

Directgov Strategic Review

Executive Summary

29 September 2010

Context of the Review

Further to discussions with the Permanent Secretary of Government Communications and The Digital Champion's team, Transform were appointed to conduct a strategic review of DirectGov to help inform how the government can implement a radical new approach to digital service delivery and communications.

Our Approach

Over an eight-week period, Transform conducted more than 50 interviews with industry experts, key stakeholders and service users, and reviewed comments submitted online and via email. We also carried out an extensive document review; undertook desk research to identify international approaches; and conducted four workshops to test different service delivery models.

Key Findings

Since launching in 2004, Directgov has successfully built high volumes of traffic to a central website and has built a trusted brand with high levels of awareness among the general public. However aging technology, excessive bureaucracy, ineffective governance structures and a lack of authority have hampered Directgov's ability to keep up with the pace of change in the external environment.

It is now in need of a **radical overhaul** in order to make it fit for purpose as the primary driver of online government transactions and information.

The changes required

The consumer service proposition

We believe the consumer proposition for Directgov should be one of *'utility'* and *'making things easier'*. Directgov users are goal-oriented, using the site to fulfil requests for information on rights, obligations and entitlements, and to process transactions.

The content, functionality and features of the service should:

- be determined by user needs and customer insight
- learn from what has been proven to work well elsewhere on the web
- be relentlessly, openly measured to drive rapid and visible improvement
- recognise impact on contact elsewhere
- be widely available and open for re-use via syndication/apps

The aim is pare down to a smaller, clearer and more manageable set of content that is well-linked and easy for users to navigate. This requires a heavy rationalisation of the site's informational content to:

- identify unnecessary or little-used content
- explore gaps where better information on rights, obligations and entitlements should be provided
- vastly improve the quality of poorly rated existing content
- develop a view on the quality and availability of information on third party sites (e.g. Rightsnet, Netmums) to which Directgov should link in preference to creating or maintaining its own content

For **transactions**, the emphasis should be on excellence in service design and supporting channel shift. This means ensuring that not only does the digital transaction work well, and allow the user to complete without difficulty, but also that supporting services and processes (e.g. status and progress updates) are also digitised. Where

there is a need to champion change to outdated legislation, approaches and attitudes (e.g. challenging why car tax periods are immovable), Directgov should do so. Both content and transactions need to be made open for others to use and re-present via APIs as standard.

The brand

We believe the Directgov *brand* can be stretched to cover news, announcements/press releases; corporate information from departments, campaigns and e-democracy. All this activity should be supported by shared web services and a single domain, but we argue that the Directgov *organisation* should not be responsible for all the activities.

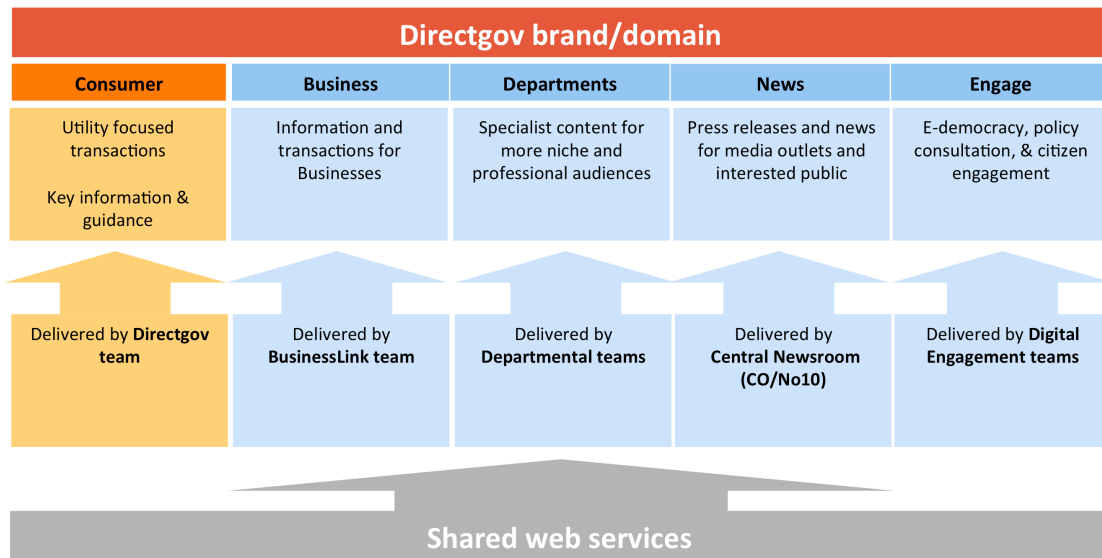
What happens to other digital content?

- **Departmental websites:** Now that government is on track to converge 95% of citizen content onto Directgov by end March 2011, we believe it's time to move onto a new phase of convergence, by rationalising and converging all departmental websites and their content (non-citizen facing policies, legislation and guidance) onto shared web services, supported by a set of common content standards. We view this content as the equivalent of 'corporate' content on a large organisation's website – important, but often specialist, and not of immediate relevance to the vast majority of consumers.
- **News:** Press releases and announcements from Departments, bodies and agencies should be brought together into one place for the interest of journalists and commentators, as is done currently through the COI's News Distribution Services, and presented through the single domain.
- **Campaigns:** Campaigns should be developed on the principle that they exist where the users already congregate online – using partnership, sponsorship, and advertising (if necessary) on third party sites such as Facebook, Netmums, Student Room etc. To the extent that a supporting microsite is necessary, then the facility to create one should be made available using shared web services, but Directgov should not have a role in producing or managing the campaign.
- **Engagement:** Consultations and feedback exercises are important for policy development, but from Directgov's consumer insight work and our analysis of their usage data, there is little evidence that they would be more successful if attempts were made to integrate them fully with the consumer proposition, due to users perceiving the value of Directgov as being one of utility. Instead, they should be supported by shared web services and the single domain, but not the staff who work on Directgov.

The organisation

The Directgov organisation should reduce and realign its resources to focus on:

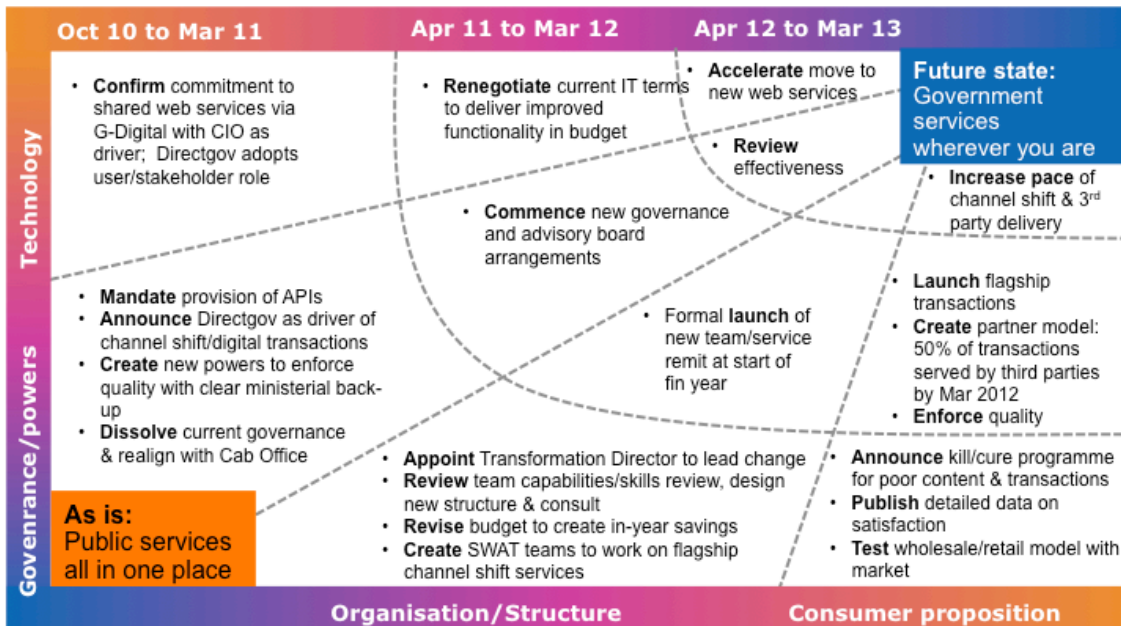
1. architecting and managing a more focused consumer proposition
2. providing easy-to-navigate information/guidance to citizens on obligations, entitlements and actions that require interaction with government
3. providing easy to use, effective services that help citizens transact with government online, to drive channel shift
4. creating & agreeing cross-government standards that support our proposed 'retail to wholesale' shift, including standards on APIs and use of open technologies to support channel shift, and the stimulation of an eco-system of 3rd party distributors of Directgov content, tools and apps.



The technology

We believe in the importance of common web services and set of standards to underpin all government digital delivery, but we do not believe it is the role of the Directgov organisation to drive its creation. Instead, that should be led by the Government CIO as part of the G-Digital project, with Directgov as one stakeholder to the project.

Transformation milestones



Summary Recommendations

1. **Go digital only**

As identified by the Cabinet Office ERG, shifting to digital-only services has huge cost-saving potential. Directgov should be the default platform for information and transactional services, enabling all government transactions to be carried out via digital channels by 2015.

Achieving this will require a radical reallocation of effort and resources within Directgov. The organisation must focus its effort on creating high-quality user-friendly transactions and guidance. It can only do so by scaling back on non-core activities and being given the power to enforce user-centred quality standards across government.

2. **Expand the brand**

The strength of the Directgov brand offers the potential to realign all Government digital delivery under a single web domain name¹. Accelerate the move to shared web services in order to significantly reduce duplication of website and hosting costs. The Cabinet Office, not Directgov, should drive this agenda forward centrally.

3. **Build the service around peoples' needs**

Learn from what has been proven to work well elsewhere on the web. Focus resources on becoming relentlessly user-driven and transparent, openly measured to drive rapid and visible improvement. Implement a 'kill or cure' policy to reduce poorly performing content and remove the long tail of content no-one uses.

4. **Create a distribution network beyond government**

Mandate the creation of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to allow third parties to present content and transactions on behalf of the government. Shift from '*public services all in one place*' (closed & unfocused) to '*government services wherever you are*' (open & distributed).

5. **Be agile**

Radically reduce the size of the central organisation. Establish digital SWAT teams combining Directgov, Departmental and external expertise to immediately start work on flagship channel shift transactions. Bring in an external Turnaround Director to plan, run and manage the transition to the new delivery model.

¹ With the exception of the NHS brand, which has higher trust values for health related information