Internet Access and Information Dissemination: Selected Topics - 3
Draft... for review and comment only ... Draft
Office of Technology, State of Minnesota

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10. RESOURCES

Description:
Providing adequate resources for an electronic information access and dissemination system is critical to the success of the system. Resources to support Internet use include people, technologies, funding and expertise. Planning for these resources is key to successful development and implementation of Internet capabilities. Once an agency has determined how it will use the Internet, planning can begin for resources to support its Internet use.

Staffing needs include technical people to support hardware, software and networks (e.g. Local Area Network managers and administrators); people to train employees and customers on use of the Internet; people with skills in writing and publishing for electronic media; people knowledgeable about the subject areas that will be provided over the Internet; and managers familiar with how to effectively use the Internet for business results.

Financial resources will be needed to purchase technology; provide connectivity to the Internet; train staff and customers; hire new staff or enhance skills of existing staff; and provide for on-going maintenance of Internet applications and technology.

Technology resources include hardware, software, networks and connections to other networks.

The State of Minnesota Information Resource Management (IRM) policies, standards and guidelines apply to Internet use as well as other information resources.

Recommendations:

1.
Agencies should plan appropriately for immediate and ongoing resource requirements for Internet dissemination systems. Once information is available to the public and the electronic community, it is important to have resources available to maintain information content accuracy, and to stay on top of the evolving world of electronic security.

References:
See also:
Employee Use (of the Internet)
Education and Training
Maintenance
Appendix: State of Minnesota References: Related Standards and Guidelines

11. DATA PRIVACY

Description:

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) and other related laws define how data are classified as private, confidential, or public, and under what circumstances these classifications apply. Agencies should always refer to these laws when providing - or securing - data, information, or electronic services.

When planning electronic distribution of data or information, agencies should realize any outgoing information that is not secured (see encryption and authorization in the 'Security Technology' chapter) is vulnerable to widespread public access. Unsecured data include those put on home pages, accessed documents, downloaded documents, E-mail messages, etc. Care must be taken to ensure this data is actually classified as 'public' before release.

When planning electronic service delivery, agencies should realize there may be additional information, not presently protected from public disclosure under Minnesota laws, that should be protected from public access. Examples may include electronic funds transfers, or exchange of bank account or credit card numbers. Legislation may be required before agencies collect sensitive data that is not presently classified as "not-public".

Agencies should also realize they may not infringe on the privacy of those accessing information or using electronic services.

NOTE: Technologies and security services for protecting data integrity and for verifying the identity of someone accessing a system are addressed in the chapter "Security Technology".

Requirements:

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1. **Information and services made available electronically may not contain or disclose private, confidential, or other sensitive information.**
2. **The collection and storage of all data on individuals must be limited to that necessary for the administrative and management of authorized programs. (MN Statutes Section 13.05, subd. 3.)**

References:
See also:
Appendix: Legal References
"Security Technology" chapter

12. CUSTOMER SERVICE

Description:
This chapter is about customer service in an electronic information environment. The needs and perspectives of customers should be addressed beginning with the initial design, and continuing through implementation of an information delivery system. Customer followup assistance is also

part of customer service.

The purpose of disseminating information is to provide value to someone else. The users of information, and the access system, are of paramount importance when planning and implementing a dissemination system: the success of information dissemination is in the eyes of the beholder. ("Dissemination system" includes both the information and the access, or delivery, mechanisms.)

Agencies should take the perspective of the end user when deciding what content to make available and what links to create to other documents. User expectations, expertise and skills all affect whether users will be satisfied with what they receive.

Agencies should also consider the point of view of users attempting to navigate through their electronic information. Navigation is the process of information users moving around within documents, or moving between documents and menus. Navigation should be simple, flexible and as quick as possible. Users should not have to consciously think about the navigation process while accessing electronic information.

When organizing an electronic information structure, designers should consider navigation goals, and provide a means (such as menu oriented pages) to assist the user with easy access. It is important to remember the person who prepares the information is familiar with it, but the person who is looking for it probably is not. The preparer must consider what clues to provide to someone who is starting from scratch. The customer-driven focus, along with identifying intended audiences, will help the preparer of electronic information decide how to best organize and present the material.

User input and feedback should also be considered part of customer service. Agencies should make provisions so that users can provide input and request assistance or additional materials.

Users with special needs should also be considered. For example, those with sight impairments can often be accommodated with text-to-speech screen readers, refreshable braille generators, or the ability to download and print converted braille versions of agency documents.

Requirements:

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1. **Agencies must design a "home page" (or top-level menu) as their initial introduction to customers accessing their services and information electronically.**
2. **All electronic services and information offered by an agency through Internet must be linked to the agency "home page" or top-level menu.**
3. **Agencies must link their home pages to the statewide Internet access point. Access should be available to the "lowest common denominator" of access capability (ie. Telnet rather than gopher or WWW.)**
4. **Agencies must create standards for electronic information and services that provide clear agency identification, a common look and feel, standard menus and hyperlinks, and consistency with state standards. This uniquely identifies agencies from outside**

organizations that create electronic links to agency electronic information.

Recommendations:

1. **Information should be provided based on customer needs. Some material on the Internet displays creativity but no substance or indication that anyone cares about the content.**
2. **A mechanism should be provided for users to leave comments, inquiries and requests. General user feedback should be actively solicited.**
3. **Comments, inquires and requests should be monitored and responded to in a timely manner. Agencies should establish guidelines for what constitutes "timely" in their environments. Procedures should be established for feedback followup and responses back to users.**
4. **Delivery mechanisms (usually technology) should address the needs and capabilities of users. (See also 'Public Use of the Internet' and 'Liability', elsewhere in this document).**
5. **Profiles should be defined that identify expected classes of users, their level of expertise with electronic media, their content knowledge, and available equipment and network connections.**
6. **The agency "home page" content should be focused to the general citizen. Specialized content should be introduced as users move deeper through electronic links or menus.**
7. **Agencies should strike a balance between meeting the needs of intended audiences and considering the impact of being seen by a broader audience. Generally information and services should be tailored to meet the needs of intended customers. However, in view of the broader audience, organizations should clearly identify the intended audience, purpose, and appropriate use of electronically disseminated information and services.**
8. **Agencies should link to outside services and information only when appropriate. Links to other services can be useful to customers in some circumstances. In other cases these links may be confusing and add unnecessary complexity. A good rule of thumb is that links to outside sources should enhance - rather than detract from - value to the customer, or to the information and services of the agency.**
9. **Home pages should be planned for efficient access by a broad audience. Efficiency of access should consider the technology available to users by maximizing response time and providing alternative display options (i.e., text-based and multimedia).**
10. **Personal home pages for individuals should not be allowed unless they serve a clear business purpose.**
11. **State agencies should provide easy instructions for using the information service.**
12. **Page layout should be user-friendly and should identify the access paths and functions of the**

various menu options.

13. **Agencies are encouraged to use standardized buttons (icons) for consistency.**
14. **Information links should be used with caution to avoid an excessive number of links that are not serving a logical purpose or offering convenience of navigation.**
15. **Agencies are encouraged to provide information links within a document that is long. This helps to prevent the user from wasting time scrolling through the document.**
16. **The right to equitable access should be considered for groups of people not covered under ADA, such as non-English speaking people. Government organizations should address in standards and guidelines how electronic information will be provided in other formats, media, or languages when necessary to meet the needs of some citizens.**

References:
See also:
Chapters on 'Design' and related topics for more detailed information about design issues
Chapter on 'General Information About an Agency" for more home page requirements

INFORMATION CONTENT TOPICS:

13. INFORMATION CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS

Description:
Scope: Information content includes content quality, usefulness and presentation. Individual topics related to information content include general information about an agency and its electronic services, planning and implementation, customer service, cataloging and indexing, and conversion. Each content-related topic has its own chapter containing further information.

Rationale: **'Content' refers to the substance of information or materials. For electronic material, the important information and/or services being provided are contained within electronic documents. It is the quality and usefulness of the content that provide value to - or waste the time of - the information user.**

The quality and usefulness of information are critical to both the sender and receiver of electronic documents. For example, a person searching electronic information for job availability needs to know job location, salary, application procedures, and deadlines for applications. The employment information would be of high quality if it provided the breadth and depth of detail needed by the job seeker. However, if the relevant information was not presented in a clear and meaningful way, even high quality information would not be of value. In either case, the information provider would not be providing a useful service.

The organization and presentation of the content also play a role in determining quality and usefulness. Information is useless if it is lost within a lengthy, cumbersome document.

Electronic media offer unique opportunities to provide content in new ways. Taking advantage of these opportunities can greatly improve services through improved access and more timely and meaningful information.

14. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT AN AGENCY AND ITS ELECTRONIC SERVICES

Description:
This topic addresses how an agency identifies itself to users of its electronic information.

Requirements:

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1. **General information about an agency and the electronic information and services it provides must be included on an agency's home page (or equivalent top-level menu). At a minimum, this must include: Agency title and mission Agency services in general, electronic services specifically Description of the purpose of the electronic information service(s) offered Agency contact information - including address, telephone numbers, FAX numbers, electronic mail addresses, TDD numbers, etc. User feedback instructions.**
2. **For electronic documents, the following must be included: Notices about use: e.g., update frequency; electronic "pages" that are under construction; data practices requirements; etc.**

Recommendations:

1. **Information about public services should be selected and organized based on the agency's mission and user needs and interests. (e.g., Fishing license information might be combined with campgrounds, but not with the motor vehicle registration information..)**

References:
See also:
Appendices: Legal References

15. INFORMATION QUALITY

Description:
The quality of information or services that are provided using the Internet is of critical concern to agencies. If the quality is poor, customers will not benefit from, or even use, the Internet information and service that the agency provides.

Electronic publishing capabilities using the Internet offer a new opportunity for an agency to provide customers with high quality information and services. Internet tools and services are available to produce and maintain very high quality electronic products. Through careful content planning, use of available tools, good design principles, and strategies for keeping materials current and accurate, agencies can ensure producing quality Internet products.

Requirements:

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1. **Agencies must establish procedures to ensure content will be kept current and accurate.**

Recommendations:

1. **Agencies should determine what constitutes quality for their information and services, based on customer and agency needs. Agencies should establish standards for content quality of electronic materials.**
2. **Agencies should establish procedures to ensure information and services have continued usefulness to customers.**
3. **General information laws and regulations apply to all electronic information and data. A project in "demonstration" status is still accountable for legal, statewide and agency information requirements.**

Next Section