

Web-Based Services

The Key to Doing More in Tough Times



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Behind electronically enabled government services (E-Government or E-Gov) are information and communication technologies that provide and improve government services. Any municipal transaction or interaction with citizens, businesses and other levels of government may be transformed with digital technology. A sound E-Gov strategy will improve services as well as increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness. E-Gov creates easy access to current information and to public officials for a more transparent and accountable local government.

More than ever before, E-Gov is important to the health and success of a community.

Do you struggle with your town's public image and the fact that newspapers only print the bad news? Posting press releases on a website makes them searchable when someone "googles" the town name.

Do you need help with economic development? A website demonstrates government's connection to the community. It provides valuable insights into the environment that potential investors will experience. It showcases the advantages of a community and attracts new residents by providing information about schools, parks, recreation and other quality-of-life issues.

Do you want to help new residents adjust and acclimate to the town so that they choose to stay and encourage their friends and relatives to move next door? Solid E-Gov services provide the type of one-stop shopping that links new residents to the valuable resources they need to make this transition quickly and easily.



Your town or city can transform the relationship between the government and the governed, while improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness with web-based services.

The Basics In 2010, there is *no excuse* for not having a basic, official municipal web presence. Think about all the brochure-type information about the community that has not changed one bit in the last decade. A few hundred dollars per year (and no technical experience required) posts all the key information about the town on a few static web pages. Basic information such as hours of operation, address, phone number, and directions to each municipal office should be available on the web. Today, visitors may search your site from their cell phone as they drive through town!

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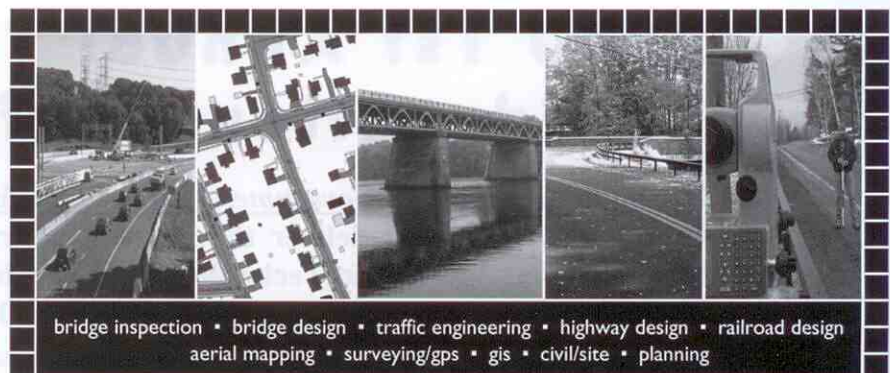
Developing an E-government Strategy
 To keep your citizens up to date with what is going on in the city, simply delivering a static web site is not enough. It's time to raise the bar and start interacting with constituents

through your web site. Your town or city can transform the relationship between the government and the governed, while improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness with web-based services.

Educational Information School kids use the internet to research everything, so having important municipal history and information about the structure of your organization and the services provided gives them a way to connect to government at an early age.

Online Forms Unless your administrative staff members are still using typewriters, it's very easy to create electronic versions of all forms citizens are asked to complete. Posting these forms online will take an additional investment of about \$250 and as much technical expertise as it takes to print a document.

Having a web site with all the basics is a good first step, but that does not mean the municipality is delivering E-Gov yet. There is more to be done to move toward an effective E-Gov strategy.



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The following list of convenience-based services suggests a few ideas on how you could improve your web presence and deliver more value to your citizens. The cost? No more than spending a few personnel hours worth of resources each day or week to update information and respond to inquiries.

- **Online contacts** Citizens would like extended hours at City Hall, so instead of staying open later, give them around-the-clock access through online contact forms. This feature allows users to send messages and requests via e-mail. The only cost to be open for business at all hours comes in the form of some staff time devoted to responding to the requests in a timely way.
- **Online posting** Move the entire township bulletin board to the web—anything posted physically, may be posted electronically. When available online, items such as minutes, agendas, resolutions, ordinances, budgets, or any other statutory documents or notices to the public become easier to find and read.
- **Online schedules** Provide an updated calendar of activities for the community. This may include governing body



School kids use the internet to research everything; so be sure to include important municipal history and information about the structure of your organization so that they can connect to government at an early age.



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meetings, recreational activities and events sponsored by the town.

- **Online forms** Instead of static forms that people print and complete by hand, this web feature allows users to fill in forms and send them online. With greater degrees of sophistication, these forms may be submitted online via e-mail or through a connection to a database.

Once these E-Gov basics have been mastered, prepare for the future. Here are a few more ideas to improve services if you already have some solid technical back-end infrastructure to provide support. The future is now, so are you delivering these services yet?

- Web-cams or wifi access at parks
- Emergency notification systems

- Online Payments for taxes, water/sewer bills, recreation fees, court fees, permit fees
- Video on-demand archive of meetings/events
- Live streaming of your Community Access cable channel through web site or direct broadcast of meetings over the web
- GIS maps—self-download for free instead of for a fee
- Online access to archives

Want to know more about how to develop your website? Check out the website at www.njgmis.org/egov.html for a listing of vendors and other resources that can help municipal officials develop websites; from the most basic to the most sophisticated,

customized sites. More information on New Jersey municipal websites is also available at www.njslom.org/web_site_management.html

Curious about where all these ideas came from? The authors met through NJ-GMIS, an association of local government information technology leaders dedicated to sharing and collaborating to improve government services. Over the past few years through sharing of ideas, they and their colleagues have found opportunities that assist governments of all sizes and budgets manage their technology and e-government services more effectively and efficiently.

Want more information? Visit the website at www.njgmis.org or drop an e-mail to info@njgmis.org. ▲



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