Chapter 16
Social Tagging to Search and Recommend Government Information

Janice Warner
Georgian Court University, USA

Soon Ae Chun
College of Staten Island - City University of New York, USA

ABSTRACT

The amount of data, documents and services provided by the US government and all its agencies is overwhelming for citizens as well as employees of government agencies that need to collaborate. The US federal government offers several portals and associated search engines. In addition, to aid in inter-agency coordination, there are some platforms deployed to exchange information and share resources. This chapter investigates how social tagging technology can support citizen information and service requirements by facilitating discovery of needed information, services and knowledge. The authors also show how governmental agencies and departments can use the technologies to better service citizens through integration of their capabilities and knowledge. The proposed service could have a big impact in helping citizens with a relatively small incremental cost to implement because the “work” done is by the users in a distributed fashion. The impact derives from improving the accessibility and sharing of information resources.

INTRODUCTION

In order for citizens (and other constituents hereafter referred to together as citizens) to make fully informed decisions about the factors that may impact their lives and their communities, access to information is essential. They want to find government services, property and financial information, educational choices, social benefits, business opportunities, health information, statistical summary information, public affairs, professional career information and many others in order to make informed decisions. In addition, citizens want to participate in the governments’ policy and decision making processes. Open government gives citizens the right to access government information. The US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) legislates that government information is accessible to all
Social Tagging to Search and Recommend Government Information

citizens. Open government entails government transparency, accountability, public trust and shared governance, allowing more accessible citizen participation in the democratic processes. The Internet and the Web support open government under the digital government initiatives. Federal, state and local governments have pushed their information on the Web, and have begun to provide services from the Web.

The amount of data, documents and services provided by the US government and all its agencies is overwhelming for citizens. It is a challenge for citizens to be able to find the right information without sifting through many potential web pages, attached documents, and services. Employees of government agencies face a similar challenge when they need to collaborate in an attempt to provide seamless integrated services for both the public and for backend government business processes.

The US federal government offers several portals that provide access to a host of information and services. The main portal is “usa.gov” but there are many other portals specific to groups of people or areas of interest. These portals characterize various types of information and offer search capabilities. The usasearch.gov search engine, which supports the usa.gov portal, provides a more structured search environment than a general search engine provides since it does use knowledge about the contents of the websites it supports. Like most search engines, it is based on keyword search which can be limited to certain website address (i.e. urls). However, despite its attempts to focus results, searches still generate large numbers of documents and resources through which end users must sift.

Besides direct searching, citizen’s access to services that cross government boundaries requires inter-agency collaboration and process coordination which would be supported by efficient search for data and web services among government agencies. To aid in inter-agency coordination, there are some platforms deployed. For example, a platform called CORE.gov, which is built on the federal enterprise architecture, is a central repository for various “components” such as software, processes, case studies and best practices. The difficulty is that all components need to be approved and the shared information needs to be transferred to the repository. Any agency offering to post a component also has the responsibility of updating it. These limitations impact what individuals share and post because the process is so burdensome.

This chapter investigates how IT tools support citizen information and service requirements. Our analysis is in two parts. First we examine the websites, information and services available directly to citizens in the USA. Then we examine the collaborative capabilities offered to government agency members in order to foster cooperation. In both cases, we use the US federal government websites and policies in order to illustrate what is possible as well as what is lacking.

Many of these websites do incorporate Web 2.0 technologies. In our background section, we review current capabilities in the areas of portals, search, and interactivity and assess their strengths and weaknesses. We then propose advances that can be made and the advantages they might bring. In particular, we look at semantic community tagging to facilitate finding of information, services and people. We also consider integration of relevant web services through mashups. Our goal is to show how governmental agencies and departments can use Web 2.0 technologies to better service citizen needs through integration of their capabilities and knowledge.

BACKGROUND

Most governments provide portals to help citizens find information. The information is categorized and special search engines are established as might be found in a corporate web site. Internal portals provide governmental employees the ability to
Related Content

Mobile ICTs in Government Field Operations: A Socio-Technical Innovation Project
[www.igi-global.com/article/mobile-icts-in-government-field-operations/115911?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/mobile-icts-in-government-field-operations/115911?camid=4v1a)

Engaging Citizens on the Internet: An Assessment of Local Governments in Ohio
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/engaging-citizens-internet/42563?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/engaging-citizens-internet/42563?camid=4v1a)

G2C Adoption of E-Government in Malaysia: Trust, Perceived Risk and Political Self-Efficacy
[www.igi-global.com/article/g2c-adoption-government-malaysia/45741?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/g2c-adoption-government-malaysia/45741?camid=4v1a)

Influential Factors for E-Government Success in the Middle East: Case Study Evidence from Saudi Arabia
[www.igi-global.com/article/influential-factors-for-e-government-success-in-the-middle-east/126350?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/influential-factors-for-e-government-success-in-the-middle-east/126350?camid=4v1a)