

Citizen Experience In A Post-COVID World

A Guide to Digital Service



GRANICUS



About the Author

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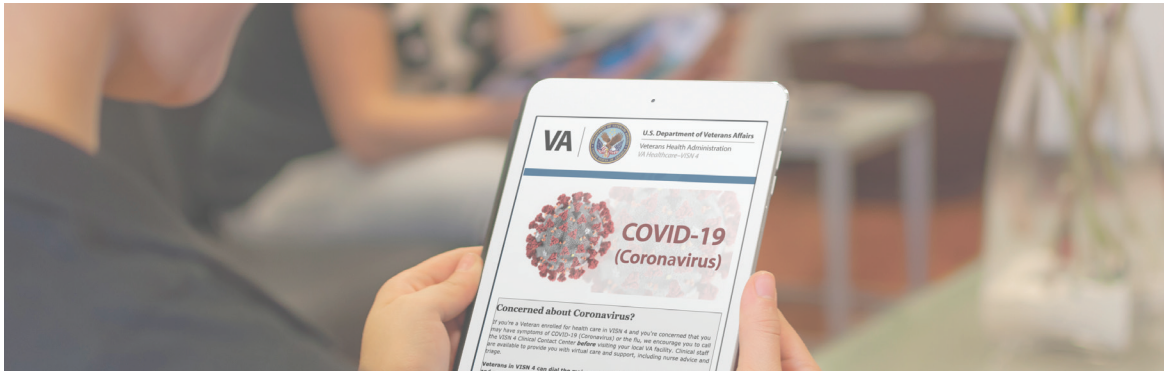
Knock Your Socks Off Customer Experiences.” Blake is a guest lecturer at Columbia University and adjunct faculty at the Rutgers executive education MBA program. Blake contributes to Forbes, the Harvard Business Review and Hemispheres Magazine. She is the host of The Modern Customer Podcast and The Be Your Own Boss Podcast.



Introduction

COVID-19 has been a game changer for every public sector and private sector organization in the world. It changed nearly everything about how citizens and customers interact with organizations of every shape and size. That's especially true in the public sector as the pandemic changed expectations for governments and the digital services and the experiences they offer.

Are you struggling to meet the new normal? See how Granicus can help on granicus.com.



Governments with stronger digital connections with residents were able to maintain operations, provide services, accept payments, run meetings, and even contribute to coronavirus-specific causes during this difficult time. They were less impacted by physical restrictions the pandemic caused. COVID-19 showed the importance of offering digital services to citizens and maintaining strong virtual relationships with them. COVID-19 showed cracks in most governments' citizen outreach and the potential for digital growth. For many organizations, the pandemic was an unexpected catalyst

towards digital transformation that put them on the path to a new model of service delivery. This new method of digital service not only improves civic participation and efficiency but also limits the impact of future crises like the coronavirus pandemic.

Whether you were swept into digital experiences or are just now getting started, this paper contains practical frameworks, tactics, and use cases for getting it right. Using these tips towards digital service can help provide convenient, personalized solutions for citizens in good times and bad.

Shift In Attitudes After Pandemic

To understand the need for digital service in government, especially in a post-COVID-19 world, Granicus surveyed more than 1,000 people from across the United States. According to the survey, 64% of citizens said COVID-19 has changed their expectations for government interactions. The most common response was that citizens want online government services, followed by respondents expecting processes to be simpler and less complicated.

Granicus also surveyed government employees and found that employees believe citizens want easy interactions. The most common answer from government employees was that citizens expect processes to be simpler and less complicated, followed by them expecting services to be delivered online.

Many government organizations were [working](#)

[toward digital transformation](#), or at least had it in their strategic pipelines for the coming years. But the global pandemic accelerated not only the need for digital transformation, but also how quickly government agencies are jumping in to make it happen.

The survey also revealed 62% of government employees believe COVID-19 expedited digital transformation, and 76% of respondents say agencies are offering more services online after COVID-19. But there's also room for improvement, as 82% of government employees believe their agencies need technological advancements.

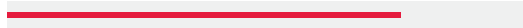
COVID-19 may have pushed government agencies towards digital change, but the vast majority still have areas to improve or need a more holistic, strategic approach.

Benefits Of Digital Transformation For Governments

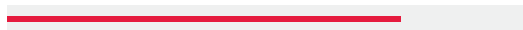
Our research found that governments say the top benefits of digital transformation are the time and resources saved and the better citizen experience created. The most common response for the biggest benefit of digital transformation was more options and flexibility for citizens (75% of respondents), followed by saved time and reduced cost (74%), increased participation (45%) and simpler internal processes (45%).

Governments say reduced paper use and automation are the largest contributors to budget savings. From the survey, the most common action governments are taking was eliminating paper processes (28% of respondents), followed by automating applications and permits (17%) and automating internal workflows (17%). Clearly, digital transformation impacts both external customers and internal processes and employees.

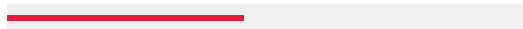
More Options & Flexibility **75%**



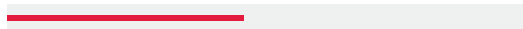
Save time & Reduced cost **74%**



Increased participation **45%**



Simpler internal processes **45%**



28%

Eliminating paper processes

17%

Automating applications & Permits

17%

Automating internal workflows



Bridging The Gap Starts with Mindset

Governments need to switch their mindsets to rally around citizens.

Customer service departments in government today face an uphill battle. For too long, governments and citizens alike have believed that government processes are full of red tape and don't have to be enjoyable or convenient. That perception fueled what citizens and government employees expected from their interactions with each other.

Citizens didn't expect a great experience, and government workers didn't have the tools and often faced roadblocks to provide great service.

However, in the post-COVID-19 world, governments need to switch their mindsets to rally around citizens as humans, customers and owners. Governments want to help their citizens but often need the systems and processes to support their desire to help and put citizens at the center of every engagement review. Forward-thinking governments integrate user-centric design best practices to frame experiences around citizens instead of thinking of them as an afterthought. Governments also need to understand citizens and create personalized solutions at scale to meet their needs. The goal of governments should be to make customers' lives easier. Today most



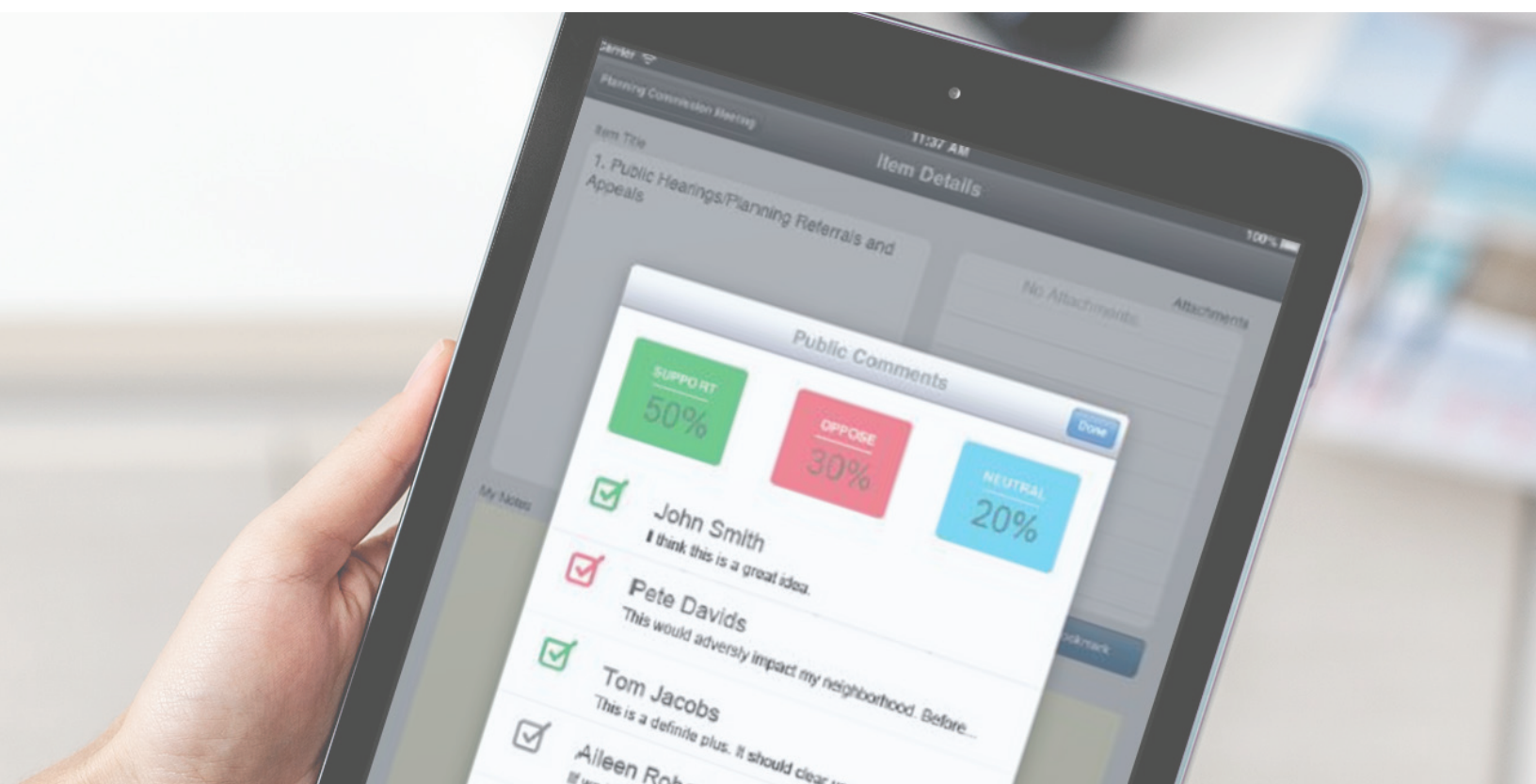
governmental organizations make life easier on their own organization rather than think about the customer first. These principles are common practice in the consumer world.

Modern customers have become accustomed to receiving personalized experiences every day, except for when they interact with the government.

Changing that approach comes from creating a new mindset inside government agencies.

Three Levels of Customer Experience

Many organizations jump into digital transformation without thinking through all aspects of their interactions with customers. To build an effective and scalable experience, organizations must focus on three main levels.



1

Psychological: Develop Citizen Understanding And Empathy

To build a great experience, governments need to start with an understanding of their citizens and what they need. This is the first step in experience design, and it is often overlooked. A strong foundation and lasting relationships come from practicing thoughtfulness and empathy. Develop a customer-centric culture and mindset by focusing on the employee experience and ensuring every employee — no matter their seniority or responsibilities — understands their impact on citizen experience.

Government agencies start

to understand citizens by communicating with them and listening to their responses, which often takes the form of interviewing citizens, regularly running surveys, and then paying attention to the results. Governments can't assume that they truly know their citizens just because they know where they live and work. In most cases, citizens are eager to talk to their government and build an emotional foundation when given the chance. Strong experiences are built from stepping back and looking at processes through a citizen's point of view.

2

Technical: Build A Unified Approach To Data And Technology

The technical level of customer experience is what most governments think of when they consider digital transformation. However, the technical level is best achieved when done on the psychological foundation that guides decisions of how and when to use technology. Digital transformation uses technology to solve traditional problems. Instead of relying on the old way of doing things, governments that undergo digital transformations bring in new solutions. They tear

down internal silos to create a unified approach to data and technology with access to a single data source for everyone.

This is done through cross-department collaboration with technology and data, which creates a consistent omnichannel experience no matter how citizens contact the government. A citizen who uses a chatbot to get answers should have just as good of an experience as someone who calls on the phone or gets information from a website.



3

Experiential: Create Customized Experiences at Scale

With a strong understanding of who the citizens are and what they are looking for, governments can create customized and unique experiences. Data and analytics are key to the experiential level; the most successful governments use data to create personalized experiences and leverage analytics to measure success.

Experiential customer service

is where governments put their knowledge of citizens into action by using journey mapping to understand where citizens are in the experience process and where there are roadblocks and pain points that need to be resolved.

Governments can also use metrics and heatmapping to uncover problems with user experience on their websites and apps.

Delivering Digital Experiences For Citizens and Governments

In a post-COVID-19 world, citizens are anxious about how they interact with others. They want to get back to some semblance of a normal life, but they are also cautious about the potential dangers that come from interacting in person. To maintain health and safety for citizens and employees, as well as provide a convenient

and seamless experience, governments need to create strong digital experiences. It is critical to consider both the overall citizen-facing digital experience as well as digitize citizen services and engagement experiences that previously could only be accessed in person.





Citizen-Oriented Website Design

The basis of a strong digital experience is a high-quality website, which is usually the first place people go to get information. A service-centric website is designed with citizens in mind and has an intuitive layout and user experience that makes it easy to find the right information. With a strong psychological foundation, governments can understand what citizens need and provide a website that meets those needs. This type of website also makes it easy for cross-functional teams to update, ensuring that information is consistent and accurate across all channels.

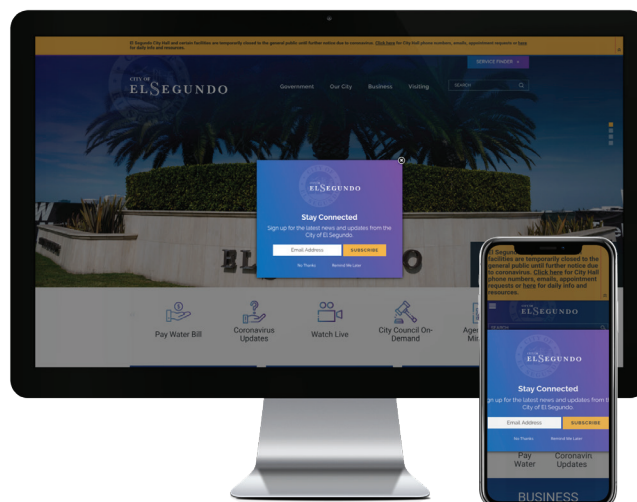
Example:

City of El Segundo, California

The city of El Segundo, California used multi-department collaboration to revise its website to become more service-centric. Adding a simple “Service Finder” search for common requests made it easy for citizens to find things that would commonly bring them to the site. The purpose in the website was to put citizens first and put the government in citizens’ shoes to create an intuitive and useful website.

“The goals for the new website were simple. We wanted to ensure the website is user-friendly, content is easy to find, and information is current at all times.”

– Barbara Voss, El Segundo
Deputy City Manager





Provide Intuitive Digital Self-Services That Scale

Even before the global pandemic, a growing number of modern customers [preferred self-service options](#) that allow them to get answers and solve problems on their own schedules. Self-service options are best for simple transactions or questions and should be intuitive and personalized. Automate back-office operations and simplify inbound request management to allow the systems to scale.

Example:

Oklahoma Department Of Public Safety

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many government agencies shut their doors and stopped offering services. One example of an organization that rose to the occasion was Oklahoma Department Of Public Safety (DPS). Instead of completely halting all transactions, the Oklahoma DPS created an online portal for self-service driver's license renewals. Citizens simply log in to the govService portal, fill out a form, pay by credit card and receive their new driver's license or ID card by mail for a transaction that is not only contactless, but smooth and convenient. Within the first week, DPS processed



60,000 Requests

per month estimated to be replaced by the self-service digital options.

1,200 requests. The self-service digital options will replace an estimated 60,000 requests per month, which not only creates a safer and more convenient experience for citizens, but also frees up DPS employees to focus on other issues.



Building Strong Connections Via Digital Communications

A strong digital experience comes from building connections before citizens need to contact the government. With a strong relationship, citizens know they can trust the organization and are more likely to have an enjoyable experience. Communicating regularly with citizens using digital channels sets the stage for a strong digital experience. Increase engagement and build subscribers to your newsletter or social media channels to allow for continued communication and relationships. Citizens who have strong relationships with the government are more likely to feel empowered and be driven to action.

Example:

Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides health resources for more than 1 million veterans through its online MyHealtheVet portal. The VA created an email newsletter to stay in better contact with veterans and get them more involved in their healthcare, but the initial push for the newsletter only yielded 30,000 subscribers — a drop in the bucket compared to the large number accessing the website each month. The VA partnered with Granicus to create a list of more than 2 million veterans who were accessing the website but not subscribed to the newsletter. Each of those veterans received an email explaining the benefits of signing up for the newsletter and then got a follow-up email 10 days later. As a result of the



500,000+

additional subscribers to the VA Newsletter through personalized outreach.

personalized outreach, more than 500,000 additional veterans subscribed to the VA newsletter. By building solid relationships with veterans and delivering newsletter content they actually want to read, the click-through and engagement rates also skyrocketed. The newsletter provides valuable content targeted at veterans, which enhances their overall online experience and their relationship with the VA.



Empower Virtual Civic Participation

Many citizens want to participate in their governments or communities but are discouraged by the red tape and time it takes to get involved. Digital channels open doors for virtual civic participation, which can bring in a new wave of citizens who are eager to impact their communities. Strong technology services empower the community with digital access to the tools and resources they need to get engaged.

Example:

City of Oakland, California

Just over a decade ago, any citizen who wanted to get involved with the City of Oakland likely couldn't due to the internal disorganization. Government and council meetings didn't have published agendas or minutes, citizens couldn't give feedback, and it was difficult to apply to be on the city's boards and commissions. By using digital solutions, the City of Oakland was able to control the chaos internally and also provide ways for citizens to engage with the local government. The city now streams its city council meetings to the public, which also helps increase transparency. The application process for citizens to join boards and commissions is centralized to a single website,



*Citizens are more
engaged than ever
before.*

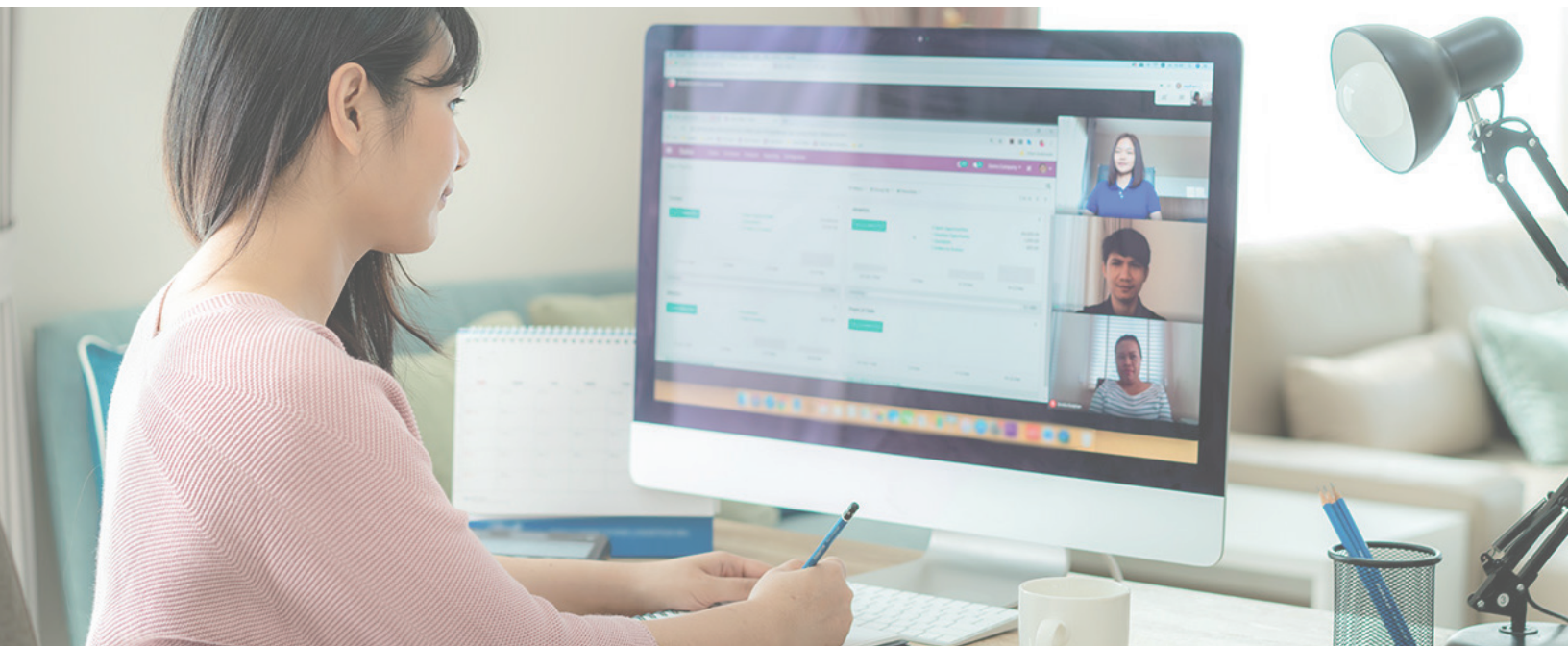
and citizens can get regular updates about city news and legislature through a robust newsletter. As a result of these virtual efforts, citizens are more engaged than ever before. They have opportunities to participate and can easily see what the government is doing and get involved.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has shown more than ever the value of seamless government digital experiences for citizens. If we do it right, we can not only improve civic participation but limit the effects of crises in the future. A strong digital experience also comes with critical benefits, including efficiency and cost savings at scale.

The old way of citizens accessing the government to get involved or perform simple tasks was to gather all of the

paper forms, wait in line, submit the mountain of paperwork, likely get it wrong and have to start over, finally get it right, only to find out later if your application for government services was accepted or not. With the new digital approach, citizens click a link, submit their information digitally, learn in real time if they need more validation, and quickly learn if their application was accepted or not. The old way took days or even weeks. The new way takes minutes.



It's no wonder citizens avoided getting involved in the government and often dreaded performing even the most basic requests with the government. A digital approach to citizen experience helps both citizens and government agencies for smoother and more seamless interactions on all sides. With less red tape, things can move forward more smoothly for a better use of time and resources. This has never been more important than in our post-COVID-19 world, where people value their time and interactions more carefully than ever before. The pandemic has acted as a catalyst for digital transformation and could dramatically change how governments and citizens interact.

There are simple solutions to drive modernization, including removing silos for cross-department collaboration, making service and participation easy and building strong, enduring connections. Strong digital service is valuable in today's world and long into the future. There is no reason public sector organizations cannot put a stake in the ground on customer experience as many private sector companies already have. Making your organization customer-focused over being internally focused can change your organization for the better. It's good for citizens, the community, and the health of your organization.

Are you ready to expedite your digital transformation and meet current demand? See how the Granicus platform can quickly deliver new digital services and modern communications to your residents.

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