



Demanding Digital:

Central Government in focus

How should central government meet the digital needs of its citizens?

Central government exists to meet the needs of British citizens above all else. That focus hasn't changed for hundreds of years, but what is now changing is citizens' expectations of how those needs should be met.

Atos commissioned research to find out what citizens think of the digital services central government departments provide. We wanted to know what their experiences have been like, how these interactions compare to other industries and, crucially, what makes them walk away and disengage from a digital service. The results were fascinating: while people's experiences of digital are mixed, within the findings are some clear indicators for government about where digital services should be heading.

to lose more if it does not embrace a wider move to digital citizen services. As far as our respondents were concerned, retailers lead the way. Yet there are expectations of government. Within the next three years, more than a third of citizens expect to be able to manage all of their interactions with government via a single app or website (35%) or even vote for a political party online (38%).



There is a huge opportunity for central government to capitalise on this openness to digital. But data protection and security is always a priority and needs to remain high on the agenda in the current climate.

The good news from our research is that although some citizens are concerned, only 3% would actually walk away from a digital service because of data concerns.

While citizens are open to the idea of smart digital technology, they want the basics to be right first. Nearly half (48%) want a simpler, cleaner experience; 38% would like government to make things faster, and 31% want an upgrade to improve stability.

One key finding is that less than a quarter (24%) of respondents would say that their experience of central government digital services was either 'good' or 'outstanding'. And nearly a fifth (18%) would go as far as to say that their experience was 'very poor' or 'poor'.

What's clear is that there is some work to do when it comes to meeting the needs of British citizens online. This is especially important considering that online and offline experiences are intrinsically linked, with 24% saying that while their experience was poor, they expect more when dealing with government via other channels.

Despite this, there are examples of successful digital services - and above all, citizens are willing to try more. 44% said they would be 'very' or 'fairly' willing to try a new central government digital service. What is equally positive is that this willingness is just as present in over-55-year-olds as in under-25-year-olds. We saw the same willingness in citizens' attitudes towards local government digital services.

With readiness to adopt digital spanning different age groups, the risk of digital exclusion is not as much of a concern as it might previously have been. In fact, government may stand

"35% of citizens expect to be able to manage their interactions with government via a single app or website within the next three years".

The findings highlight that age is no longer a barrier to digital adoption





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What do citizens want from Central Government digital services?



Want a simpler, cleaner experience

This is perhaps unsurprising since over half (52%) have had to abandon a digital service part-way through without completing what they needed to do.

This is especially frustrating given the transactional nature of communications between central government and citizens where service users want tasks to be as efficient and quick as possible.

This infrequent interaction also heightens expectations of improvements between engagements, whereas with a daily visit to a banking website for example, we aren't surprised when it remains the same. In fact, a change can come as a shock.

What is significant is that citizens see central government as one organization, so services need to integrate seamlessly throughout the user journey. Commercial companies have already been successful at improving efficiency and winning customers through multi-channel, always-on services that make people's lives easier.

Citizens across the generations now want the same from government through faster, easier, more joined-up online services irrespective of which department they are dealing with.



Would like central government to make things faster for them

Instead of just taxing a car online, for example, the service could integrate with parking permits, insurance data, emissions data, MOT information.

Citizens' expectations are rising at a time when public service budgets are still being squeezed. Of course, people want speed, ease and low-cost. They also want government to think differently, be flexible, be unafraid to experiment and go digital in a way that offers them real benefit. Like other sectors, central government needs to think radically to meet the twin objectives of gaining efficiencies and improving services.

That means being more collaborative and putting citizens at the heart of service redesign to improve citizen experience, integrate delivery around specific needs and target resources where they are needed most.

What the Demanding Digital report shows is that service users bring rich insights into where to focus digital investment. Old demographics are becoming less and less relevant: it's time to re-think customer segmentation. In terms of user experience, simple certainly doesn't mean shallow. Government departments need to use the best as their inspiration - because that's what citizens will be doing. And if new



Want an upgrade to improve stability

digital services can help to optimise and coordinate resources more efficiently, then the future is a blended experience.

High-quality, joined-up digital citizen services are now a must for central government, not an option. The key to this will be unlocking the right data, working together and keeping citizens at the heart. As the Demanding Digital research concludes, understanding a citizen's journey through digital has never been more important.



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