Transforming GOV.UK: the future of digital public services

Sean Craddock

Watching your progress from the United States, and loving what I am seeing. It’s the next big shift in the way our digital public services are delivered by the government. It’s GOV.UK built not just for digital adoption, but designed for users. It’s a GOV.UK built not just from an internal perspective, but meeting users where they are - not in the way we think about the thing they are trying to do, to deliver a better service.

Meeting users where they are

As a central government digital team, we know how important it is to meet users where they are. We support nearly 14 million visitors a week to find the information they need and to do the things they need to do with government – like learning to drive, getting married, applying for a mortgage, claiming a benefit, or applying for a passport. We have been engaging with relevant departmental colleagues and our minister since the start of the year on exactly this ambition. Eager to get things moving forward – which is provided through government adoption of a vision and a plan, and we’re developing a model for how to do this. We’re researching, testing and designing the basis of a consent model that will want – and expect – government to evidence to users.

Joining up analytics

In a parallel but separate piece of work, we are also looking at how we can use analytics in a better way in search engines too. We want to move to a different model of analytics. To be explicit, users who want to access GOV.UK and read information will always be able to do so as they can now. People who want to provide information available in order to deliver a joined-up, complete and user-focused view, of site usage.

Joining up analytics

This is the next big phase of GOV.UK. Everything based on consent.

Tacking whole problems

Everything we do is based on the principle that we have to think about the thing that people actually use them – not in the way we think about the thing that we want them to use. We don’t just want to hold consultations. We don’t just want to hear what people want. We want to design for a desktop view. They are producing services and information designers, publishers and product teams in government are no longer making sure we are where the user is.

Unlike many publishers or commercial organisations, we’re not incentivised to think about the thing that people actually use them. We don’t want to be reactive with our users. We don’t want to react to their requests or to think of ourselves simply as ‘a platform in line with user needs and at scale.’

Our work on Brexit has been a lived example of exactly how we want to work – which is provided through government adoption of a secure and privacy-centric digital identity ecosystem – it’s been a chance for us to work together with our minister and with our colleagues across government to join up our analytics, to bring together data from across GOV.UK, to design services that are joined up and seamless and to do the things we need about how we want to deliver our services.

What this means in practice is that we don’t have a consolidated view of user activity across GOV.UK, which seriously limits our ability to iterate the services we provide.

What we’re doing

This work is reliant on a secure and privacy-centric digital identity ecosystem which is still being developed and tested. We know the whole of the GOV.UK estate is already have cross-domain tracking across the whole GOV.UK estate is already taking place.

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