**2011 NASCIO RECOGNITION AWARD NOMINATION**


**Nomination Category: Digital Government: Government to Business**


# Business.ca.gov: California's Business Portal


**California Technology Agency**

**Office of Technology Services**

# Section B. Executive Summary

California is the top-ranked among states for venture capital, foreign direct investment, and small business employers. However, in February 2010, a report by the state's Little Hoover Commission outlined the problem of the growing gap between California's golden potential and its economic performance. Since 2003, California has slipped from the world's 5th largest economy to the 8th. One of the key issues identified in the report was that the State of California did not have a centralized entity to increase economic growth and create jobs. The Governor's Office of Economic Development (GoED) was created to respond to this problem by consolidating various state government economic development efforts.

To maximize its impact, GoED wanted a single point of contact to help businesses acquire the direction, information and resources they need to invest, succeed and expand in California. So GoED worked collaboratively with the Office of Technology Services (OTech) and other state and local agencies to create a Web Portal (Business.Ca.gov) with one-stop access to state-level information and resources for businesses, consolidating content and contact information for numerous public and private entities in the state.

The Business.ca.gov website is an innovative mix of high quality visual content and functional resources for business owners. From step-by-step instructions for how to start a business or obtain the necessary permits, to an interactive map that shows you where hundreds of resources exist all across the state, the website is the online embodiment of the state's only One-Stop-Shop for business.

The GoED web portal was completed and launched in April 2010. Developed in collaboration with 11 agencies, Business.ca.gov consolidates data, information and resources from more than 15 sources, and includes 400 pages of valuable information for domestic and foreign businesses of all sizes. The effort was completed in 27 days.

During the last year alone, the Business.ca.gov website had 311,504 visitors and allowed GoED to provide assistance to over 4,000 businesses, with 98% of these businesses being small businesses. The website is aligned with the Governor's and NASCIO's top priorities of improving efficiencies, and achieving cost savings through collaboration and consolidation.

In addition to the intangible and significant benefits of economic development and associated job creation, the Business.ca.gov website provides cost savings and cost avoidance for state government and California businesses, through efficient, direct contact with the most important information, regulation, and contacts for creating or expanding a business in California.

# Section C. Description of the Business Problem and Solution

**Problem:**

A February 2010 report by California's Little Hoover Commission highlighted the fragmentation of the state's economic development activities. These activities were spread out over several agencies, boards, commissions, allocation committees and financing authorities. More than 10 advisory panels, boards and commissions, with more than 150 combined members from the public and private sectors provided guidance on how the state should spend millions of dollars on economic and workforce development programs.

This fragmentation led to:

- The lack of a holistic approach to facilitate economic growth, including multiple, overlapping state agencies involved in providing services for business development.
- A lack of visibility for the state's toolbox of economic development resources, which were scattered across disparate organizations;
- The lack of a single point of contact for businesses, local economic development organizations or even other state-level actors to learn about and access state economic development programs, or find help to resolve permitting issues or navigating regulations;  and
- A diminished ability to help to businesses and local economic development agencies.

**Solution:**
To address these issues, in April 2010 California created the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GoED). As a "one-stop shop and concierge service" for businesses, the GoED's mission is to provide the information and resources needed to start, relocate, or expand businesses in the state. GoED coordinates the efforts of 11 state agencies involved in economic development activities, centralizing and consolidating services, operations and resources into a single office. However, the office needed to reach prospective businesses across the world and around the corner. The office joined forces with the Office of Technology Services (OTech) to create a web portal, Business.Ca.gov, to serve as the primary platform to interface with the business community. The website is an innovative mix of high quality visual content and functional resources for business owners. The website:

- Consolidated the state's toolbox of business resources, making these resources available and accessible in one intuitive site
- Serves as the single point of contact for businesses when they need help with policies, regulations, or help starting, expanding or relocating their business in the state.

- Leveraged existing skillsets and technology in the state to maximize results while minimizing costs.

The entire effort to create 400 pages of content from 15 different data sources representing 11 different agencies was completed in 27 days from start to finish. That included helping the new GoED organization with internal organizational structure, roles and responsibilities and training on the Content Management System (CMS) so that they could be self sufficient from day one.

**Technical Details:**
The website was a collaborative effort among 11 departments including GoED, Otech, Symsoft Solutions, and Sabot Technologies, and other state and local economic development agencies. It was built on a CMS platform that uses Cascading Style Sheets. The CMS is leveraged from other OTech website implementations to reduce costs and utilize their technical skill. CMS allows non-technical business users to securely edit web content, eliminating the need for IT web developers to update the web page content. This helps to keep content relevant and current at all times.

In addition to 400 content-rich pages, Business.ca.gov uses innovative layouts and content organization to provide easy access for businesses and other innovative features such as an interactive map for locating business resources, a permit lookup wizard, an integrated event calendar for all business-related events in the state, and an integrated business news room with content in four languages. The website provides access to GoED's social media presence, including Facebook and Twitter, to engage and collaborate with users.

California's website team embraces the most aggressive accessibility standards in the nation, implementing measures beyond those required in Section 508 to serve users with a disability.

Business.Ca.Gov website was launched on April 7, 2010. The site has been in service more than one year. Development cost was projected to be $100,000, while actual development cost was $95,000.

**Project Management and Communications:**
OTech staff managed the technical aspects of the project using the California Project Management Methodology, working collaboratively with GoED and the other partners to develop requirements, create the site and test and approve it. The project plan included communications requirements, such as regular communication between OTech and GoED at each phase of the project and a rollout strategy to the public.

# Section D. Significance of the Project

Since April 2010, the Business.Ca.gov website has been a key resource to promote economic development and job creation in California. The website is used for business-

oriented outreach and marketing efforts to promote California as a place for business investment.

The website supports the Governor's priorities of economic development and job creation, improving efficiencies through collaboration and consolidation of business services and resources. Using Otech's skilled webmasters and CMS aligns with the Goals 1, 2, and 3 of the Statewide IT Strategic Plan by using a collaborative effort to create an accessible shared service solution to reduce costs and improve outcomes.

The main stakeholders of Business.ca.gov are the business community, the state and local agencies and GoED. The business community is the primary consumer of the information and services provided on the website, while the state and local agencies, and GoED staff are primary content providers. The CMS Platform allows state and local agencies and GoED staff to securely provide timely, relevant updates to the website.

Business.ca.gov provides valuable resources for businesses of all kinds, domestic and foreign, small and large, in a user-friendly manner for easy access. The website recognizes businesses' specific needs, including information for specific sectors (such as green energy), where the business is in the "business lifecycle" (whether growing, relocating, or starting out), and what kind of assistance they need (such as taxes or employment). The website is also the starting point for foreign investors when they research California's business climate to find resources and incentives.

The portal's technology:

- Helps businesses target California opportunities and helps GoED target specific businesses with an event calendar, news feeds, and social media tie-ins;
- Provides an interactive way to help with planning and focusing efforts; and
- Helps businesses save time and frustration through the permit lookup function while reducing calls to state and local offices.

For state and local agencies, the website is the first point-of-contact for the businesses, and is used to provide coordinated marketing for the state's economic development programs and business opportunities. The website also is used by businesses to contact GoED staff to seek clarification or request additional help. With the website's CMS platform, the business staff at GoED is able to provide timely and relevant information to the stakeholders.

California has many distinct economies and their needs and interactions with each other are complex. The business.ca.gov website strongly supports the state's strategic plan to stimulate prosperity by taking the first major step to raise awareness about the state's toolbox of economic development resources and its diverse economy.

## Section E. Benefit of the Project

Business.ca.gov provides high quality visual content and functional resources for business owners. From step-by-step instructions for how to start a business or obtain

the necessary permits, to the interactive map that shows hundreds of resources all across the state, the business.ca.gov website is the state's online One-Stop-Shop for business. Quantitative measures that demonstrate the benefits of the website include:

- **Business Leads:** In the first year alone, the website allowed GoED to provide over 4,000 businesses with assistance such as starting a new business, financing a business, site selection, expansion and relocation, international trade development, state procurement, permit assistance, clearing regulatory hurdles, commercialization of new products and much more. 98% of those businesses were small businesses with fewer than 100 employees.

- **Interest in California Business:** Between its April 2010 launch and May 2011, the business.ca.gov website has had 311,504 visitors and 1,221,828 page views.

- **Transparency:**
  - The business.ca.gov website hosts the CalGOLD permit database. This CalGOLD database allows a prospective new business to see all of the permits they need (city, county, state and federal) to get started. This valuable tool saves time and money for prospective business owners as well as consultants and state and local officials. Since April of 2010, the CalGOLD database has had 287,149 visitors and 1,176,482 page views.

  - The business.ca.gov website features a comprehensive event calendar that informs constituents and stakeholders of upcoming events all around the state. The website features GoED events and the events of its public and private sector partners. So far, the website has publicized over 1,000 events in almost every county in California.

- **Social Media Tie-Ins:** The business.ca.gov website provides access to GoED's Facebook and Twitter pages. The GoED Facebook page has 200 fans, over half of whom joined in the last 3 months. And the Twitter account has over 750 followers.

**Cost Avoidance Benefits:**

- Business.ca.gov provides an innovative, efficient website that allows GoED, a small agency, to serve populations that are important to California. It provides easy access to concierge-level services, personal contacts with GoED staff who help cut red tape and questions. The site also makes it easy to find the right information quickly, contact the right person to move ahead, and apply for permits conveniently online – which saves time and money for Business.ca.gov users and GoED staff. The website reduces costs for the state and California businesses. Without the GoED website, no one place existed where businesses could find information quickly. Rather, this information was distributed across many agencies and departments. Navigating through "who does what" was a difficult task for small businesses relying on timely information.

- GoED staff now manage their website on their own, without depending on IT web developers, saving the state about $50,000 per year.

**Alignment with NASCIO priorities:**

The project aligns with the NASCIO's 2011 state CIO priorities of:

- **Consolidation / Optimization** by consolidating the business development services across 11 state agencies into a single office and delivering these services through a common website. It further combined multiple websites and databases into a single website, with a single database hosted in one location.

- **Shared Services** by sharing resources, services, infrastructure, independent of organizational structure within various state agencies serving the needs of business community.

- **Social media and networking** by serving as the backbone of the GoED's social media strategy, and by connecting users with the GoED's social media pages. It also provides users of the website an opportunity to send their questions and feedback through the website. The GoED staff can create their blogs, and post events from all organizations that conduct business related events.

Through the website, businesses make connections, and these connections lead to jobs and innovations in California. The website has helped California businesses by saving their time and effort in locating the right information while collaborating with business program leaders toward mutual prosperity. By getting businesses off the ground sooner, this site helps create jobs and stimulate the economy at a time it is needed the most.