

# **CANADA'S REPORT ON PORTALS**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Canada is taking a staged approach to achieving what it calls *Government On-Line* (GOL), its plan to put the Federal Government's information and services on-line by 2004. In order to fulfil this commitment, announced in October 1999, the Federal Government set out, in its initial phases, to:

- ❑ strengthen its Internet presence and,
- ❑ improve the organization and presentation of its on-line information in a manner that is client-centred and intuitive to the user.

Both of these goals were achieved by January 2001, and culminated in the official launch of the redesigned Canada Internet portal, [www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca), on February 2, 2001.

The longer-term vision for GOL is to make Canada a world leader in electronic connectivity and to provide Canadians with on-line access to Government of Canada information, programs and services by 2004, and to connect with Non-Canadians where it serves Canadian interests (e.g. investment, international trade, immigration, tourism, etc.). This goal is rooted in ongoing public opinion polling indicating that an increasing number of Canadians want to access government information and services on-line. Indeed, recent studies indicate that:

- ❑ 77% of Canadians think the Internet will improve how they receive services from the Government of Canada (Source: Canada Information Office - Spring 2001)
- ❑ Putting Government of Canada programs, services and information on-line:
  - Is a good use of tax dollars - 73%
  - Makes the Government more innovative - 78%
  - Improves how Canadians interact with Government - 77%(Source: Canada Information Office - Winter 2001)
- ❑ In the future, 43% of Canadians expect to have more contact with the Government of Canada using the Internet. (Source - Canada Information Office - Spring 2001)

In its commitment to "smart" government, Government On-Line has four (4) overarching goals:

1. To strengthen its relationships with citizens by:
  - ❑ improving services (access, quality, responsiveness)
  - ❑ facilitating participation in policy making
  - ❑ enhancing accountability and transparency
2. To support Canadian businesses in the adoption of electronic commerce by:
  - ❑ reducing the cost and burden of transacting with government
  - ❑ encouraging innovation

- ❑ providing an enabling policy environment
- 3. To renew the public service by:
  - ❑ updating internal processes
  - ❑ renewing the work force
- 4. To augment Canada's international image by:
  - ❑ strengthening Canada's links with potential investors
  - ❑ strengthening links with immigrants and students from outside Canada
  - ❑ reaching relevant and interested audiences abroad

The longer-term vision for portals and clusters includes greater alignment of services across jurisdictions, including various levels of government in Canada, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The intent is to provide the client with seamless, one-stop, "no wrong door" access to the services they require. This requires ensuring built-in flexibility, as well as back-office transformation, into GOL processes and frameworks so that the evolution of GOL portals continues to meet client demands.

Additionally, GOL is a service initiative designed to improve and increase services as well as complement existing methods of service delivery. As such, GOL supports service delivery transformation across channels and promotes cross-channel harmonization of service delivery. In this context,

*the Government of Canada defines a portal as a channel or point of access, recognizing that users may choose to use different portals or access channels at different times, i.e. an electronic portal (e.g. Internet), telephony portal (e.g. call centres), or an in-person service location, (e.g. Service Canada access centres, Canada Business Service Centres, Embassies of Canada, etc.).*

The Government of Canada's commitment to this initiative is reinforced by the lead role played by the President of the Treasury Board and the championship of the portal, gateways, and clusters by Deputy Ministers. At the operational level, dedicated project offices within departments and central coordination through Treasury Board Secretariat, ensure the successful roll-out of portal visions and strategies.

## **2. DRIVERS OF CHANGE**

### **2.1 USER ORIENTATION**

The Government of Canada undertakes extensive public opinion polling to ensure that the Government On-line initiative continues to meet client expectations and reflect client priorities and needs.

A collaborative approach amongst central agencies, portals and clusters is promoted when undertaking all traditional and on-line qualitative and quantitative research. Several types of public opinion polling are conducted, including:

- ❑ Focus testing and interviews
- ❑ Surveys and questionnaires
- ❑ On-line research panels/surveys
- ❑ Usability Testing

Other sources for information about client needs and priorities stem from queries received by Help Desks, Electronic Mail, Telephone, the "Contact Us" button, and Metrics (measurements of traffic patterns and volume).

A number of lessons learned have been drawn from public opinion polling results. In particular:

- ❑ **Share Results:** in order to avoid duplication when polling, identify polling gaps, identify priorities, and coordinate polling efforts and language to ensure consistency;
- ❑ **Substantiate Changes:** by basing any modifications of portals upon polling results and on-line client feedback, thereby ensuring that changes meet client needs;
- ❑ **Validate Goals:** to identify discrepancies between client needs and priorities and departmental or political agendas.

## **2.2 OTHER INCENTIVES**

There are a number of factors that have enabled the development of GOL. This includes policies, legislation, funding, partnerships and efforts to enhance user access.

- ❑ **International:** The international public sector has greatly influenced Canada's interest and efforts vis-à-vis clustering. The trend toward clustering has been emerging and growing in various sectors and has been motivated by a shift toward client-centred service delivery. As a backdrop to these international efforts, the impact of the World Wide Web can be seen; that is, the abundance of information on the Web gave rise to initial efforts to develop portals/clusters and has transformed our thinking about the organization of content.
- ❑ **Policy:** In May, 2000 Treasury Board approved the Service Improvement Initiative (SII) and a policy framework for a results-based approach to continuous service improvement. The intent is to increase citizen satisfaction with government delivery of services by 10% over the next five (5) years. This will be accomplished by adopting a systematic approach to service improvement, setting targets and annually measuring performance against targets. The SII provides a broader framework within which to galvanize efforts to modernize service delivery via GOL.
- ❑ **Legislation:** Bill C-6 is legislation that has facilitated the development of GOL by addressing privacy issues and the use of digital signatures.

- ❑ **Funding:** The February 2000 Federal Budget allocated \$104 million (US) over two years to design and launch the GOL initiative. An additional \$78 million (US) in incremental funding has been allocated for the 2001-2002 fiscal year, bringing the total amount of targeted funding to \$182 million (US). Funding has been critical to engage departmental partners, develop prototypes, undertake public opinion polling, develop common infrastructure and launch portals and clusters. However, the Government of Canada recognizes that further incremental funding will be required to maintain new on-line services that have been established and to meet the goal of getting government services on-line by 2004.
- ❑ **Partnerships:** Stakeholders within the private sector and non-governmental organizations have been partners in stimulating GOL-related efforts. Given the GOL goal of greater harmonization across jurisdictions, communities of interest have taken a leadership role in moving forward an agenda that is Canada-wide, not simply government-wide. Ultimately, partners recognize that GOL will provide broader access to their client base, provide coordinated “bigger picture” information to clients, and ensure that clients receive more complete and targeted service. Growing partnerships within the Federal Government have also been key incentives for the successful development and implementation of GOL.
- ❑ **User Access:** The Government of Canada supports efforts to ensure that all users have electronic access to government information, programs and services regardless of income, disability or location. Toward this end, the Community Access Program (CAP) receives tri-level governmental funding. Thus far, 5000 points of access have been established in rural communities and 3000 points of access have been established in urban communities. Electronic points of access can be found in libraries and community centres. As well, the SchoolNet program ensures connectivity for all interested schools and public libraries across the country. In the context of these initiatives, GOL fulfils the broader objective of ensuring that users have access to required content in a manner that meets their needs.

### **3. PORTALS – FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES**

#### **3.1 STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT**

As the result of extensive public opinion research and focus testing in year 2000, a framework was developed to help evolve the Government of Canada's Internet presence. Focus-testing results assisted an inter-departmental working group to identify and define subjects and/or areas of interest that could be used to organize government information and make it easier to find. The overall goal is to rationalize and integrate information and services across departmental and jurisdictional boundaries ensuring seamless, one-stop, “no wrong door” access to information and services for users.

Canada's GOL initiative reflects a three-tiered, cross-channel approach, bringing together information and services across organizational boundaries into groupings that make sense to clients. The three tiers are:

- ❑ **Portals** are the primary multi-channel access points for government information, whether electronic, via telephone or at in-person service locations.
- ❑ **Electronic gateways** are the broad themes through which on-line users are streamed, i.e. Canadians, Canadian Business, Non-Canadians.
- ❑ **Electronic clusters** represent a wide range of federal information, bring together many federal departments, provide an opportunity for inter-jurisdictional arrangements and develop easier, more intuitive access to government information.

The Government of Canada asked a wide range of users about the intuitive, spontaneous expectations they had for how Government information and services should be organized. They said information and services should be organized primarily:

- ❑ By subject or cluster (e.g. Science and Technology);
- ❑ By audience group in some categories (e.g. Youth and Seniors);
- ❑ By life events in some categories (e.g. Lost Wallet).

As a result of this work, subject clusters, life event clusters and audience-specific clusters have been grouped into three (3) gateways: Canadians, Non-Canadians and Canadian Business. Each gateway has a Deputy Minister Champion, while each cluster has a Deputy Minister or Assistant Deputy Minister Champion, who is responsible for ensuring that the development and advancement of these areas are in line with Government of Canada objectives, in particular, the Government On-Line Initiative.

The result of this initial work is that an *Electronic Cluster Blueprint* has been developed and will be validated twice annually through focus-testing with clients to ensure consistent mapping with client needs.

GOL is intended to *complement, not compete* with, existing priorities, initiatives, mandates, and work processes. Efforts to date have been aimed at enhancing horizontal integration across Government of Canada organizations, while respecting the legislated responsibilities and hierarchical authorities of departments and agencies (horizontal and vertical integration initiatives are underway e.g. Lost Wallet).

This complementary effort is, nonetheless, having an impact on the government mindset and is promoting a re-evaluation of how government departments inter-relate. While segments of the front-end, or visible portions, of government electronic services have been streamlined for the user, greater consideration is now being given to the challenge of integrating information and services at the back-end, or "behind the scenes".

As well, while the Government of Canada upholds a policy of choice of access (that is, users have the choice to access government information and services via telephone, mail, fax, in-

person or on the Internet), there is growing indication that users may prefer on-line access over the longer-term. Recent research<sup>1</sup> indicates that almost 80% of Canadians eventually expect Internet penetration within households to be as common as the telephone. Thus, the 'market' for GOL has the potential to grow significantly and become the channel of choice for users.

### **3.2 APPLYING METADATA CRITERIA**

Metadata provides a 'common denominator' across the Government of Canada portal, gateways and cluster sites to aid clients find the information and services they are looking for. Metadata is valuable for both the discovery and organization of resources, providing proper information management principles are applied. Metadata provides a tool to cluster managers to help them decide on the suitability of content for their particular cluster site. Metadata also provides a tool to help clients search and select content from the e-cluster environment.

The Government of Canada is adopting the Dublin Core as specified at <http://www.dublincore.org/> as the core metadata standard for resource discovery. A metadata standard ensures that, across domains and clusters and business functions, the effort that goes into assigning metadata is co-ordinated, cost effective and client-service focused. A metadata standard as the core which can be extended or mapped to for specific subject domains or purposes preserves high level consistency and interoperability. The Government of Canada accepts the semantics and syntax established by the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative.

The elements Title, Creator, Language, Date and Subject are **mandatory**. Content rules for these elements are detailed in the Treasury Board Secretariat Common Look and Feel Policy. Through a Portal Content Administration Pilot Project, the Government of Canada is identifying additional elements from the Dublin Core and administrative elements beyond the Dublin Core required for portals. Element refinements, content rules, encoding schemes and values for controlled elements are being identified. Results of this exercise will be shared with the Dublin Core Government Working Group and the Managing Information Resources for eGovernment project of the European Commission IDA initiative.

### **3.3 FUTURE CHALLENGES**

In its April 2001 report, *Rhetoric vs. Reality – Closing the Gap*, international consulting firm Accenture cited Canada for its citizen-centred approach to e-government, and ranked it NO.1 in the 22-nation study of e-government readiness, in large part due to its re-organized and re-designed Internet portal.

Behind the scenes, however, the complexities of a cross-government undertaking of this magnitude are daunting. A host of challenges arise in moving government on-line, but several relate specifically to the task of cutting across traditional organizational boundaries to create a truly citizen-centred interface. These include:

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<sup>1</sup> Ekos Research Associates Inc. *Re-Thinking the Information Highway: Update on Key Tracking Indicators*. Summer 2001, p. 11.

- ❑ **Sustainability Models:** To ensure the long-term viability of portals, gateways and clusters, sound sustainability/funding models must be developed. A systematic funding process must be established to maintain the stable development of the portals, gateways and clusters. This is an issue area where an international exchange or work project might be very beneficial.
- ❑ **Governance Structures:** Establish sound horizontal governance structures with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities that respect the vertical authorities of the current departmental structures.
- ❑ **Common Infrastructure:** Shared government networks, applications that can be re-configured for use in other departments, and the avoidance of replication are essential both for seamless presentation and cost-effectiveness.
- ❑ **Business Transformation** of government: Some have argued that the vertically integrated structures that characterize public sector organizations are unsuited to the digital age. The process of co-ordinating and integrating information and services for citizens will drive the integration of internal processes to improve our organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The requirement to work horizontally will ultimately transform internal work processes.
- ❑ **Managing Content/Information:** It is necessary to ensure that content is current, accurate, understandable, trustworthy, and available in a timely manner. The Government of Canada is currently undertaking a pilot study to determine whether or not an automated, centralized administrative system and metadata repository can be developed to manage all additions, deletions, modifications and links of information across gateways and clusters.
- ❑ **Inter-jurisdictional Relationships :** The challenge is to develop a collaborative approach with other levels of government to provide one-stop seamless access to all government services. As well, to develop appropriate partnership models with third party organizations while respecting the principles of universal access and client privacy, and ensuring fair and balanced visibility of and authority over federal government information, programs and services.
- ❑ **Human Resources:** To be focused on the task of integration, public service employees require a commitment from management that they will have the tools and support to make the transition to an integrated, on-line workplace. As well, challenges around human resources include finding and retaining skilled staff.
- ❑ **Privacy:** The challenge is to ensure that on-line transactions respect and maintain privacy of information and function in accord with the Privacy Act. As well, to generate public confidence that the Government is implementing privacy standards and will maintain client privacy.
- ❑ **Security:** To ensure that on-line services, transactions and communication between the Government of Canada and citizens, as well as the international public, are secure. To



ensure that private information is protected. This is critical to maintaining the trust relationship between the public it serves.

- ❑ **Language:** It is necessary to ensure that all on-line government information, programs and service are provided in Canada's official languages – English and French. The Government of Canada is also exploring the development of multi-language access for its International or Non-Canadians Gateway. This introduces a number of complexities including the need for quality assurance in the translation of material.

### **3.4 PORTAL SAMPLES**

**Canada Site** (<http://www.canada.gc.ca>) The Canada Site is the official Government of Canada Internet Portal site that is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Recently redesigned, it reflects a citizen-focused approach that includes three new audience-based, information and services gateways: Canadians, Canadian Business, and Non-Canadians. It also provides access to more than 450 federal web sites and features e-mail responses within one business day.

**The Canadians Gateway** (<http://www.canadians-canadiens.gc.ca>) provides easy access to current information, services and resources that are relevant to Canadians in their everyday life. A wide variety of information is conveniently grouped into subject clusters. The Canadians gateway also provides clusters that group information and services around the needs of key communities of interest, such as:

- ❑ The Aboriginal Canada Portal, which offers access to information and services as well as listings of Aboriginal associations, businesses, organizations, bands and peoples.
- ❑ The Seniors Canada Portal, which provides older adults (aged 55 and over), their families and caregivers with access to information and services tailored to their needs, including links to provincial government programs for seniors.
- ❑ The Youth Portal, which provides young people with information about health issues affecting them, planning careers, education and finding jobs.

**The Business Gateway** (<http://www.businessgateway.gc.ca>) provides access to information that businesses need to make important decisions over the entire lifecycle of an enterprise. The four most popular clusters are currently taxation, human resources, business start-up and financing. It includes links to the top ten most requested services for businesses, over fifty electronic forms grouped in one place, and links to provincial and territorial sites.

**The International or Non-Canadians Gateway** (<http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca>) offers residents in other countries a wealth of information regarding doing business with Canada, travelling, living, working or studying in Canada, as well as about Canadian culture and Canada's international relations. It has grouped services and information into four subjects: Going to Canada, Doing Business with Canada, Canada and the World, and Arts and Culture. With approximately 20% of visits to federal web sites coming from outside the country, this gateway represents an important means to present Canada as an attractive country in which to live, visit, and do business.