

Chapter 24

TT Connect: The Gateway to Enhanced Service Delivery

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ABSTRACT

The Trinidad and Tobago (TT) Pilot Portal site, also known as TT Connect provides a gateway to access the services of the 22 TT government ministries. This approach signifies a fundamental change in philosophy from a ministry-centered focus that was vertical, linear, and insular to a step to an e-governance paradigm. Using the portal design to enhance service delivery of the ministries to citizens, it is expected that in the future, the site will lead to an increase in civic engagement, transparency, and a new form of participatory governance.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter has multiple objectives that relate to e-governance and civic engagement. It focuses on the rationale for using the portal design as a strategy to engage citizens in e-government and how it enhances e-governance. By using the portal design, TT's government is attempting to shift to a new paradigm in its service delivery, improving public outreach and citizens' responsiveness. This approach shifts the government's orientation from a ministry-centered focus, to having a multi-dimensional and holistic approach. In so doing, it will discuss digital divide issues; review the government's macro policy (*Vision 2020* and

Fastforward) and discuss the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) strategy, that is being employed so that TT government can reach developed nation status by 2020.

BACKGROUND

Digital Divide Issues

The term *digital divide* relates to gaps that exist between countries (and people) that are technologically advanced and those that are technologically less advanced. The concept became popular in the late 1990s and was a salient issue with public, political, and scholarly debates. It first originated in the United States from stakeholders in certain

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areas of research such as education, policy making, government and advocacy groups, (Aspray, 2004; Kuttan & Peters, 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, & Stansbury, 2003; Van Dijk, 2005; Warschauer, 2003) and later spread to Europe and the rest of the world. This term captured the essence of the dichotomy in the world of those who “have” and those that “do not have” technology (Aspray, 2004). The important point to consider is that the digital divide, is a complex issue that brings new questions for policy makers that must decide how society is able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technology.

Other Divide/Website Usability Issues

Additionally, the study alludes to another aspect of the divide which is website usability issues that can arise for potential users when using a government portal. The concept of the other divide is defined accurately by Stowers (2002):

The gap between those who not only know how to contact government, but understand enough about it to be able to sift and sort their way through a perhaps poorly designed government website – and those who not only have less access to computers and the Internet but also understand less about the agencies whose websites they are visiting. The result is another digital divide (Stowers, 2002).

The other divide demonstrates “the lack of experience of many citizens in using computers or the Internet” (Stowers, 2002, p. 6). In relation to the digital divide (DD), the other divide may be regarded as a sub-issue with the broad phenomenon.

Consequently, governments, policymakers, web designers, and IT specialists need to focus on their design, development and implementation of websites that are user-friendly, house critical information and provides services that are easily

accessed and understood by a wide cross-section of people.

It forces implementers of ICT to consider their end users’ needs and the kinds of problems they may face when visiting a government website (Stowers, 2002). Some authors describe usability as, “the more a site helps people find the information they are looking for, the more usable it is” (Spool et al., 1999). Further, it involves design goals that encompass the following:

- *Correct Functionality*: An assurance that the system eliminates software that complicates usability and enables users to correctly execute functions they need (Brinck et al., 2002; Pearrow, 2000).
- *Effective Usage*: Minimization of delays; users are able to execute tasks speedily.
- *Easy Learning*: New users can easily understand and learn how to complete tasks with fewer steps as possible.
- *Easy Recall*: The extent to which users’ retention abilities are tested; the fewer memory aids required make a site easy to recall.
- *Error Control*: The management of error prevention, detection, and tolerance. Once identified, it should be easily corrected.
- *Perceptual Aesthetics*: This relates to users’ subjective sense of the “look and feel” of a website. The site’s “look and feel” may influence users’ perceptions of usability (Brinck, et al., 2002).
- *User Limitations*: Consideration of types of limitations that may occur for users – bandwidth constraints, type of browser, cutting edge web browsing gadgets (e.g. web TV, hardware, plug-ins), and Internet accessibility for users to access a website (Pearrow, 2000).
- *People Preferences*: Knowledge of the users you serve – IT savvy, choice of features on the Web, IT phobias or fears, and computer literacy (Pearrow, 2000).

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