

White paper

Delivering superior client service

Multichannel communications
in the public sector

Government organizations at every level face increasing pressure to improve service throughout their operations. This white paper examines the area of client communications. It reviews the current state of client communications and the ways in which a unified, multichannel client communications platform, on-premises or in hybrid cloud environments, can improve service delivery.

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Executive summary

Government agencies communicate regularly with thousands of their clients for a variety of reasons. Communication is part of the overall “service package” that government provides. Much of this communication explains the activities and programs of one or more government entities, some of which are mandated by law. Even at the local level, client communications is a large task that can strain personnel, budget and technology resources.

Although many of these communication requirements were valid a few decades ago, the issues have become even more problematic today. Government policy makers, regulators and citizens now expect better, faster and more secure communications—delivered in more ways: by email, over the web, in print and using mobile devices. These expectations are part of a larger trend toward a government that is more transparent and more responsive.

To meet these demands, governmental officials are searching for ways to stay connected with various agencies and departments, as well as the citizens they serve. A tangible application of the connected government philosophy is the client communications management (CCM) platform. CCM enables government organizations to generate, manage and deliver multichannel communications with a single technology solution on-premise or in hybrid cloud environments, while improving service, reducing cost, eliminating waste and meeting regulatory compliance demands.

Connected government

Regardless of size, budget or reporting structure, government agencies and officials share a common purpose: to serve the needs of the people. But state and local governments face many conflicting pressures. While declining revenues force agencies to contain expenses, demands from citizens, businesses, political officials and regulators continue to escalate. Despite efforts to cut costs, government organizations need to find alternate ways to meet their needs. The solution to this seemingly impossible situation is a concept called “connected government.”

“Connected government” is a set of interwoven technologies and processes that enables state and local government agencies to respond to growing cost pressures and spiraling service demands by exploiting the power of effective digital information management in a flexible, collaborative environment.

Since agencies must regularly interact with the citizens they serve, client communications can benefit greatly from a connected government approach. Ongoing communication about agencies’ activities on behalf of clients, as well as the outcomes of those activities, is not only expected, but often mandated by law. At one time, the bulk of this communication was “correspondence”—printed letters and other material sent through postal mail. However, the communication process is evolving.

Today’s government agency is expected to communicate effectively with its clients through multiple channels: by telephone, through printed materials and electronically through the internet, email and mobile devices. Yet many agencies struggle to meet these expectations with a fractured communications infrastructure that includes legacy technology and siloed point solutions encumbered by largely paper-based processes.



This white paper begins with an overview of client communications and the ways in which legacy communications systems prevent government agencies from delivering superior citizen service. The next section describes how a unified client communications management (CCM) platform can improve citizen service, boost transparency, lower costs and support regulatory compliance.

Scope and state of client communications

For government agencies, client communications involve three primary document types:

- Notices
- Forms
- Correspondences

Traditionally, government agencies have sent all three types of communications through postal mail. While a segment of the public still prefers postal delivery of printed communications, electronic communications is increasingly preferred for several reasons:

- **Client demand**—The web and mobile communications are now extremely common. More and more people use them every day to find information, shop, maintain business and personal relationships and take care of routine transactions. Many people are not only comfortable with the digital lifestyle, but prefer it because it is interactive and immediate.
- **Cost**—For high-volume communications, postal mail is expensive even for standard delivery. Printing also adds costs, especially for high-quality, full color materials.
- **Speed**—Standard postal delivery is slow. Expedited delivery is costly—and it still cannot match the speed of electronic communications. The speed of electronic communications is rapidly becoming the standard against which all communication is measured.
- **Environmental concerns**—Printing and large-scale paper production are damaging to the environment. As a result, many government agencies are migrating a greater share of their communications to electronic channels such as email, web-based instant messages and short message service (SMS) messages via mobile devices.

Of course, the demise of print communications has been predicted for decades. Despite the transition to electronic communications, there will always be a role for printed documents. For government organizations, this means that an effective client communications infrastructure must accommodate print and electronic communications in a variety of forms. Yet this kind of unified infrastructure is rare. Instead, agencies usually manage a different technology solution for each type of communication and often for each agency, making it difficult to meet elevated standards for transparency, access and service while adhering to budget constraints.

A unified, multichannel client communications platform

The volume and scope of agency communications demand a unified, multichannel CCM platform, which employs dynamic content publishing to create, assemble and deliver client communications through multiple distribution channels. It can be deployed on-premise or in hybrid cloud environments, automatically adapt the level of personalization as required and publish in interactive, real-time and/or batch modes. A CCM platform also ensures the use of consistent, relevant and approved content by combining variable data with digital assets through powerful document assembly logic, providing agencies with the ability to reach the right client with the right message in the right format. The following sections describe the major components of a CCM platform in greater detail.

Integrated content and data management

Client communications must accurately represent agency program and service capabilities while conforming to regulatory guidelines. To achieve this, program content should be managed centrally and stored in a secure repository. The repository should support versioning of content and be easy to navigate and search. It should also be able to manage the business rules that drive personalization. Finally, this type of repository should be able to integrate seamlessly with production systems.

Fit-for-Purpose design tools

The ability to generate thousands or millions of client communications with specific personalization, information and security demands requires sophisticated design tools. These tools are used to create templates that incorporate business rules governing design variables, customization parameters and the use of client data. In this way, master templates can produce a virtually unlimited number of unique instances.

A CCM platform should integrate the power and ease of use of popular desktop tools such as Microsoft® Word, Adobe® InDesign® and Adobe® Dreamweaver® with rules-based, dynamic content assembly of complex communications in a variety of formats. Leveraging familiar tools reduces the learning curve among designers and business users, streamlines high-volume production and reduces the role that IT must play in servicing the infrastructure.

Scalable, multichannel content generation

The heart of a CCM platform is its document generation engine, which performs three tasks: content assembly, composition and formatting and distribution to multiple channels. Its composition and formatting capabilities must be able to support a broad set of electronic and print output formats, including PDF, HTML, AFP, PostScript, PCL and plain text.

The document generation engine must also be equally capable of meeting the needs of high-volume batch production or individual real-time requests—and integrate tightly with an agency's web infrastructure. To meet the scalability demands of e-commerce, the engine's platform must be service-oriented and web-based. Although many traditional document generation software tools use a highly optimized batch technology, this technology cannot scale to service high-volume, high-concurrency, on-demand requests. Scalable generation engines are based on service-oriented architectures, such as Java Enterprise Edition or the Microsoft .Net framework, which include this capability.

eDelivery capabilities

A CCM platform also enables agencies to quickly create and deploy graphically rich HTML email and web landing pages. These pages can direct clients to relevant information through personalized extensions to secure web portals. Moreover, the CCM platform's rules engine can apply appropriate jurisdictions and effective dates and add and remove specific content, thereby simplifying compliance with regulatory requirements.



Secure content archiving

Every client communication should be automatically archived for legal and regulatory purposes. Using content metadata, a rules-driven document generation engine will enforce archiving and records management policies that determine access rights, retention and disposition.

Enterprise integration

Government organizations must be able to integrate document personalization and generation services in existing enterprise applications, making personalized communications services callable from agency workflows to generate content in real time or queue them for batch processing. To enable easy integration with enterprise systems such as enterprise content management, a CCM platform should include a comprehensive set of web services and Java APIs.

Benefits of an integrated CCM platform

An integrated CCM platform as described in the previous section confers significant operational advantages to the organization that deploys it. For example, OpenText™ xPression™ is a unified, multichannel client communications management platform that can support all the correspondence needs of a public sector agency while enabling process improvement and greater efficiency at lower cost throughout the organization.

xPression eliminates the need to manage and maintain disparate systems and technologies that are tied to specific output formats and production methods, such as batch or real time. It can also support correspondence in multiple languages, enabling agencies to communicate with citizens in their language of choice and can be deployed on-premise or in hybrid cloud environments. The following sections outline some of the fundamental benefits that xPression can provide to government departments and agencies.

Electronic delivery and eNotification

With xPression, the generation of multichannel output formats can be triggered by client preference. xPression supports various commonly used digital formats, including HTML 5, enabling delivery through electronic channels such as the web and mobile devices while saving time and eliminating paper and postage costs. With xPression, there is no need to redesign applications for multichannel output.

Court appearances, eligibility hearings and license renewals are just a few of the activities that citizens need to keep track of in their routine interactions with government. For example, a child support order may be sent out months before the court date when the order may be adjusted. xPression can generate and distribute electronic alerts for non-custodial parents prior to the court date. Similarly, when a driver's license or registration is near expiration, an electronic alert can remind the citizen in advance and supply helpful information including the costs and options for renewal. These alerts reduce call center inquiries and help public sector organizations provide superior citizen service.

Reduced call center costs

The language for eligibility notices can often be difficult to understand. As a result, citizens contact their case workers or call centers for clarification. Furthermore, the language for these notices is often maintained in legacy systems with little or no capability to format it for better comprehension.

As case workers repeatedly address the same questions, service levels drop. Case workers typically generate follow-up communications based on each citizen interaction, further increasing costs. The resulting experience is often time-consuming and frustrating for all parties.

Using familiar authoring tools like Microsoft Word, xPression allows agencies to quickly produce higher-quality, more accurate notices that are easier to understand, contain only relevant content and use color and graphic emphasis to highlight the most important information. This software also enables the user to maintain notices in multiple languages.

Integrated eligibility notices

Citizens often need multiple forms of government aid, such as child support, supplemental nutrition assistance and healthcare. Often these services are supported by different departments and systems within the same agency. xPression can combine information from different systems into a single, integrated eligibility notice. Integrated eligibility notices reduce mailing costs and provide aid recipients with a unified view of their benefit status.

When legally permissible, xPression also enables agencies to consolidate documents and create a single statement per household containing information relevant to each member. For postal communications, such consolidated mailings reduce paper consumption and lower costs.

Simplified application processing

For many government services, citizens must apply for assistance. This usually involves obtaining a preprinted form or printing the form from a website, completing it and mailing it. Typically, the forms are maintained as Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF documents. xPression can use these documents to create powerful templates that applicants and case workers can complete and submit electronically. Electronic forms improve legibility, reduce errors and improve processing time. xPression can also apply barcodes to automate processing by document imaging, mailing and workflow systems.

Moving to the cloud

Deployment options may include a wide variety of on-site, virtualized server and distributed infrastructures – including completely managed delivery from the cloud. Such options will allow government departments and agencies to realize the value of new CCM infrastructures as quickly as possible.



Conclusion

As government agencies attempt to manage constraints and communication pressures, an effective CCM platform can help government agencies deliver enhanced client service and improve overall efficiency by:

- Reducing paper, paper storage and postage costs
- Lowering call center volumes
- Decreasing cycle time for the creation and delivery of client correspondence
- Enabling multichannel delivery
- Improving ease of use for field case managers
- Providing greater centralization and control of the communications process

As traditional print communications surrender prominence to their web-based, digital counterparts, a CCM platform will become increasingly essential to all public sector organizations.

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