

## A. Cover page

<b>Title:</b>	Mass.Gov: Achieving a True "Single Face of Government" Through Continuous, Sustainable Improvement
<b>Category:</b>	Digital Government: Government to Citizen (G to C)
<b>State:</b>	Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## B. Executive Summary

Since 2002, Massachusetts has had a top-level state portal ([www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov)) that organizes information and transactions according to user needs, not government structure.

However, what sets Massachusetts apart is that we have carried the idea of "a single face of government" far beyond having just a top level portal that continues to link off to hundreds of disparate websites, or simply establishing guidelines on consistent look and feel.

In Massachusetts, we have:

- Consolidated close to 100 websites into a handful of topic-based sub-portals, using a consistent, controlled page layout throughout

- Used a single, distributed content publishing toolset that does not require coding expertise to use

- Enforced a single brand identity for the Executive Department of state government, with agencies from other branches voluntarily using our model\*

- Established strong governance and user communities

- Used visual design and navigation based on professional, third-party usability findings

- Complied with open standards and built universal access into the content publishing process

- Continuously made enhancements to improve the user experience and promote civic engagement and public safety

\*The State Comptroller's Office and the Attorney General have had Mass.Gov subportals for over 2 years; the Treasurer launched its subportal in 2008 and the State Ethics Commission recently launched its subportal in May, 2009. District Attorneys and Sheriffs are beginning to use Mass.Gov as well, and the Legislature and the Courts have expressed interest.

## **C. Description of business problem and solution**

### **Business problem**

Massachusetts was a leader in making services available online in 2001; however, government was growing increasingly inaccessible to citizens, due to hundreds of siloed websites with inconsistent branding and navigation. In addition, agencies had no common web publishing platform and varying budgets to support their sites. Larger agencies delegated the job to consultants, while smaller agencies assigned the job to administrative staff and others lacking technical expertise. As a consequence, websites were poorly designed and maintained, or relied on expensive coders and designers. Content was often outdated, difficult to find or use and inaccessible to the disabled.

The initial solution was a top-level portal that would link to existing websites until they could be converted to the Mass.Gov platform. However, we soon learned that with hundreds of state agencies, and a staff of only 14, converting one agency at a time to Mass.Gov's templates wasn't feasible or sustainable, and also would not really address the challenge of making government more accessible.

### **Solution**

Our solution to this problem was to build upon the top-level portal by consolidating over 100 websites into a handful of topic-based "sub-portals." These sub-portals use the same controlled page layout and user-centered information architecture throughout.

A case in point is the Executive Office of Health & Human Services which had 18 separate websites with stovepiped content and varying design quality. Today, there is one Health & Human Services site with content organized by constituency and topic, and related content integrated from multiple agencies. For example, under the "Consumer" constituency, in the Family Services topic, content from multiple agencies is provided--adoption, caregiver support, childcare, child welfare and more. Side modules, such as news, online services, and publications, provide easy access to additional related content.

To date we have consolidated 78 standalone agency websites into 9 topic-based subportals. Combined, these sites (78 out of 105) represent over 74% of Executive Department content.

**When the consolidations are completed, we will have reduced the number of standalone Executive Department websites by 90%.**

### **Length of time in operation**

Key milestones along the road toward establishing the consolidation strategy:

2003: Overhauled front-end user interface and simplified back-end content management system.

2004: Piloted consolidation with the Executive Office of Health & Human Services.

2005: Established Portal User Group and Portal Advisory Board. Struggled to attract and retain appropriate senior-level business representatives.

2006: Implemented code and design changes to further separate content from presentation and improve usability, accessibility and flexibility.

2007: Formalized and mandated the consolidation and branding strategy under a new Governor. Reconstituted Portal Advisory Board with more appropriate representation.

2008: Various enhancements including RSS feeds and "Commonwealth Conversations" blog

2009: Achieved 74% of consolidation goal; strategy and methods proven repeatable and successful.

## **Challenges**

A key challenge was the need to preserve individual agency identity, for both practical and political reasons. We were asking agencies to give up autonomy and control over look and feel for the sake of consolidation. Also, because it made more sense to organize content by topic and not by agency, it didn't mean that information about agencies no longer mattered. In order to overcome agency resistance to consolidation, and to meet citizens' needs for information about individual agencies, Mass.Gov., working with its agency customers, devised the "agency landing page." This page lives within the consolidated subportal and provides basic information, such as what the agency does; who the agency head is; where the agency is located; and how to contact it. While the rest of the agency's content lives within topics elsewhere on the subportal, that content links back to the agency landing page, so that citizens know who is responsible for specific content.

Another challenge was balancing the need for consistent look and feel from site to site, with the need for some differentiation between sites. Although the banners for Mass.Gov and its subportals are consistent, we instituted a new banner that gives subportals some branding flexibility via color schemes and the use of meaningful, rotating images, which also lend a more dynamic appearance to Mass.Gov as a whole.

## **D. Significance of the Project**

### **Policy, strategy & goal alignment**

Key to our achievements has been the support of Governor Deval Patrick's Administration, which quickly grasped that Mass.Gov was key to achieving its goals: improving service to citizens; increasing civic engagement; and reducing the cost of government.

We could have chosen to focus on implementing the latest web technologies *du jour*, many of which have popped up and then disappeared. We chose instead to focus on the much harder task of transforming how content gets published, because that is exactly what citizens are looking for on websites. Complete, easy-to-use content is also the foundation for substantive civic engagement and

involvement.

Mass.Gov is a mission-critical, 24-7 operation serving all of the Commonwealth's key constituencies--citizens, businesses, municipalities, employees and visitors, and hosting 350,000 web pages belonging to 78 sites. Combined, Mass.Gov's sites receive 5 million visitors and have 34 million pageviews per month.

(Massachusetts' population is approximately 6 million.) To our knowledge, we are the only state in the U.S. that has undertaken such a deeply penetrating website consolidation, focused on content quality, accessibility and ease of use. The only comparable effort we are aware of is the British government's.

### **Impact on agency nominating the project, state agencies and citizens**

*Sustainability and manageability for state government-* Mass.Gov has a staff of just 14. "One agency, one website" was no longer sustainable. We simply could not succeed in establishing a true single face of government, one agency at a time. To accomplish the consolidation, we developed a repeatable process with reusable presentations and reference materials. Joint teams of Mass.Gov and agency staff inventory and analyze agency content, identify gaps, eliminate unnecessary content, and develop a user-focused information architecture. After Mass.Gov trains agency staff in the publishing toolset and best practices (writing for the web, usability testing, accessibility compliance, etc.) they build their own sites. We mentor them through establishing governance and business processes for ongoing maintenance.

*Increased ease-of-use for citizens -*Mass.Gov's current colors, fonts, tabs and arrangement of page elements are based on a third-party usability study, which involved observing actual citizens and business users complete a battery of tasks on Mass.Gov's websites. The study also affirmed the importance of consistent look and feel. When users navigated away from a Mass.Gov web page to another agency's different-looking standalone site, the experience was jarring and undermined their trust and confidence in the government site.

*Continuous enhancement to improve user experience, promote civic engagement, public safety* A "Citizen Alert" module, managed by Public Safety staff, provides real-time Amber Alerts and other emergency notifications. We have begun rolling out a module for citizens to provide targeted feedback, which we will use to drive site improvements. The Governor's office is using its Mass.Gov site to promote civic engagement, and publishes videos podcasts, photo galleries and extensive content concerning its policy priorities. Many other agencies are using blogs and posting instructional videos with either closed captioning or accessible alternative formats. Most recently, the Public Health blog was key to communicating quickly and effectively about the H1N1 virus. In 2008 we launched RSS feeds for all of Mass.Gov's news and updates modules; this enabled citizens to subscribe to feeds on dozens of topics. In the past, when agencies implemented such enhancements, they were "one-offs" which benefited only that agency and its customers. Today, when Mass. Gov implements an enhancement, it benefits everyone. And now, agencies are starting to use Web 2.0 and social networking technologies; a number of portalized agencies now have Twitter accounts, including Mass. Gov, Public Health, the Attorney General's Office, and the Office of the Governor which has over 4,000 followers.

## **E. Benefit of the Project:**

*Faster consolidation--reduced completion or resolution time* - At the time we solidified our consolidation strategy in 2006-07, we estimated that without consolidation, migration of all Executive Department sites on an agency-by-agency basis would take over 10 years. Now we estimate that upon completion in 2009-10, it will have taken 4 years.

*Increased efficiency and reducing the total cost of government through consolidation*

*Increased citizen "self service."* When information and transactions are easier to find, there are fewer calls, office visits and paper forms to process and voluntary compliance with laws and regulations increases. Agencies have reported that their Mass.Gov sites enable them to maintain or improve service levels, despite budgetary cutbacks.

*More rational, efficient allocation of staff to publishing function.* Through consolidation, agencies can pool their resources more efficiently. Health & Human Services agencies had 17 content management systems and 24 staff maintaining their sites, with wide disparities in staffing and skills. Following consolidation, they use 1 content management system (Mass.Gov's) and maintain their site with a centralized team of 7 staff. Results are similar with other consolidated sites.

*Decreased reliance on vendors, and in-house technologists freed up to focus on applications.* Many smaller agencies outsourced their sites, paying vendors and consultants for web development. Now these sites are completely operated by state staff, saving the Commonwealth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

*Single, shared infrastructure; economies of scale.* Agencies are consolidating, using a shared infrastructure and fewer resources. Our content community has an active voice in determining enhancements and additions to the Mass.Gov tool set and publishing features to ensure the greatest value for the our efforts and investments.

*Consolidation, consistency, and common branding* - Citizens and businesses should not have to know which agency provides a service, or wrestle with hundreds of different web interfaces and brand identities to access state services. In addition to consistent information architecture and navigation, banners, headers and footers are consistent on every page, giving customers confidence that they are on an official Commonwealth site. Whether or not their sites are part of Mass.Gov yet, all Executive Department agencies are required to use a Mass.Gov web address (mass.gov/XYZ) in all announcements or materials promoting their sites. Massachusetts' increasingly consolidated, consistent web presence, and single brand identity:

*Streamlines citizens' interaction with government, and decreases the clutter of hundreds of unique URLs they are expected to remember  
Improves findability in external search engines such as Google*

*Supports transparency and civic engagement* - Many agencies previously promoted their sites with unique URLs, often using .com or .org addresses, instead of a mass.gov address. Agencies using these domains argued that "my customers don't trust government." Yet the use of them perpetuated that problem. To increase civic engagement, transparency and public trust, it is important for citizens to recognize all the work that state government is doing, which is obscured when agencies use individual URLs.

*Maximizes the Commonwealth's limited marketing dollars.* - Graphic design is expensive, and unique URLs are hard to remember, especially after a marketing campaign ends. The Mass.Gov URL is well established, trusted and easy to remember. It is referenced constantly in the news media and agency print materials, including subway ads, billboards, tax forms, car registration renewals and highway signs.

## **Nonfinancial ROI**

*Strong governance and user communities* - Mass.Gov is more than a web publishing platform, it is a community with strong buy-in and participation from our customers. A Portal Advisory Board decides strategy and sets priorities. A Portal User Group meets to exchange ideas, discuss best practices and upcoming enhancements. An Emergency Web Communications group meets to ensure we are prepared to communicate in a coordinated manner in the event of a disaster or emergency. A key benefit of these groups is the opportunities they create for agencies to interact, discover mutual interests and identify resources they can share.

*Using a single, distributed publishing toolset that doesn't require coding expertise* - Mass.Gov's publishing toolset consists of Interwoven's Teamsite for file and content management--intuitive, with a custom-coded point-and-click tool for constructing and maintaining all navigation. There are 200 content authors publishing hundreds of changes per day directly to the web. Our templates and tools free agencies from focusing on coding, design and layout so they can focus on content. The tools enable organizations to centralize or distribute publishing responsibilities according to their needs and business processes.

*Adopting open standards and building universal accessibility into the content publishing process* - In 2006, we overhauled our HTML and CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) code, further separating portal content from presentation. The underlying code is W3C-compliant, which allows for more consistent branding and layout, greater compliance with web accessibility standards, and serving content on mobile devices, without having to maintain separate "text only" sites. We can make 98% of future design changes by deploying a single file - the CSS file - for an immediate change to all portalized sites. We make agency content authors' job much easier by ensuring that Mass.Gov's templates and display code fully comply with our web accessibility standards. Agencies are responsible for auditing the accessibility of the content they contribute. For that purpose, we created a Web Accessibility Toolkit to help them, and we publish content on specific techniques.