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MY MOBILE VIRGINIA WIRELESS PORTAL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virginia.gov is the nation's first state portal to offer a wireless government portal, My Mobile Virginia (www.vipnet.org/mobilegov), for mobile access to Virginia government information services. With the growing popularity of personal digital assistants, PDAs, and wireless Internet connectivity, a need to access state government information via those devices has emerged. PDAs, wireless phones, and various WAP-enabled devices currently have presentation restrictions that make it difficult to navigate most Web sites based on current site design. By reviewing existing Web-based applications, studying the state portal's Web metrics, and interviewing state agency IT departments and citizens, a subset of services and content was defined for display on a wireless portal. Current Web-based applications that access government information and services were the first targets for conversion to access via wireless devices. Using existing technologies such as XML, WML, and Web clippings, new interfaces were developed to access the same information and services presented on an agency's Web site.

The Virginia Information Providers Network, VIPNet, is the network manager for Virginia's Internet and mobile government portals. To date, VIPNet has worked with seven state agency partners to develop more than a dozen services for access via wireless devices and PDAs. Users now access public meeting information, track legislation of interest, confirm the license status of their health professionals, locate a local golf course or bed and breakfast, or find their local polling place via mobile access.

By providing citizens with the wireless alternative, Virginia has enabled citizens to not only access government information at **any time**, but also from **anywhere**. No longer must citizens be held hostage to a desktop PC in order to be able to conveniently interact with government.

MY MOBILE VIRGINIA WIRELESS PORTAL

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & LENGTH OF TIME IN OPERATION

With the growing popularity of personal digital assistants, PDAs, and wireless Internet connectivity, a need to access state government information via those devices has emerged. PDAs, smartphones, and various WAP-enabled devices currently have presentation restrictions that make it difficult to navigate most Virginia state government Web sites as they are. By reviewing existing applications, studying the state portal's Web metrics, and interviewing state agency IT departments and citizens, a subset of applications and content were defined for display through the wireless portal. Current Web-based applications that access government information and services were the first targets for transport to wireless devices. Using existing technologies such as XML, WML, and Web clippings, new interfaces were developed to access the same information presented on agency Web sites.

The identified Web-based services were modified for use on the smaller, hand-held screen, with the interactive components of these services reconfigured to return palm-optimized pages. The palm-based services retain the same functionality, navigation, and breadth of information service as their Web-based counterparts.

Information, instructions, demonstrations for these services are provided from the link PDA/Wireless Services from Virginia's state portal home page (www.virginia.gov) or can be directly accessed with a wireless device at www.vipnet.org/mobilegov.

Virginia began deploying its first mobile government services in November of 2000 with the introduction of real-time election results via PDA's with wireless Internet connectivity. The following month, Virginia launched its legislative tracking service for mobile access. Following the subsequent development of other mobile government-to-citizen service, Virginia launched the first wireless government portal, My Mobile Virginia (www.vipnet.org/mobilegov) on July 1, 2002.

My Mobile Virginia is a simple and organized gateway to state government wireless information and services. It functions through the use of a logical and intuitive link architecture consisting of simple HTML links and information formatted for the smaller display screens of portable wireless devices. This architecture facilitates easy access and navigation through the various wireless government services and information.

Users need to know and use just one URL rather than the typical process of learning and entering individually the URLs of each service for which they need. By following a familiar portal link architecture, the user first logs on to the My Mobile Virginia homepage and is presented with simple categories that help guide them to their destination. Users will quickly choose from a State Government link where they can access location and contact information for the various

Virginia state agencies; an Online Services link where they will be presented with a list of links to available wireless services and service categories such as Tourism information and lookups, the Consumer Assistance Portal's Complaint Selector, and the Commonwealth Calendar; and a link to Emergency Information allowing access to emergency service providers such as the Virginia State Police, the Department of Emergency Management, and the American Red Cross. Once the users decide what type of information or service they need, they simply click to it.

Ultimately, Virginia's goal is to make all government information services available simultaneously via the user's preferred communications mechanism, whether that is a desktop personal computer or a wireless phone. From a development perspective, new technologies including XML will permit VIPNet and government entities to concurrently create electronic information services that are accessible via PCs, palm devices, wireless telephones, or whatever communications device is available.

My Mobile Virginia includes contact information for:
- Governor and Executive Branch Secretariats
- Judicial Branch
- Legislative Branch
- General Assembly
  - Meeting information
  - House of Delegates member listings
  - Senate member listings
- Emergency Information
  - Virginia State Police
  - Department of Emergency Management
  - Red Cross
  - Blood Services of Virginia

The following are brief descriptions of wireless-enabled services currently offered via My Mobile Virginia:
- Consumer Assistance Portal - This tool assists consumers in finding the appropriate federal, state, or local government agency with whom to file a consumer complaint.
- Commonwealth Calendar - Search for official meetings and events posted online by Virginia government entities.
- Tourism Information - Search by city to find current weather information or contact information and descriptions of lodging, dining, and golf in Virginia. This service also allows citizens to search attractions by type and city.
- Election Results - The nation's first real-time elections results in a wireless version.
- Lobbyist-In-A-Box - A legislative tracking service built to the specifications of the lobbyist audience that allows users to receive email notifications of changes to legislation they choose to track.
- Polling Place Look-up - Find your local polling place online. This service also includes links to your elected officials.
- ABC Store Locator - Search by city to find the address of the closest ABC store near you, the phone number, and the store's hours of operation.
- VA Mobile Tax - VA Mobile TAX is a convenient way for PDA users to access information about taxes in Virginia. Information on where to file, business FAQs, individual FAQs and more is available via the VA Mobile TAX portal.

SIGNIFICANCE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE OPERATION TO GOVERNMENT

Virginia's development of a mobile government portal and palm-enabled, wireless accessible information services is a further step in the state's electronic government evolution. My Mobile Virginia is providing Virginia state agencies and other government entities with the technology and infrastructure so that those entities may provide citizens government information and services virtually anywhere. The significance of mobile state government, and demand for those services, is growing exponentially as citizens increasingly depend upon cell phones and PDA-type devices to communicate and obtain and exchange information, versus the desktop personal computer. Just as Internet technology enabled the state to meet citizen needs for access to government information and services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, My Mobile Virginia now facilitates government entities meeting that demand from the line of a grocery store or bus stop.

VIPNet devoted significant development resources (several hundred man-hours) to the creation of the initial palm-enabled services as the network learned the new technology. Under that technology, PDA-enabling Web-based applications require customization of the html coding for the presentation of the information so that it may be displayed on a PDA-size screen. However, subsequent development efforts for new wireless services has been less time consuming because many existing Web-based services are already well adapted for wireless access, particularly those services that are more text based and do not have substantial graphical presentation. With the development of wireless applications there also is the opportunity to reuse the existing code of applications currently available. Leveraging existing code has saved significant development time and money required to create such services.

VIPNet is working with other government IT personnel to learn the latest requirements and technology to adapt a variety of services so they may be deployed through various wireless and WAP devices. This partnership is allowing developers to leverage their individual knowledge base and initiatives for a significantly larger cause: the deployment of information and services by various modes to meet the individual needs of citizens.

New tools and standards, including XML, WML and various content management systems, will further facilitate those development efforts and will permit simultaneous programming of both traditional Web-based delivery and newer PDA device displays. For example, the state tourism site simultaneously provides weather information via its Web site and the My Mobile Virginia portal because it receives the weather data in the XML format. Other agencies are now making state information services, such as the state employee directory, available as a Web service that can then be accessed for wireless delivery. This simultaneous deployment will allow for greater opportunities to meet the needs of citizens. Virginia government is moving toward ultimate accessibility and better customer service.

BENEFITS REALIZED BY SERVICE RECIPIENTS

Virginia government has consistently been a leader in providing information services to its constituents via the most convenient and accessible mechanisms available. What started as a PC–based, Web revolution in electronic service delivery now has expanded to encompass a wealth of different PDA devices. Virginia is utilizing those new technologies as yet another means of providing better service delivery. Today, users may access an increasing number of government services and information via wireless devices.

The introduction of Web-based access to government several years ago changed government operations by making information and services available at any time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Virginia's expanding utilization of PDA technology makes government available **anytime** and **anywhere**. Thus, users no longer are tied to a desktop PC in order to access or interact with government. Rather, while traveling at a park, or in line at a grocery store, users may obtain the government-related information they need and, in an expanding number of instances, exchange information with government as well.

Citizen use of the My Mobile Virginia portal and wireless services is growing significantly. Since the portal's launch in 2002, there have been more than 772,000 page views and 23,000 user sessions.

News reporters were the first to praise the convenience and efficiency gained from Virginia's wireless government services when they were able to report election results live from a particular party's campaign headquarters. Those reporters were neither at their PCs nor on the phone awaiting to hear the results, but, rather, tracked the election results via their PDAs as the registrars across Virginia posted the results real-time.

Similarly, users tracking Virginia legislation have realized tremendous savings in time and effort by being able to access real-time legislative information and updates via wireless devices. Those users spend the majority of their days, and nights, away from their PCs and in legislative-related meetings. The wireless service allows both citizens and lobbyists to be notified immediately, regardless of where they are, when changes occur to legislation of interest. This has revolutionized the way professional lobbyists have been able to complete their job:

> "**I no longer must be at my desk, in front of my computer in order to track Virginia legislation. With wireless access, I keep up with my bills as I do my job in and around the Capitol.**"

Government entities across Virginia also have benefited from the new electronic information delivery methods by being able to provide their services to more users, more conveniently, and with little additional expenditure of resources. For example, the voter registrars' offices have cited the efficiencies that they have gained because the mobile government services have reduced the number of phone inquiries that they receive for election results on election nights.

Furthermore, in addition to improving government operations by making government accessible at anytime and any place, Virginia's use of PDA technology also is helping to make government available to **anybody** who has an electronic communications device. Although a significant percentage of the population has access to PCs, the "digital divide" still includes many people who do not. However, an even higher percentage of the population, and one that cuts across broader socio-economic distinctions, utilize many of the PDA devices available today, such as wireless telephones. Industry analysts have consistently recognized that the desktop PC of today may not be the primary means of Internet access tomorrow.

Under that assumption, Virginia is hoping to serve an even broader percentage of its population by making its government services available through these alternative electronic means, which often involve less costly equipment. Virginia is preparing for tomorrow while meeting the needs of citizens today.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT, SHORT-TERM/LONG-TERM PAYBACK

VIPNet provides funding for the development and maintenance of the My Mobile Virginia wireless portal at no cost to the Commonwealth. VIPNet is operated through a public/private partnership between Virginia and the e-government company NIC. VIPNet is funded through fees generated by services for businesses including enhanced data access and electronic filing services. The revenues generated by those business services have funded the development of My Mobile Virginia and the interactive wireless services.

As described above, VIPNet has been coordinating its development efforts with other government entities that are interested in providing mobile government services. Some of those entities have devoted staff resources (a portion of the time of one to two staff members) to those projects but are benefiting from the shared development information and infrastructure that has enabled them to develop mobile services more quickly and less expensively.

Virginia's short term return on investment has been significant as government entities have been able to offer a dozen new services to citizens via mobile devices and do so in a relatively short time frame and without a substantial cost. Citizen user feedback regarding the services has been overwhelmingly positive and has quantified the benefits of the service: citizens are accessing the mobile government services from almost any place they need to do so. That convenience of location, combined with the 24x7 availability of the services, has resulted in substantial timesavings for users (from the reporters and lobbyists following election results and legislation remotely at the State Capitol and legislative buildings to the voter trying to find his/her polling place on election day after the registrar's office has closed).

Longer term, the benefits to the state, and the end users, will continue to increase. My Mobile Virginia provides the technology and infrastructure enterprise necessary to dramatically expand the number and types of services available via wireless devices and PDAs. Virginia can then move towards simultaneous development and deployment of government information services via multiple means of delivery: Internet, via PCs, wireless access, integrated voice response, or whatever new technology brings next.