Re-design of CT.gov / Business Portal

Category	State CIO Office Special Recognition
State	Connecticut
Contact	Mark Raymond, Chief Information Officer
mark.raymond@ct.gov
Project Initiation	January 2014
End Date	June 2015

Executive Summary

The State of Connecticut launched its first CT.gov statewide portal back in 2002 in order to provide a mechanism for state agencies to share information about government services to its citizens. Over time, the needs for citizen's access to government services has quickly outgrown the thousands of html files with scrolling text and large cumbersome pdf documents. The broadened use of technology coupled with the use of mobile devices has created an unwavering demand to make government services more available to the citizens at the time and place that they are needed.

Through its partnership with Connecticut Interactive, a NIC Inc. subsidiary, the State of Connecticut entered into an agreement to assess the current state of the existing CT.gov statewide portal and deliver a top-level re-design aimed at the following goals:

- Leverage CT.gov as the main entry point for citizens to access statewide government services making content easier to locate
- Implement the new design on a device agnostic responsive platform to support the demands of increased mobility across all devices
- Use data and analytics to develop insights into user behavior and overall site engagement as input into future design improvements

In June 2015 the new CT.gov statewide portal was launched and included re-designs for the Governor and Lieutenant Governor Websites and Business Portal.

CONCEPT:

Like many government websites the original CT.gov statewide portal was structured from the inside out through the lens of the internal agency organizational structures. With over 60+ plus government agencies and thousands of web pages and files it was up to the citizens to understand and make sense of what services were offered and how to access the services. The new CT.gov statewide portal included several optimizations focused on home page design and layout, improved search capabilities, enhanced user interactivity, mobility and broader use of web analytics.

The home page design was optimized through the use of related structured content topics to help citizens and businesses identify the services quickly and efficiently. A user driven popular links section can help navigate to services based on seasonal activity and statewide events. User defined settings to adjust for language translation, a high contrast stylesheet and font-resizing are provided as settings to improve overall user experience.

User interactivity is promoted through various communication channels within the new site. Users can submit a government related question or take a brief survey about the new site re-design to let the CT.gov team know how the site is performing. Social media interactions with the agencies are also summarized across eleven different channel outlets.

Access to government websites and online services using a smart device is on the rise. The new mobile-friendly CT.gov site conforms to the size of the user's device screen, creating the best user experience possible on any device.

Search capabilities and web analytics were improved through the integration of Google Site Search and Google Analytics in the redesign of CT.gov. The new CT.gov implemented Google Site Search, moving away from the state's existing Google Search Appliance. Taking advantage of Google's external web search proved to return superior and more comprehensive results compared with the internal appliance. Google Site Search enables features for ct.gov such as customizable design integration, label refinements, image search, ad free results, including searches by date and future promotions in autocomplete. Google analytics were fully integrated to broaden the use of data and analytics to understand user website tendencies, leading to increased user traffic and metrics development to measure the efficiency of the new design and features.

SIGNIFICANCE:

CT.gov and the Business Portal is built to serve every audience. Government has a responsibility to provide accessible resources to empower its citizens and audience. The State of Connecticut and CI have delivered a high quality, innovative, online resource for the public and state employees though the new CT.gov and Business Portal.

The level of effort involved in redesigning the new CT.gov was no small task as it had not undergone a design and structure change of this magnitude since its initial launch in 2002. The starting point focused on the top 1,000 viewed CT.gov pages/urls by visitors prior to the redesign. These top pages/urls had then undergone a card sorting exercise with a select group of business owners across the entire state government landscape. Card sorting was used to generate the new CT.gov content topics and for outlining the new information architecture, workflow, menu structure, and web site navigation paths.

In addition to delivering a long overdue content refresh and redesign to the visitors of CT.gov, Connecticut has some of the most stringent web accessibility policies in the country which results in a higher standard for CT.gov and the Business Portal and its services. Throughout the design process it was imperative that CT.gov was developed and committed to ensure accessibility for everyone from the beginning.

In order to realize the rollout a successful redesign of the CT.gov website, hundreds of design hours and user testing from internal and external visitors as well as 3rd party experts in the industry were focused on the task of delivering a redesigned CT.gov that aimed to make government services more accessible for online visitors to conduct business with the state through increased usability, customer service, transparency, and accessibility.

Launching an all new business portal was also a significant and top priority included in the redesign. The new business portal now houses an online presence that consolidates various business-related solutions provided by multiple state agencies, and allows for the flexibility to introduce additional new services that make it easier for the private sector to form, operate and expand businesses in Connecticut.

Increasing technology expectations of consumers evolve rapidly and CT.gov and the Business Portal remains ahead of those expectations by providing over 90 online services, and including over 300,000 pages of information, and proactive notifications from a range of sources such as email, text messages and social media outlets. CT.gov and the Business Portal are delivering a resource on the cutting edge of technology with the capacity to scale in the anticipation of future demands.

IMPACT:

Substantial conveniences are now available to the users of CT.gov and the Business Portal which have now been firmly established as a centralized location for access to all government services. Just some of the impact areas and ways the CT.gov and the Business Portal are truly making government better in the State of Connecticut are:

Reenergized Top Official Websites: Along with the updated CT.gov Portal, Connecticut launched new websites for the Office of the Governor and Office of the Lieutenant Governor, providing the latest news and information from both top offices at the users' fingertips.

Redesigned Business Portal: Centralized the state's business-related services with the goal of encouraging the private sector to operate and expand businesses in Connecticut.

Fast, Reliable Search Features: CT.gov utilizes Google Search, which provides fast, accurate results. The search box is prominently displayed and uses "assistive" search suggestions to guide users. The new widespread search locates information throughout CT.gov and other related websites, which pinpoints the exact information needed. The new search utilizes Google site search that leads to increased accuracy for each search experience.

- The most recent analytics during the month of April 2016 indicate the non-state visitor traffic utilized the search feature to find the information they were looking for on CT.gov 80% of the time.

Speed: CT.gov and the Business Portal continues to decrease response times. This is important for all users, but especially those on mobile devices. Optimization techniques include use of CSS sprite images, consolidating JavaScript and CSS files, using GZIP for plain text files, and preventing the download of most images and scripts from the smartphone view.

- The most recent analytics during the month of April 2016 for the CT.gov homepage the average response time was 482ms, less than half a second.

Customer Service: Superior customer service is critical for government and CT.gov consistently goes above and beyond to troubleshoot all issues and support all users' needs and requests. During the first 10 months of the launch of the new website redesign the CT.gov customer service team responded to over 1,200 constituent inquiries regarding state government requests for additional information.

Website Uptime: Websites today are increasingly more complex and that can sometimes lead to a break along the way and an interruption in a visitor's experience. With the launch of the new CT.gov it was imperative to monitor uptime and be the first to know if there was an issue. CT.gov is checked automatically, testing it every minute from locations all over the world. The monitoring filters out false alerts by double-checking downtime from another location.

- The analytics from January 1, 2016 through May 9, 2016 reflect that the CT.gov homepage has an uptime of 99.99% throughout this period

Since the site launch on June 13, 2015 through May 2016 there have been approximately 140,000 unique monthly visits to the CT.gov top level portal and 788,000 page views of the top level CT.gov site each month.