Executive Summary

That government idea of forming a more perfect union with "we the people" is catching on in Missouri. Separate budgets, separate (state and federal) statutory requirements and separate privacy issues all contribute to separate business processes for each state entity. Changing the face of government processes to meet citizens at their convenience and on their terms is not a natural process. It requires collaboration to share resources and information and adapt business processes to the citizen's perspective and agenda.   Collaboration is a challenging concept for a government organization. There is no recipe since we haven't done this before. The Missouri Business Portal is the project, and collaboration is the key ingredient.

The Missouri Business Portal Mission Statement is to create a single access point – one stop shop for new and aspiring businesses so they can make informed business decisions on information available – easy registration of new business. Governor Matt Blunt said in a press conference, "Make the process of starting a business as hassle free as possible." The support of the Governor, his administration and the Secretary of State have been key components to the success of the Missouri Business Portal project.

The Secretary of State and the Director of the Department of Economic Development co-sponsor the project. A steering committee representing each of the stakeholder entities is providing overall direction and support. The project team was drawn from 4 executive agencies, one elected official's office and an agency of the University of Missouri. Together, these team members identified the requirements of starting and running a business and approached the solution from the perspective of the business owner. The project's first phase is now complete. This phase is the gateway to state government for businesses. The Portal itself has information guiding the user to appropriate links. This one-stop concept allows businesses to conduct their required registrations and filings with a minimum of time and effort. The remaining phases will implement a modular architecture allowing the number of agencies represented to grow in an orderly fashion. This architecture will further automate business registration and provide lookups for required state permits or licenses and links to city and county regulatory agencies.

The project team was able to build upon previous efforts to streamline the business registration process. Utilizing existing applications allows the responsible agencies the capability of maintaining those applications in a manner appropriate to the specific needs of the situation.

Key difficulties of the project were the lack of precedence for enterprise collaboration and working through the silo structure of state government. Efforts of the project sponsors and steering committee set aside political and branding issues and allowed the team to focus on a customer centric product. The size of the project was dealt with by breaking the efforts down into phases rather than attempting the entire project as one big effort.

The team was able to avoid costs by creating the Portal with existing state resources. All design and development has been performed by state employees, at no additional direct cost to the citizens. During the planning stage, the team obtained a quote of $33,623 to complete the design of the Portal. Doing the work in-house saved the taxpayers that expense.

The impact to the stakeholders of the project has been the development of the Portal as a one-stop location for business information for the entire lifecycle of the business.   The Portal is available 24/7, at the customer's convenience rather than the convenience of the State.

Problem

Previously, a business owner or potential business owner wanting to register his/her business with the State of Missouri needed to decide what licenses and permits were needed, which agency issued those licenses and what they had to do to register. A business could have to register with up to 14 different state entities, each with its own individual registration process. This process was the outcropping of years of state government working in silos. Bringing the state's business registration stakeholders together for a collaborated solution that was focused on the interests of the citizen was the challenge. The answer was to create the Missouri Business Portal. Bringing these disparate perspectives together required the collaboration of four executive agencies, one elected official's office and an agency of the University of Missouri.

Solution

The Missouri Business Portal was launched on February 20, 2007.

There are several factors that have led to the successful development of the Missouri Business Portal. Encouraging business growth in Missouri is a major goal of Governor Blunt's administration. The proliferation of the Internet provides the conduit for providing citizens with state services online rather than in line. Gathering citizen information once and using it many times is practical, efficient and expected. These factors facilitate the concept of collaboration. State entities working together and looking at processes from the citizen's perspective is good for everyone. At the press conference to kick off the Missouri Business Portal Governor Blunt said, "As the result of the hard work of Missourians, the economy is growing, new small businesses are starting and high quality family-supporting jobs are being created. This project is part of our continuing efforts to partner with entrepreneurs by helping create a pro-jobs, pro-growth climate in our state." At the same press conference Secretary of State Robin Carnahan said, "The Missouri Business Portal is a terrific resource for businesses large and small. As a small business owner myself, I know how valuable it will be in helping business owners access the resources they need from state government."

Missouri's small businesses account for 93.77% of the total businesses in the state. Those small businesses employ 732,860 Missourians. Over 43,600 new jobs are created each year in Missouri and 93% of those are created by small businesses.

The Missouri Business Portal project team includes a business representative and an information technology resource from each of the stakeholder entities: Secretary of State, Department of Revenue, Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Department of Economic Development, University of Missouri's Small Business Development Centers and the Office of Administration. This team is supported and guided by a Steering Committee of executives from each of the stakeholder entities. The Steering Committee is sanctioned by the state's Information Technology Advisory Board (ITAB). From an enterprise perspective the state's CIO, Dan Ross, chairs ITAB and serves on the Steering Committee. The Missouri Business Portal Project is steeped in the state's enterprise IT culture which is a facilitating factor in this collaboration effort.

The consolidation of the executive agencies IT shops under Governor Blunt is another enabling factor for enterprise collaboration in Missouri. Consolidation positions the state's major IT hardware and software resources on an enterprise plane under the state's CIO, Dan Ross. This gives the reporting structure in the executive agencies an enterprise focus, and serves as a springboard for developing and delivering citizen-centric services.

The Missouri Business Portal project is the result of a number of negotiated compromises. The project team invested the time and energy to identify each entity's statutory and process requirements. These requirements were then logically assembled as a business owner would consider them and molded into a conceptual plan for processing a business registration with the state.

One of the early decisions by the project team was to build on the state's existing online business applications. The Departments of Revenue and Labor and Industrial Relations implemented Consolidated Registration (COREG) in 2002. COREG is an online application for business owners to register for several types of tax with the Department of Revenue and for unemployment tax with the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. The Secretary of State also has online processes for registering limited liability companies, filing annual reports, searching for businesses and searching for registered agents. Building on these applications allowed us to establish the precedence for maintaining the software for agency specific processing at the agency level. At the same time, the creation of the business portal allowed us to present the state's business related processes, including registering a business, as a one-stop service to the citizen.

During discussions, the team realized that it was appropriate to address the entire business lifecycle rather than just startup. This concept provides the business owner one location to access for all needs from concept to startup to growth and finally, to the end of the business. The Portal offers links to 200 government business sites. The Portal is available 24/7, at the customer's convenience rather than the convenience of the agency.

In order to facilitate the collaboration necessary to accomplish this goal, Project Management methodology and the Missouri Project Management Best Practices were utilized. By definition, Project Management brings the needed resources and skill sets together as required. This multi-disciplinary approach brought the expertise of several agencies together in order to achieve the goal of creating the Missouri Business Portal.

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The Portal is arranged in four sections:
RESEARCH – showcases the Small Business Development Centers, one of our development partners, and highlights state resources for business planning. Several federal resources are also included.
REGISTER – the registration page provides guidance and links to the various registrations, licenses and permits necessary for a business.
MAINTAIN – provides links to required annual registrations and filings as well as tax and employee concerns. There is also a section on ending a business.
RESOURCES – has information on raising money for capital; growing a business, including import, export and e-commerce; employee concerns and environmental compliance.

The Portal is compliant with current State Information Technology standards and architecture, including accessibility for citizens with disabilities. The Portal is also compatible with popular web browsers and various PDA's, such as the Blackberry.

The Portal offers a Contact page with access to various state agencies and the Small Business Development Centers as well as web support personnel. A survey is also offered as a means of feedback. These methods enhance the responsiveness of the Portal to public input.

Brad Smith, State Director for National Federation of Independent Businesses for Missouri, "This is without a doubt the best resource the state has ever produced for helping brand new or existing small businesses." "Small business owners don't have time to run all over Jefferson City looking for the proper forms or licensing information that they need to stay in compliance." "When an entrepreneur wants to start a business, they normally have a million questions. This business portal is going to help answer many of them. This new site will save countless hours of leg work for potential businesses owners and existing companies." "Governor Blunt and Secretary Carnahan are to be commended for putting together such a valuable tool for the Missouri business community."

Significance of the project to the improvement of the operation of government
The Missouri Business Portal Project is proving that state government can work cooperatively across agency borders. Collaboration is a concept that state government must embrace. Technology affords a plethora of opportunities to streamline processes and deliver citizen centric services. There are no time or location logistical barriers in the virtual world. However, collaboration is a relatively new concept in government.

Promoting the Portal was a major part of the implementation phase of the project. The project team recognized that the state customarily does very little to inform citizens about new services. Governor Blunt and Secretary Carnahan held a joint press conference when the Portal went live in February of this year. That event was followed by a series of press releases in newspapers, television and web based media. The project team worked with business related organizations both within state government and the private sector and to date there are more than 4,000 links to the Missouri Business Portal, www.business.mo.gov.

The Portal project is proof of concept that Project Management, enterprise architecture, standards and best practices can all work to foster collaboration on a project that truly improves service to our citizens. The Missouri Business Portal will serve as a benchmark for future state projects involving multiple agencies and data sharing.

Public value of the project

The project has focused on providing a service to the taxpayers. The Business Portal brings together information from a variety of sources related to doing business in Missouri. In addition to the service to the taxpayers, the increased usage of online business registration could save 30 to 40 hours per registration. Current online registrations for the Department of Revenue are approximately 15% of total registrations. This chart below shows the projected time savings expected at various increased levels of online registration.

Additional value added for the State of Missouri and the taxpayer revolve around improved speed, accuracy and efficiency of the registration process. The project also serves as a benchmark for future multi-agency projects and data sharing among agencies.

Performing this project with existing state resources avoids the cost of outsourcing the effort. During initial conversations, the team obtained a quote from a consultant for the design of the initial phase of the Portal. This quote was for $33,623. With three additional phases in the project, the total cost avoidance may well exceed $100,000.

CITIZEN HOURS SAVED WITH ONLINE REGISTRATION

Bar chart titled "CITIZEN HOURS SAVED WITH ONLINE REGISTRATION" with y-axis labeled "CITIZEN HOURS SAVED" and x-axis labeled "Percentage of registrations online". Values: 20% = 57000, 25% = 114000, 30% = 171000, 35% = 228000, 40% = 285000, 45% = 342000, 50% = 399000.