EMBRACING IAM
FOR BETTER CITIZEN EXPERIENCES

How an identity and access management platform helped Texas deliver sweeping improvements in government services online.

—BY STATESCOOP STAFF

Government agencies are discovering that improving citizens' online user experience takes more than just modernizing IT systems for mobile customers and redesigning agency websites. It also requires a more intentional approach to identifying and managing the access of users across multiple systems.

It's driving CIOs from federal to state and local agencies to begin adopting more comprehensive, cloud-based identity and access management (IAM) solutions, similar to those used by banks and private corporations, to streamline digital transactions between government and the public.

Consumers who have grown accustomed to ordering goods, managing their finances and locating services in real time from all kinds of companies using their smart phones expect a comparable experience from government. But many government agencies, saddled with aging IT systems and proprietary applications, have had a harder time delivering that same level of service online.

Until recently, most government agencies have been focusing on technology catch-up — trying to modernize aging infrastructure and applications to improve IT services, fortify security and reduce a backlog of technical debt. That focus, however, is shifting.

Across the federal government, for instance, improving citizen experience is a key component of the President's Management Agenda (PMA), released in March.

"[I]ndividuals and businesses expect government customer services to be efficient and intuitive, just like services from leading private-sector organizations.

Yet the 2016 American Consumer Satisfaction Index and the 2017 Forrester Federal Customer Experience Index show that, on average, government services lag nine percentage points behind the private sector," the PMA notes. The PMA lays out a roadmap for closing that gap, calling for a combination of tools and strategies. State and local agencies are taking similar steps.

Central to improving the citizen experience is the need to ensure that the users of services are who they say they are, and that they only have access to the information to which they're entitled. This means the foundation of delivering citizen services, at its core, involves adopting technology that can readily identify users and manage their access privileges across multiple systems and services.

DEEP IN THE HEART OF...TEXAS.GOV

Recent initiatives by the state of Texas illustrate how integrating modern IAM solutions not only can improve customer experience but also accelerate the job of modernizing IT.

For more than a decade, the state has had a website — Texas.gov — where citizens could find information on a wide range of state services. But to actually engage those services, users had to enter information for each service individually, and each one had particular data requirements that made it cumbersome to use.

"There was no concept, historically, of a citizen having an account with the state where the citizen could view [all] the information pertinent to them — a driver's license, professional license, hunting license, et cetera," says Chris Keel, principal at Deloitte Consulting.

"The citizen had to know their [vehicle identification] number, their account numbers, et cetera, to renew. But Amazon, for example, has just two experiences — Guest and Login."

When the contract for Texas.gov was awarded to Deloitte by the Texas Department of Information Resources this past April, the company was tasked with designing and implementing a new, integrated version of the website. That meant working with component agencies on a full range of IT services, including application development, enterprise resource planning, business intelligence and data warehousing, technology migration, procurement and project management.

Deloitte's previous work with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles helped it make the case that a robust IAM solution was an essential ingredient to modernization. It also provided Deloitte a baseline understanding of the requirements for the larger Texas.gov portal.

"[We] are responsible for the whole architecture and integrations at the back and front ends," Keel explained. It was clear at the outset "how the critical information that pertains to the citizen comes together in one platform," and why it was essential for a comprehensive IAM system to "move from a stove-piped experience to a customer experience solution."

ESTABLISHING A BASELINE FOR IAM SOLUTIONS

As the system integrator/architect for the eight-year contract, Deloitte opted for IT system designs that would work with open source technologies for maximum choice and flexibility over time as technologies continue to emerge, and that would leverage cloud capabilities.

The importance of open source technologies lies in their use of open source standards, such as the REST API. REST is the acronym for "Representational State Transfer," which establishes rules for uniform interfaces. Cloud providers, for instance, use REST-based architecture so all of the functions of an application are easier to use. Providers of legacy systems, on the other hand, typically try to adapt to a cloud environment by creating wrappers, an outer layer over the applications that can only expose the specific designated functions, but which limit overall flexibility.

In addition to supporting open source, the IAM solution had to be easy to integrate with the department's back-end systems. Just as important, it had to be licensing cost-effective; Texas has the second-largest population in the United States and every adult constituent could have an account.
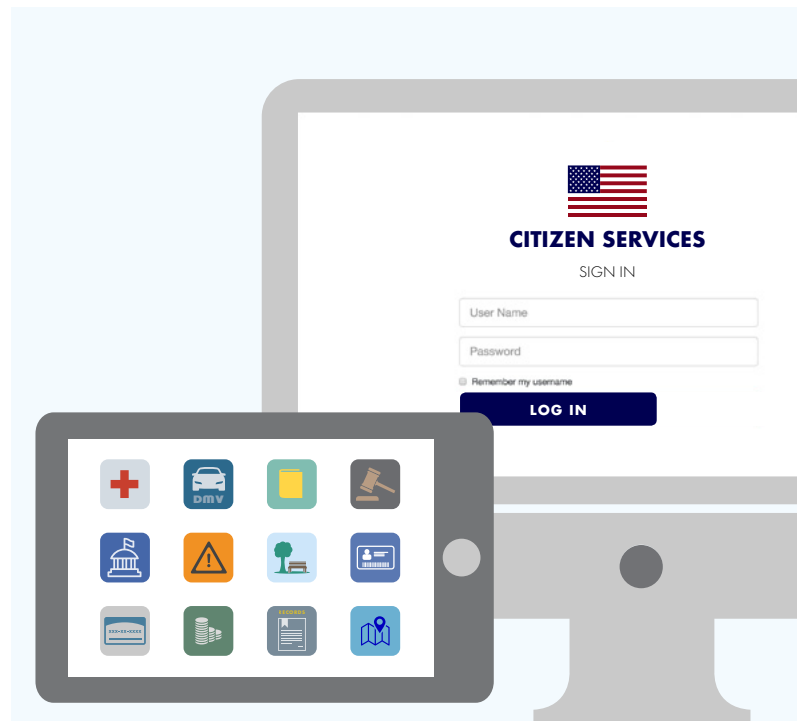
After reviewing a variety of offerings, Deloitte selected a cloud-based IAM platform developed by ForgeRock, a leading provider of identity and access management solutions for global banks and corporations as well as federal and state government agencies.

Deloitte and Texas DIR team leaders deployed the platform so that citizens coming to Texas.gov first create an account through the platform, which then manages access to the website's affiliated services.

"Centralizing the IAM capability and rerouting from each [citizen service] application through the single platform improves citizen experience, security and implementation times for all application owners," says Jeff Brooks, vice president, U.S. public sector, ForgeRock.

It also allowed the state to retire the old system at the end of its lifecycle and ease the transition from the incumbent contractor to Deloitte. "It took us about two months to stand up the first application," for the first of many agencies relying on the portal, Keel says. "All things considered, that's relatively quick, and now we have a blueprint to work with other agencies."

Deloitte has to enable API integration with each of the agencies using Texas.gov as their portal. Now that the first one has been completed, Keel estimates it will take just a few weeks for other agencies. The fast turnaround is important because there are 52 applications in the Texas.gov portfolio that need to be incorporated. "We need an agile environment," Keel says.

PROVIDING SECURITY THROUGH IAM

If a government agency is looking to modernize its citizen experience at the enterprise level, Keel believes that having an IAM solution is central to realizing that vision. "It's not an option to consider — it's a requirement," he says.

It is, after all, "identity" management that provides not just access to appropriate, targeted services, but also provides security. At a time when data breaches routinely make headlines and people are concerned about the privacy and security of their information, all the components in a citizen experience solution have to include the latest security measures.

A seamlessly fully integrated IAM system is about security and works best when it balances mission and technical needs against the capabilities of the new system, Brooks says. "It will save money and the support of open standards enables agencies to future proof their investment so they can integrate with best of breed solutions, such as the latest biometric solutions as requirements change of time."

Look for more information here on how Identity and Access Management Solutions can help your agency modernize and better secure its applications.

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RECOMMENDED STEPS THAT AN AGENCY CAN TAKE TO START DOWN THE ROAD TO SUPERIOR IDENTITY AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT.

1. **Start with high-impact/low-risk projects**, rather than "boiling the ocean" and taking on too big a project. Agency leaders and end users may see the benefits of a well-designed identity and access management environment in the abstract but may not appreciate the effect it can have on established processes and culture. Starting small and achieving early successes lays the groundwork to elevate the system's use more broadly.

2. **Look at web-based opportunities** where a web interface would benefit from applying a modern IAM technology to its core identity functions such as account creation, multi-factor authentication and federation support.

3. **Pick a systems integrator that understands IAM** and your agency's mission needs. The right systems integrator can translate and map out the necessary steps to make the implementation a success that takes into account the unique mission needs of government agencies.