Chapter 15
A Review of Standardization Frameworks for Electronic Government Service Portals

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ABSTRACT

E-Government service portals have a challenging and unique mission, focused on public access, for an unknown group of users who vary greatly in terms of the information and services they seek, as well as their education, background, and access to technology. Within this context public organizations at central, regional or local level initiate many efforts towards the development of government portals in order to offer electronic services to citizens and businesses. However, even if these efforts are in most cases successful, the portals that are developed do not follow a common set of specifications. On the contrary, each public agency follows its own design, set its own functional and technical specifications and most of all put its own needs before the needs of its users. The need for e-Government frameworks, as a prerequisite supporting tool for e-Government portals implementation becomes more apparent worldwide, when considering the added complexity of procedures, information needs and systems, technologies used, security aspects, legal frameworks, organizational structures, and other special issues which have to be taken into account. In this chapter a comparison framework is proposed, extending and adopting existing approaches, to the national standardization framework’s needs. Applying the proposed comparison framework an assessment and extended review of some of the most significant standardization efforts undertaken worldwide are considered in an attempt to assist decision makers, politicians, public and IT managers to design their own Standardization Framework for Electronic Government Service Portals.

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INTRODUCTION

As yet, there is no generally accepted definition of a portal and the definition and characteristics of a government portal are even less well specified; no existing definition fits the unique requirements of a government portal. Government service portals are not the same as public portals that have a strong commercial aspect and they provide structured access to web sites across the whole of the World Wide Web. They are not vertical portals that attempt to provide comprehensive access to information on a defined topic or function to a defined audience, even though there are vertical specialist portals in the government sector. Although they may focus exclusively on government information and services, government has much broader scope than does the normal range of a specialist portal. They have a challenging and unique mission, focused on public access, for an unknown group of users who vary greatly in terms of the information and services they seek, as well as their education, background, and access to technology. Within this context government portals must try to channel users and inquiries through hundreds of thousands, and in some cases millions, of web pages, with maximum efficiency and with user satisfaction.

The number of public sector web sites has mushroomed in recent years and governments worldwide have published a stream of web site guidance, addressed to a range of audiences. Implementing public sector web sites involves a complex bundle of interrelated activities with decisions about management, organization, structure, content, security and legal issues, as much as about surface, or the ‘interface’. Discovering who the web site’s potential users are, finding out their requirements, using this to decide what information to include on the site, how to structure it and what to call it, and designing navigation paths through it that are as clear as possible, are all part of design. These days, it is also essential to ensure information is accessible to as many different people as possible. Many of the best practices, rules and standards regarding some of those processes are proposed from international standardization bodies’ (ISO, W3C, Oasis, OMG etc.), which affect research in areas related to e-Government but are not particularly readable.

In the second section of this chapter we present the need behind the development of standardization frameworks for electronic government service portals (SF) and we propose a framework against which, some of the most remarkable government frameworks worldwide, will be examined in section three. In section 4 the results are discussed and finally we present our conclusions and some thoughts about the necessity, usability and applicability of a standardization framework for electronic government service portals (SF).

Positioning of Standardization Framework in National E-Government Strategy

Government administrations at the central, regional or local level initiate many efforts towards the development of government portals in order to offer electronic services to citizens and businesses. However, even if these efforts are in most cases successful, the portals that are developed do not follow a common set of specifications. On the contrary, each public agency follows its own design, set its own functional and technical specifications and most of all puts its own needs before the needs of its customers (i.e. citizens and businesses). These rather dispersed, uncoordinated and heterogeneous efforts for the development of government service portals resulted in several problems and discrepancies for both public agencies and citizens and businesses. More specifically, different solutions were adopted for issues such as content organization and presentation, navigation, search functions, accessibility, domain name registration, type of users’ identification, or personal data protection. On top of these issues, and probably the most significant area that raises