NASCIO 2019 State IT Recognition Awards

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State | Kansas

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Executive Summary

Portal.kansas.gov is the official website for the State of Kansas, and it serves all Kansans by linking them to Kansas services, agencies, elected officials and much more. We strive to make interacting with Kansas state government a positive, simple, and convenient experience and are committed to making the site useful and easy to use.

This site provides a streamlined process to support our users while being at the forefront of advanced technologies. We tracked analytics from our previous site and found more than half of the prominent navigation categories were not what our users needed or wanted. We learned that these unused navigation categories were simply decorative placeholders, which had little to no clicks.

This information led us to our redesigned project adopting a simplified approach along with a slogan for the new site: “Get Answers.”

We leveraged site analytics to create our plan for this project. We had the answers to what our users were navigating for, the searches they were looking for, and knew the answers to their questions. With this information, we stripped our website of all of the extra navigation and links and instead started with a search box.

That search box is now how users can get answers. They can simply type keywords into the search box and cards related to that word will display. Our internal API allows this process to quickly happen because we collect, input, and update the content on the cards. Additionally, the cards also connect users to information, websites, contact links, social media, and in some cases videos.

Our chatbot, Agent Kay is integrated into the website and can answer questions that are asked in the search box. Agent Kay is also available to support our users 24/7 through chat and can be accessed by users clicking the speech bubble in the bottom right-hand corner.

Concept

An effective citizen experience starts by understanding what the citizen wants to do. We took that mantra to heart when we reexamined nearly every interaction we create with citizens. We began this reexamination by attempting to rid ourselves of any preconceived notions about what our users are doing and instead of looking at the raw data to see what it was telling us.

This project follows the agile project management approach and our scope of ideas and wants are currently being monitored and will be implemented in the future. This project was constantly evolving as our team encountered unexpected situations and we adapted as needed to meet our target deadline. This market cost for this project totaled to over $28,000, but with our self-funded model allowed us to work at no charge to the state.

Early during the research and development phase of our website redesign project, we used heat mapping to review thousands of anonymous, real-world interactions that citizens had with various agencies. We used this data to see how people interacted with numerous website s and online services. We were able to see how users moved their mouse over the screen, how long they took to find whatever they were searching for, determines what services they used, and where they may have abandoned the website or online service. We also reviewed customer service interactions whether with a live person or through our chatbot. This data provided us with a massive amount of objective information about how citizens are interacting with the State of Kansas.

We then carefully analyzed this data and made some surprising discoveries. This data clearly indicated that the vast majority of citizens were ignoring almost all of the information we provide. For example, there were prominent links to what we thought was important information that was absolutely never selected by users. Navigation, sidebars, and site promotions were all being passed over and going unclicked. Although this information may have been important in the past, modern users are generally just doing one single thing — searching.

Users aren't browsing site content to find out "what's new" with an agency or to see what services are being promoted. They don't want weather reports or press releases. For example, there were prominent links to what we thought was important information that was absolutely never selected by users. This was exemplified by the fact that we could clearly observe through heat mapping that users were consistently taking the same actions and those actions were based on searching for something. If the user couldn't find what they were looking for he or she typically abandoned the site or contacted a help center

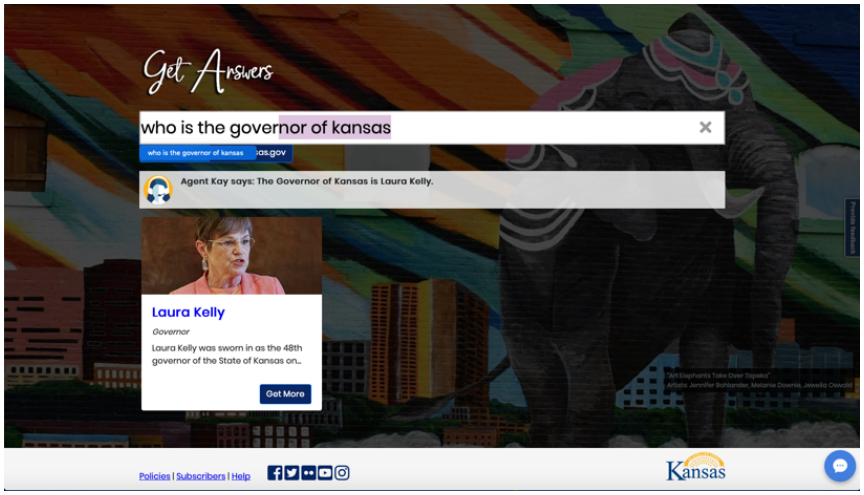
technician. The heat-mapping software even allowed us to visibly see the frustration sometimes experienced by some users as they shook their mouse while looking for something that they could not find.

We then took allthe data we collected and focused on giving the citizens what they wanted – search and more importantly, relevant results. With that in mind, we adopted a vision for the new Kansas.gov site: "Get Answers."

This initiative is part of our larger scope of projects we are currently finding ways to makes our sites and services as simple and convenient as possible. To accomplish this project, we stripped the state's main website homepage of menus and navigation and retained just one primary element: a simple search field.

Although visually simple, real work is producing relevant and useful results.

As a search is executed, results instantly begin to appear. These results presented as "cards" begin to appear on the page as additional data is entered and the search becomes more refined. For example, if a user searches for "Governor Laura Kelly," or search "who is the governor of Kansas" her card will begin to appear, narrowing as each keystroke is entered until the correct card appears. Additionally, Agent Kay will answer the question before the user completes the questions. Users can also click directly to her site from the main card or click "Get More" to find social media feeds, information about Governor Laura Kelly or contact information. In short, unlike most sites,



To achieve this, an API bounces each keystroke against a non-relational database that houses the cards.

As part of this new approach for serving citizens, we also incorporated our artificial intelligence chatbot, Agent Kay. This chatbot simulates interacting with a real person. But it does more than just simply give an answer, it attempts to help the user navigate to the specific information he or she is seeking.

Of course, it's understood that mobile devices have become in many cases the primary way

people access information. However, as noted above, we didn't want to just assume we understood how citizens are interacting with government. Using our tools, we can see in detail the kinds of devices people are using, what operating system they are using and what version of that operating system is being used. This provides to us objective information about how best to serve our citizens. For example, if certain advanced web features are not offered because they are not compatible with an older operating system, we have data to determine what percentage of users are accessing the website from a specific device with that operating system. A decision can then be made regarding the impact if that operating system is no longer supported. Similarly, we can access detailed information about what percentage of users are accessing a service from an Android device versus an Apple device.

In addition, for our imaginary, we chose to take the untraditional route. We wanted Kansas related pictures that were more than just fields of wheat and landscape scenery. Kansas has more to offer, and we wanted this site to show that.

As proven by Apple, Google, and others, making complex things simple is not an easy objective to achieve. We have spent countless hours reviewing data to get to the heart of what people are really doing when they interact with the government. Using that data, we have reimagined every channel where we interact with citizens with a focus on search and relevant results. It has not always been easy to eliminate or move content that has traditionally been a component of a government website or online service. However, the data is clear, and it shows that people are wanting to find something specific quickly. We embrace this approach and will continue to welcome feedback, track analytics, and work with our users to make the site user-friendly, useful and a tool that gives answers.

Significance

By staying up to date with and monitoring our websites we are able to learn more about our users and are able to leverage off of the links they use most and the ones they do not use at all. This redesigned site allows users to get straight to what they need by allowing them to quickly and easily search for they want.

Users can even simply start to type in questions and answers from Agent Kay will come up before they finish typing for some questions. The approach advances the State of Kansas

and allows us to give our users a more useful and convenient way to get answers and connect with state agencies, services, officials.

Impact

Since the released early this month, feedback has been consistently received. Of course, the responses vary, but we are finding that most users are finding the site easier to navigate and are able to find things quicker.

Before the site was redesigned, our heat mapping services showed us that users were not finding what they were looking for. They even had to click through multiple tabs to navigate to the desired location. Now, we are finding that users only have to type a few letters of a keyword to get their answers. Our self-funded model allows us to work on this project without government assistance, and because of that, we are able to work at a value of over $25,000 for no-cost to the state. This project provides technologies to the state and will continue to improve and advance Kansas.