An International Perspective on Web Content Management

Emerging issues and e-merging countries

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The (R)evolution will be Webcast . . .
Today’s Virtual World

• In the U.S.
  – every federal agency, state and over 1,500 municipalities and counties have Web sites
  – public sector spending on e-government topped $1.5 billion last year

• Governments in over 220 countries and territories have established 20,000 Websites
  – Sierra Leone, war-torn and last in the United Nation’s 2000 Human Development Index, maintains a rudimentary Web site
Emerging Issues

- Digital divides in e-government
- e-government $\neq$ e-governance
- e-government hijackers
Digital Divides in E-government

• *E-government haves and have-nots*
  
  – countries (rich vs. poor, democrats vs. dictators)
  
  – governments (visionary vs. myopic, national vs. local)
  
  – communities (e-literate vs. illiterate, rural vs. urban)
Digital Divides in E-government

• *Gap between expectations of officials and the public*

  – for officials: easier communication within government among agencies; better/faster service to traditional “clients”

  – for public: Hart-Teeter survey on e-government in US found public priorities are (1) greater accountability and (2) greater access to information (transparency).
Digital Divides in E-government

• *Divided we plan*

  – A divide exists between governments that start with a formal (usually centralized) plan for e-government and those who create as they go along

  – E.g., < 10% of US cities and counties have any formal e-government plan or strategy -- US/China vs. the rest

  – Among many federal agencies and states as well as many other countries, e-government is being developed without much input from the public
E-government ≠ E-governance

• E-governance is rarely an e-government priority -- despite public desires

• Why? E-governance requires that citizens are seen as the primary “customers” to be served as opposed to only other officials, vendors or professional intermediaries

• Why? Benefits of e-governance hard to quantify in dollar terms; requires greater reinvention of government processes
E-government ≠ E-governance

• **Example**: public input into policymaking

  – interaction with the public is rarely a priority for governments -- not just in US, but most countries (e.g., other developed, technology rich countries like Japan and Singapore)

  – many agencies don’t post names and email addresses of officials; are non-responsive to emails from the public
E-government ≠ E-governance

• commenting on draft laws/regulations

– not all federal agencies allow online posting/reading of comments on draft regulations (e.g., DOL, DOE)

– especially odd since several federal agencies in China have solicited public comments via Internet

– each agency manages own site with its unique system of handling public input

– other countries offer more organized system: UK’s Citizen Portal; its “Citizen Space” allowing submission of comments/complaints gets more use than public services or information sections of site
E-government will not turn bad government into good government
Transforming unresponsive government into open, accessible government depends upon . . .

better information flow

and

willingness of officials
(political and career levels)
to change how they interact with the public
E-Government Hijackers

• Hijacking the homepage
  when politicians dictate content

• *the problem:* when the priority is to serve political interests rather than public interests -- political priorities can shift frequently and suddenly

• *example:* USDA homepage changed from more public service oriented to one dominated by press releases and statements by the Secretary
E-Government Hijackers

• *The tension*: between political appointees and e-government content managers and the public
  – few political appointees understand how their agency’s websites are actually used by the public

• *The risk*: if the public equates e-government with politics we might see greater distrust of e-government

• *The solution*: content should be guided by the needs and wants of public constituencies (individuals, business, other public stakeholders)
It’s a small world after all . . .

- **it’s all so common**: emerging issues in e-government--digital divides, e-governance and politics dominating content--are common to most e-merging countries.

- **surprises abound**: from USDA’s experience with online comments (500,000 of them) for draft regulations on organic food labeling to China’s experiments e-government.

- **leadership counts**: it’s often the only to cut through bureaucratic resistance and mobilize resources.