved patient care."

Government leaders see continuous improvement as well as ongoing collaboration and citizen engagement as important elements in shaping Ontario's destiny. "If you want a vision of what Ontario will look like in the future, you might think of the whole province as a network of networks, of people and organizations working together," McCalla says. "The provincial government has a leading role as the orchestrator to bring that about."

"The next generation of services is going to be heavily based on two key premises of privacy and security," says Gregory Georgeff, corporate chief information officer (CIO) of the Management Board Secretariat. "This will allow us to personalize services to each individual. For example, I may want to know about the air and water quality in my workplace or neighborhood, or be automatically alerted to upcoming changes in roads or transportation services that will affect my daily commute, or zoning variances that will affect my home or business."

"The idea is to be customer-centric, and that means we have to change not only the technology but also our business processes," Georgeff adds. "We have to become much more horizontal. For example, we want to extend the bundling theorem we've applied to life events such as births, deaths, and marriages to the business community. If you start a business, you have to deal with a number of different agencies in terms of building inspectors, health inspectors, permits. The notion of combining things across various jurisdictions will create a lot of value for people. We have a number of pilots under way that are working well."

Georgeff describes the future capabilities as moving Ontario from automating services required by the government, such as permits and license plates, to enabling services desired by citizens. Plans

are to provide natural language capability, electronic agents, and knowledge management to learn from individual's requests. "With authentication technology, we can create a very powerful tool for our citizens," Georgeff says. "We have millions of citizens, each with very unique requirements, and we want to provide the environment and the capacity to satisfy all of them."

"We're expecting in very short order to drop the 'e' from e-government," McCalla says. "Because it's really about government being the best it can possibly be in terms of serving the public interest. Technology is certainly the means to get there, but bottom line it's not about 'e,' it's about 'g.'"

For More Information

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