Accelerate digital services for citizens

Here’s how agencies can achieve true agility and clear the hurdles to transformation
This is an opportune time to reimagine the citizen experience

For government leaders who were already making progress on digital transformation, the sudden need to allow millions of staff to work from home during the pandemic has thrown digitisation plans into top gear.

Agencies had no choice but to respond fast to change. There are excellent examples of rapidly deployed applications and services that improve citizen access to COVID information, help organise medical and community responses, and of course, facilitate home working for government employees.

Forward-thinking agencies know that this is a valuable moment. Leaders at every level recognise the value of digital transformation for the government. They see the wisdom of improving agency reflexes now, for a fast and effective response to the next crisis. The next emergency might be related to climate, health, or something else. That’s the problem with emergencies. You don’t know what they look like until they’re at your door.

How can agencies act right now to improve how they respond to change, across their entire organisation? To build on past digitisation efforts and take their agility to the next level?
The building blocks of digital transformation for citizens are already in place

- **UK**: invested in 18 innovative digital solutions that support vulnerable people who need to stay at home or need other help in the community.

- **America**: The City of Boston created data analytic dashboards and a texting service in six languages, part of its digital toolset to let citizens track COVID-19 cases across Massachusetts.

- **Australia**: its highly active Digital Transformation Agency says 85% of digital roadmap projects have been completed, including National Drought Map to target aid to areas most at risk.

- **Croatia**: a virtual doctor powered by artificial intelligence advised people how to diagnose and manage suspected COVID-19 infection.

- **France**: More than 550 local authorities and ministries have joined demarches-simplifiees.fr, a platform that lets administrators replace paper forms that citizens need to complete with a digital version.

- **Germany**: has lagged but is gathering momentum with its Online Access Act, which requires all German public services to be accessible by digital channels by 2022.

- **Nordics**: Swedish taxpayers now receive a pre-filled tax return prepared from income statements from employers and banks, reducing the time they must devote to filing.

- **Spain**: has an AI-powered chatbot that provides answers to more than 200 questions, ranging from details on COVID-19 symptoms to the Ministry of Health updates and local emergency numbers.

- **Singapore**: the popular OneService app for reporting municipal issues was adapted to let residents photograph and report instances of unsafe social distancing during COVID-19.
Speed & scale – the agents of change

Any e-government initiative or app that answers a pressing citizen’s need is valuable. But agencies recognise that they don’t just need point solutions, they need to digitise entire business processes. The agile agency is one that’s digital by default, where:

• Outdated patterns of work are eliminated
• Intelligent, automated workflows let the agency react fast and at scale
• Productivity stays high even during profound disruption
• System security and data privacy are proactively protected

Leaping the hurdles to agency agility

Agencies might have a reputation as being hostile to technology. Still, the reality is more complex: inherited systems and paper-based processes are deeply embedded, and historically they have worked, although not optimally. But they aren’t sustainable in today’s highly dynamic environment.

What’s needed is a way to deliver simplicity: to break down dysfunctional processes, provide a unified foundation on which to build effective services, and deliver a consumer-like experience to all customers, both citizens and staff.
Injecting agility across the agency

Even the simplest life event requires citizens to interact with multiple agencies. Today, that often means repeating information, accessing multiple systems, and enduring slow, paper-based processes prone to error. Some transformation projects have removed the paper, but not the rigid information structures. A digitised silo is still a silo. Citizens experience government across agencies, and transformation requires the same enterprise-wide view.

The agile agency delivers simplicity. There’s a customer-facing “front office” where the government is easy to do business with. An employee-facing “middle office” features streamlined, efficient workflows. And a powerful, underlying “back office” includes scalable, modern IT infrastructure that supports automation and self-service, with world-class cybersecurity protection for personal data, systems integrity, and business continuity.

That’s an agency that’s ready for whatever lies over the horizon, be it a lockdown, a flood of citizen queries, the need to rapidly support urgent, overnight policy changes -- or all three.
Quick digital services with a human touch

The COVID-19 crisis has meant significant increases in citizen queries. Home-based staff struggles to respond from the isolation of home offices, cut off from colleagues, and the collective knowledge of the workplace.

Simultaneously, commercial online services have had their moment in the sun, outshining online government experiences in terms of convenience, simplicity, and time to resolution for queries.

The problem with information silos is that citizen queries can get lost in a black hole, with even urgent questions going unresolved. That is unacceptable at any time, but especially during a crisis, when delays cause emotional and financial distress.

Underlying IT systems didn’t create historic silos, but they aren’t resolving those rigidities, either. To deliver digital services with a human touch, IT must unite disparate data sources, and let staff create workflows that quickly deliver the right information to the right person, speeding up resolution times.

A modernised underlying platform also makes it easier to roll out self-service options, allowing citizens and staff to solve their issues via tools like chatbots, and reducing overall caseload.
A secure, compliant digital workspace

Even before COVID 19, cyber-attacks were increasing relentlessly, with a survey of 3,000 security professionals across nine countries revealing a 17% jump in attacks between 2018 and 2019. And those figures are based on office-based work, rather than the emergency work-from-home arrangements of 2020.

For governments, more remote working means a much larger attack surface for intruders. That means a higher risk that citizens’ personally identifiable information (PII) could be exposed, and that agencies could breach data protection obligations.

Siloed information infrastructures make risk management even harder, frustrating the IT team’s mission to monitor risks, respond quickly, and resolve vulnerabilities as soon as possible.

The agile agency responds faster to security incidents and events because its tools let it proactively manage risk. IT can pinpoint high-impact vulnerabilities before incidents occur, and leverage automation to stay on top of vital but routine tasks.

And because the underlying infrastructure is a single, connected platform, IT has a commanding view right across the organisation to resolve vulnerabilities once, for all connected departments.
Making everyday employee tasks fast and frictionless

Until government staff began working remotely during COVID-19, they may not have realised how much they relied on tribal knowledge, and ad hoc, in-person chats with colleagues to achieve everyday tasks, from asking a payroll question to reporting an IT problem.

But “ad hoc” doesn’t scale. Neither do manual or outdated processes that force the employee to do all the running to get a simple answer. It is a situation that is all too similar to the roadblock’s citizens can experience when trying to complete a basic task with the government.

For employees and citizens, information and answers should be fast and easy to find, so they can get on with their day. Instead of multiple, manual paper forms, streamlined information flows can send the right information electronically to the right person, in the right place.

Automation allows these tasks to be completed without human intervention, whether it’s a staff member requesting a new piece of IT equipment, or a contract being routed seamlessly through a series of signatories for approval -- no paper, no delays. Just productivity.
Smooth-running operations that keep productivity moving

COVID-19 has put every government and its people under pressure to find and retain more staff, specifically IT personnel, to assist with urgent projects. It has never been more critical to digitally transform operations. Equally, there's never been a better time to make the changes in processes and IT infrastructure to deliver that transformation.

The agile agency is one that has eliminated siloed applications and databases locked within departments. It delivers simplicity and achieved visibility across all applications by using a single, secure, and scalable cloud platform for citizen-facing and employee-facing services.

It’s able to attract, onboard and retain the best people by offering seamless HR experiences and frictionless daily work processes that make it easy to be productive and deliver on the agency’s mission to make life better for citizens. The agile agency also drives down cost and is free to focus its IT talent on innovation, automation, and transformation, rather than propping up legacy systems that are no longer fit for purpose.
Readiness to respond to future crises demands transformative change, now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for digital transformation in government. An essential next step is to transition to a cloud platform that makes modernisation goals achievable and improves the agency’s security posture while also honing its reflexes.

A single service management and automation platform also support long-term remote working, capturing tribal knowledge, and building this into standard and repeatable processes. In an agile agency, the information architecture itself reflects the wisdom of its most experienced people.

The next emergency – and the current ongoing one – demands a fast, confident response. Whatever the size of an agency, it can achieve that responsiveness by beginning with a modern cloud platform that promotes optimised workflows, leverages automation and self-service, and allows dedicated staff to do their jobs productively, proudly as part of a high-performance team.
About ServiceNow

Globally, government agencies of varying sizes rely on ServiceNow to support their digital transformation. We help you speed delivery of key services—all with better efficiency and lower costs. With a single cloud platform, we pledge to improve your efficiency and engagement by:

- Boosting your IT security IQ
- Exceeding citizen expectations
- Enhancing staff productivity
- Mapping and managing key services

With one platform, we partner with agencies to improve the delivery of mission-critical services to citizens, no matter the circumstance.

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