A Metrics-Driven Approach to Customer Experience

MARKET TRENDS REPORT

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New Relic.

Introduction

Tax season can be a tense time for the millions of individuals and families navigating the filing process, as well as the IRS employees tasked with ensuring things run smoothly. This was especially true during the 2018 filing season when the IRS suffered a tax processing system outage that lasted 11 hours.

"The timing and severity of the outage prompted the IRS to allow an additional day to file," according to a government watchdog report. Per requirements from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the IRS reviewed the system failure and documented incident response lessons learned to ensure and verify corrective actions.

Ultimately, efforts to improve how the public accesses and uses government services can't be based on assumptions or anecdotes. Development, operations and program teams across government must be able to measure the current state of digital services, gauge success and monitor application changes easily. The ultimate goal is to fix problems faster and serve citizens better.

These outcomes are at the heart of the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA), which calls for agencies to provide a user-friendly experience for its modern customers. With a metrics-driven approach, agencies can better pinpoint how best to improve their customer experience (CX), which is the sum of all interactions over time, via different channels, including digital, that agencies have with citizens.

When OMB required High Impact Service Providers (HISPs) in the federal sphere to establish CX action plans in 2018, measurement was the top focus area that over a third of the agencies concentrated on.

Agencies realized that establishing good metrics was the first step in providing better CX. When the whole agency can align on common goals around customer experience, a transformation that provides better CX in time- and cost-efficient ways can take place.

With unique public sector challenges, such as legislative mandates, budget constraints and public trust to consider, the government approach to customer experience is a little different from the private sector's. Considering these factors, GovLoop partnered with New Relic, a software analytics company, to produce this report. New Relic specializes in providing real-time performance insights for monitoring customer experience.

In the following pages, we explore the best solutions for agencies to improve their CX — starting with telemetry data, which is collected directly from an agency's systems. We also discuss how agencies can enhance CX and service delivery with consistent indicators that are visible to all employees and actionable in real time.

BY THE NUMBERS
CX in Government Today

9x

Satisfied customers are nine times more likely to trust the agency providing a service.

Source: 2018 McKinsey Report

9x

Satisfied customers are nine times more likely to agree an agency is delivering on its mission.

Source: 2018 McKinsey Report

2x

Dissatisfied customers are twice as likely to publicly express dissatisfaction.

Source: 2018 McKinsey Report

31%

of the federal government's HISPs predominantly focused on measurement when establishing a CX action plan.

Source: Performance.gov

OMB requires HISPs to assess 5 maturity areas: measurement, governance, organization and culture, customer research and service design.

Source: Performance.gov

Reliability, simplicity and transparency are the top three drivers of customer experience in the U.S.

Source: 2018 McKinsey Report

THE CHALLENGE
Lack of Clear, Consistent and Measurable Metrics

Agencies are under increasing internal and external pressures to provide secure services to users when and how they need them. Requirements set by the 21st Century IDEA define a roadmap for federal website modernization and digitization of government forms, and encourage acceleration of electronic signatures. With electronic signatures, users can quickly — and digitally — sign forms with a click, tap or swipe.

But the journey to this modern state will require agencies to address a lack of clear, consistent and measurable metrics to determine the quality of their digital services. Inconsistent key performance indicators (KPIs) are the first obstacle agencies must overcome to gauge and improve their CX. Irregularity makes it difficult for stakeholders across an organization to understand how an application is performing, how it's being used and how to provide better experiences.

"There is uneven visibility into the process and technology elements that underpin the KPIs and thereby the means to improve CX," said Andy Wetzel, Senior Director of Digital Strategy at New Relic.

When these linkages are not visible, agencies can spend valuable time and money using slow, imprecise polls and surveys. Surveys are incapable of providing the kind of real-time visibility into systems to see how the customer is actually using the service. They do not connect user experience to service and system performance, nor do they provide the deterministic data required to drive improvements.

The lack of telemetry data and visibility in turn discourages collaboration across teams and agencies, which need to work together to establish and achieve consistent CX goals.

Specific to government, changes driven by legislation such as the 21st Century IDEA require agencies to be responsive to customer needs and scale their applications securely and swiftly.

"In this digital era, agencies are increasingly moving more of their applications to citizen-facing web programs," said Bob Withers, Senior Director for Public Sector at New Relic. "They're driven a lot by legislation that can happen overnight, where it changes the whole design of the system."

To best prepare for and comply with legislation, the ability to scale accordingly, observe what is happening in applications and then provide insight to stakeholders is paramount.

THE SOLUTION
Real-Time Visibility and Actionable Data

Agencies can achieve breakthroughs in customer satisfaction by tracking three key application functions: availability, functionality and speed of their services. Tracking consistent KPIs enables agencies to effectively measure performance and ultimately deliver the best customer experience possible.

"Consistency in and of itself will go a long way to allowing you to improve CX," Wetzel said.

By measuring KPIs, you have a way to benchmark one agency or agency site against others, moving from amorphous assessments like "good enough" or "getting there" to more concrete comparisons and goals.

The first step is tracking service availability, because you can't provide great customer experience if your site is down. Once you've established service availability, tracking application or web functionality is the next step. You can do this by measuring error rates and validating key user actions to ensure that any customer-impacting issues — including front-end, back-end and infrastructure matters — are indicated and addressed.

Lastly, ensuring speed is what will guarantee a modern digital experience, and agencies can do so by assessing front-end load times to eliminate and alleviate undesirable bottlenecks in services for their users.

"It's so transformative what happens once you just start measuring a few KPIs," Wetzel said. "The measurement becomes both your goal and the vehicle by which you can assess any corrective or optimization actions."

BEST PRACTICES
How to Kick-Start Better Metrics at Your Agency

1. Establish customer-focused KPIs that align with agency goals

Make them consistent across the agency first. This is most effective from a leadership perspective, so the whole agency can be on the same page about how to improve CX.

2. Assess the quality of your service through the customer's eyes

To put yourself in the customer's shoes, consider the following questions: Is your service **available** for customers to use? Is it **error-free**, so customers make transactions without malfunction? Is it **scalable** for changing needs and demands? Is it **fast enough** for optimal customer satisfaction? These four questions can help you decide on specific KPIs for your agency's needs.

3. Break down the established KPIs in to action items

Using your baseline indicators, break down your KPIs into action items that are specific to each team, whether it is the developer, operator, application owner or executive. From there, teams can start making actionable decisions.

4. Citizen-source your data

It's not exactly what it sounds like — that is, enlisting volunteers to sit at computers and look at your service performance and customer feedback. Instead, a software platform can log how a user interacts with a system — at what time, how many times, what they used and so on — so that you can get the most direct information about how your service is actually performing. Less manual work, better data.

5. Make data visible to internal stakeholders

You can't make the best, data-driven decisions without seeing the data first. Utilize a platform that displays all the telemetry data of a system so stakeholders can track and take action for their specific goals. That way, cross-team collaboration is smoother with the telemetry visible to everyone.

Enhancing Citizen Services for More Agility

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has one of the biggest digital footprints in federal government, which means it isn't simple to keep track of every customer experience. The agency has more than 50 million active users utilizing its online services, including Medicare.gov, MyMedicare.gov, Medicaid.gov, InsureKidsNow.gov and HealthCare.gov.

Without a performance tracker, it was especially difficult for the agency to oversee its CX in real time. Often, the agency reactively addressed problems that cropped up in its web environment. CMS realized it needed greater visibility on a single portal to stop the fire drills.

So the agency partnered with New Relic to deploy a cloud software analytics platform. The platform provided a unified, intuitive "pane of glass" that granted performance visibility into all its online services, from the back end to the front end. The platform provided tools such as dashboards, alerting and transaction logs that extended visibility to all employees — developer and non-developer — so they could be more agile in their work.

As a result, the agency was able to decrease response times to performance issues by at least 75%. In addition, CMS enhanced customer experience by organizing, querying and visualizing data regarding key questions about application performance and CX. These capabilities allowed CMS to view and analyze massive amounts of data to gain actionable insights in real time.
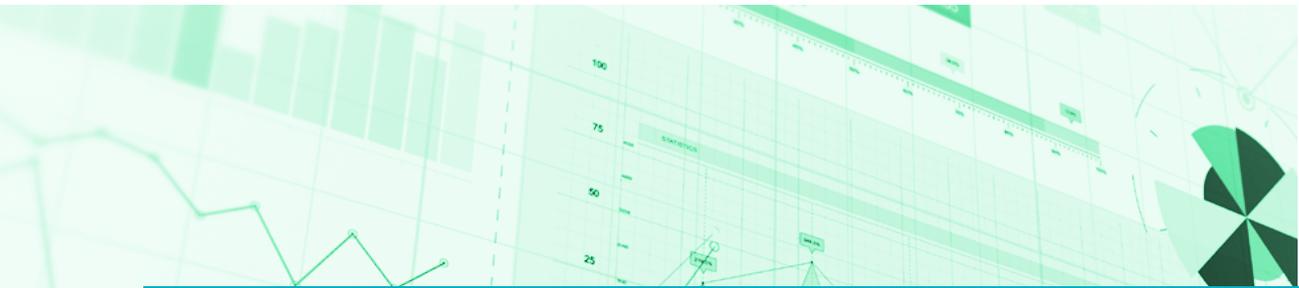
HOW NEW RELIC HELPS

New Relic's platform enables agencies to collect and leverage all the telemetry, or the record of system behavior, from a particular software — "anything the software touches," Withers said. With that visibility, you can display the data, record it and correlate it in the best ways to make the best decisions for your CX goals. The FedRAMP-authorized observability platform captures all the important data about a system that is used to deliver a digital customer journey securely across a range of devices and applications.

To learn more, visit **newrelic.com/public-sector**.

Conclusion

For government, improving CX is simultaneously simple and complex — simple because customer experience can be measured by key performance indicators that answer these four questions: Is a service available? Scalable? Speedy? Error-free? It's complex because answering each of these questions spans a composite of teams, services and technologies.

That's why having one place to observe all the telemetry data that a system records is a game-changer for agencies tracking their CX efforts. With consistent KPIs visible to the whole agency on a secure, programmable platform, improving experiences for citizens and the public becomes simpler. Agencies can take proactive action using real-time user interaction, comply with mandates and reduce costs along the way.

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ABOUT NEW RELIC

New Relic is the industry's largest and most comprehensive cloud-based observability platform built to help public sector customers create more perfect software. The world's best software and DevOps teams rely on New Relic to move faster, make better decisions and create best-in-class digital experiences. If you run software, you need to run New Relic.

Learn more at **newrelic.com/public-sector**.

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ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to **info@govloop.com**.

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