

Executive Summary

The gateway to the state's collective resources, the Access Washington™ portal (<http://access.wa.gov>) has been delivering information and services over the Internet as the unified face of Washington state government since 1998. One of the first enterprise-wide state government Web portals, Access Washington continues to grow, improve and mature. In March 2001, the portal was refreshed with a task-oriented look and feel, including new navigation that highlighted the state's services and most heavily used sites. Average daily visitors to Access Washington increased from roughly 5,000 in 1998 to more than 18,000 in early 2005.

User statistics are a clear indication that citizens rely on the resources that Access Washington provides. In September 2004, the portal debuted a user-centered redesign based on extensive Web usability testing. From October 2004 to March 2005, Access Washington logged more than 4.1 million visitor sessions and nearly 15 million page views. These numbers represent a 21 and 17 percent increase respectively, when compared to the averages from the six months immediately before the redesign.

The portal's services and applications have been designed to ensure that every visitor has a positive online interaction with Washington state government. Features include:

Accessibility - Access Washington has been tested in multiple browsers and across many platforms. Extensive changes to the site structure were made during the redesign to obtain maximum usability. Access Washington is usable in Internet Explorer and Netscape browsers 4.0 and above. The site has been extensively tested in JAWS and Wave for accessibility with screen readers and other accessibility tools.

Transact Washington™ - An extension of Access Washington, Transact Washington is the state's authentication gateway that allows state agencies to provide secure online services to customers using digital certificates to identify and authenticate users. Using a single digital certificate, customers can securely maintain records, access patient-identifiable information, fulfill reporting requirements, file taxes and more, all in a single Internet session conducted any time, from anywhere. To date, more than 6,300 customers have acquired digital certificates.

Ask George™ - The portal's natural language search engine, Ask George™, finds state government information as well as city and county information. On average, 150,000 users rely on Ask George each month to help them search.

Help Center - Customers can visit the Help Center day or night for answers to questions. They can browse the extensive Knowledge Base, view Frequently Asked Questions, report a site problem or use the e-mail contact form or the toll-free number to contact a representative 24 hours a day, 7 day per week. On average, 85 percent of users find the answer they need using the Help Center without having to e-mail or call a customer service representative.

Access Washington provides true service and generates strong customer satisfaction. Results are measured by reviewing data from the search feature, customer support requests and surveying the users of Access Washington - and the feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents said that they were likely to return to Access Washington. Seventy-six percent of respondents said that they would use Access Washington as their primary government resource. Seventy-five percent said that they would recommend the site to others.

A portal into government is not nice to have, it is a *must have*. Citizens expect their government to be available and delivering services at all times. Access Washington is a trusted source of information - a 'one-stop shop' for the collected state and local information, news and resources that citizens need. Providing accurate and relevant information and services that meet the needs of customers remains the portal's primary goal.

a) Description of the project, including length of time in operation.

Every online interaction with government helps citizens shape their opinion about their government, whether positive or negative. State governments are under increasing pressure to 'do more with less.' At a time when citizens expect government to be efficient, available and responsive, Washington state's Web portal, Access Washington™ fills the bill. The portal is constantly evaluated and updated for ease of use and relevance of information based on customer feedback. This ensures that our citizens have a positive interaction with, and hence a positive perception of, state government.

The gateway to the state's collective resources, the portal has been delivering information and services over the Internet as the unified face of Washington government since 1998. In March of 2001, the portal was refreshed with a task-oriented look and feel, including new navigation that highlighted the state's popular services and most heavily used sites. One of the first enterprise-wide state government Web portals, Access Washington continues to grow, improve and mature. Providing accurate and relevant information and services that meet the needs of customers remains the primary goal of the portal.

In September 2004, the portal debuted a user-centered redesign based on extensive Web usability testing. During the first phase of usability testing, study participants were tasked with finding specific information. They were successful in finding the information only about 50 percent of the time on average. Subsequent testing on the redesigned site showed that study participants were able to find what they were looking for an average of 90 percent of the time. The redesign of the site's architecture based on user needs resulted in a 40 percent increase in the success rate of the study participants.

Customer feedback during the first round of testing indicated how and where the site could be improved and generated the goals of the redesign including:

- Providing a positive citizen experience by maintaining a site with a professional and friendly appearance, that offers customers what they want and need.
- Increasing efficiency to ensure that customers quickly get what they need.
- Incorporating citizen feedback throughout the redesign process in order to develop processes that increase user satisfaction.

Access Washington's redesign reflects the state's commitment to responsive government by providing citizens the information and services they want and need in ways they can access quickly and easily. The portal points the way to government-to-business transactions, tourism, legislative information, social and human services, laws and regulations, lottery results, licenses, state news, recreation and more. It is a digital service counter serving thousands of people in thousands of ways.

Access Washington delivers approximately 300 online services and informational resources to citizens in Washington every day. Customers are supported 24 hours a day, seven days a week through an extensive customer support service that includes self-help sessions, e-mail support and live customer support.

b) Significance to the improvement of the operation of government.

A diverse group of people rely on Access Washington for direction to the information and services they need - from citizens and out of state tourists, to businesses using online applications to meet state operating requirements. The portal points them to information and services from more than 130 state agencies, boards and commissions and more than 240 political subdivisions throughout the state.

A user-satisfaction survey of 2,105 people conducted between January and April 2005, revealed the following user groups:

- 27% general public
- 27% government employees
- 10% small business owners
- 9% business or non-profit employees
- 8% students
- 7% unemployed
- 7% other
- 3% teachers or educators
- 2% visitors or tourists

The portal's features and applications have been designed with customer needs in mind and combined with a robust search feature and customer service support to ensure every visitor has a positive online interaction with Washington state government. Features include:

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need. The result is that government resources are reallocated to the remaining 15 percent of customers requiring individualized service.

Foreign language content - Access Washington features state agency content in six foreign languages: Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese and Cambodian. These pages provide non-English reading citizens access to state information on the Internet, such as voter registration information and worker rights.

Emergency information and resources - Links featured on the front page provide access to the information and resources citizens need during emergencies. Topics include drought, floods, fires, earthquakes, terrorism, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, and critical energy shortages.

With service available 365x24x7, Access Washington allows citizens and business owners to conveniently do business with Washington state. For example:

- Open an account for secure transactions with the state (<http://transact.wa.gov/>)
- Order vital records (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/CHS/cert.htm>)
- Find a contractor (<http://www.ini.wa.gov/TradesLicensing/Contractors/HireCon/default.asp>)
- Renew your driver's license (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/olr/>)
- Renew your car or boat tabs, change your address or report sale of a vehicle (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/tabs/>)
- Reserve a campsite (<http://www.camis.com/wa/>)
- Search for a job (<http://www.wa.gov/esd/employment.html>)
- Apply for a job (<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/statejobs/inetapp.htm>)
- Get a business license (<http://www.dol.wa.gov/forms/700028.htm>)
- File and pay your State of Washington taxes (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dor/eservices/>)
- Find missing money or property (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dor/ucpl/>)
- Access state agency Web sites, boards and commissions (<http://access.wa.gov/agency/agency.aspx>)
- Gain an easy path to the Washington State Legislature
- Find links to education

c) Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state.

According to a report released by the PEW Internet & American Life Project in January of 2005, on a typical day at the end of 2004, some 70 million American adults logged onto the Internet to use e-mail, get news, access government information, check out health and medical information and engage in countless other activities.

Nearly a third of users surveyed for the PEW report say that the Internet has improved their dealings with government. Further, the Internet has enhanced the relationship of citizens to their government. E-government applications are growing in popularity with online Americans. For instance, 38 million have sent e-mail to government officials to try to influence policy decisions and another 29 million have researched or applied for government benefits on government Web sites. Many report that the convenience and usefulness of these sites have improved their perceptions of how government functions.

Access Washington continues to be a trusted source of information - a 'one-stop shop' for the collected state and local information, news and resources that citizens need. When citizens find what they need, when they need it, their positive perception of government grows.

The average number of daily visitors to Access Washington has increased from roughly 5,000 in 1998 to more than 18,000 in the first part of 2005. The redesign launched in 2004 has positively impacted the site's usage numbers. In the six month period spanning from April 2004 to September 2004, Access Washington logged just under 3.4 million visitor sessions and 12,743,235 page views. In the six-month period spanning from October 2004 to March 2005, Access Washington logged more than 4.1 million visitor sessions and 14,886,945 page views. Those numbers represent a 21 and 17 percent increase respectively in just six months. User statistics are a clear indication that citizens rely on the resources that Access Washington provides.

d) Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback (include summary calculations).

According to IT research organization IDC (International Data Corp.), the ROI calculation for e-commerce demands a method to quantify the “soft benefits” of moving business online. Important “soft” benefits are occurring naturally as the digital Washington community empowers itself and its customers to conduct the business of government online.

The accounting of hours and time saved is only part of the formula for return on investment. Additional benefits of online government not calculated in the ROI equation include:

- The value of quicker and more accurate communication and exchange of information between departments, agencies and citizens
- The money saved when staff have more time available for over-the-counter personal service for the citizen
- Cost-efficiencies possible when the expertise and leadership needed to design, develop and deploy reliable and secure online services can be sourced from within
- Operational savings at the facility level when citizens conduct desktop business with the state from home or work

Access Washington provides true service and generates strong customer satisfaction. Results are measured by reviewing data from our search feature, customer support requests and surveying the users of Access Washington - and the feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Although data collection is still in process, customer feedback demonstrates that Access Washington is meeting the goals identified in the redesign process:

- "Oh my, I have already received a reply from Access Washington Customer Support. Truthfully, I was surprised how quick I got a reply."
- "Thank you very much for the information. That was very impressive and amazing. Wonderful service from a government service - only in Washington!"
- "This is a fantastic website. It makes me proud to be a Washingtonian. Just a little note to let you know that the Access Washington web site is TOP-NOTCH. It's well organized in a logical manner."

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents said that they were likely to return to Access Washington. Seventy-six percent of respondents said that they would use Access Washington as their primary government resource. Seventy-five percent said that they would recommend the site to others.

A portal into government is not nice to have, it is a *must have*. Citizens expect their government to be available and delivering services at all times. The millions of citizens Access Washington serves can best quantify how the portal has improved the quality of their lives - by saving them time, saving them money, and/or increasing their access to information. Value to the citizen is the true return on investment generated by the Access Washington portal.