Moving Iowa's Education System Toward the 21st Century

by ITD's Darrell Fremont, Director of eMedia & eLearning Development

"The next big killer application for the Internet is going to be education. Education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make e-mail usage look like a rounding error." -*John T. Chambers, CEO, Cisco Systems INC.*

Online educational opportunities are being offered via networks by many educational institutions, businesses, libraries and state government in Iowa. Governor Vilsack during his 2000 Condition of the State address, called for the establishment of a 21st Century Learning Infrastructure available to all Iowans to support life-long learning. The 21st Century Learning Infrastructure initiative is an effort to enhance, coordinate, and increase distance learning/digital library offerings thereby enabling all citizens the increased opportunity to participate in quality life-long learning.

The Iowa Information Technology Department, the Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa Communications Network, Iowa Public Television and the University of Northern Iowa are working together on a 21st Century Learning Infrastructure pilot project during the 2001 fiscal year, using a $1 million appropriation from the legislature, focused on enhancing the learning for Iowa's students in the area of middle-school math. The project has the following primary purposes: 1) the acquisition and creation of digital educational materials; 2) to research, test, and evaluate indexing systems for easy acquisition of content over the Internet; 3) delivery and use of the content in the classroom; 4) provide instructional design and developmental support to the classroom teacher; 5) to evaluate the success of the pilot and make recommendations. Digital content has been licensed for state-wide use by all educational institutions and citizens in physics and math. www.infoweb.state.ia.us/eteacher.

The legislature has appropriated $1.5 million to expand on this wide-reaching project in FY '02.

The next big killer application for the Internet is going to be education

As I sit writing this article the clock hands have just passed midnight. It reminds me of sitting in the Lindquist computer center on the U. of Iowa Campus just shy of 3 decades ago. I always did my best debugging work after midnight. I was obsessive then too. In the early to mid '70's I was a math major specializing in Computer Science. (That was how it was done then.) Once during a midterm in Calculus I read through the exam, that consisted of a dozen or so proofs, and took it up to the professor and explained that I was sure that he had given me the test for a different class. He assured me that it was the correct test. I started thinking about a different educational path. Political Science and Psychology later replaced Mathematics. I became somewhat of a computer guru in Poli. Sci. No one there knew anything about computers or SPSS. I always thought that I would come back to computers, I just didn't know when or where.

At twenty-two four of us friends started a painting contracting business. We wanted to travel to Europe and figured that the only way to earn enough money was to work for ourselves. We all made it to Europe though at different times. I really loved the physical nature of the work so when I came back from traveling I started up where I had

My primary duty as Director of Digital Government is to change State of Iowa government

left off. For most of the last twenty-five years I have worked at starting and running a number of different businesses, but kept coming back to construction related contracting. Finally, aching knees and opportunity brought me back to computers, now called Information Technology.

Through my years of serving customers I learned a number of lessons. There are two pitfalls inherent in bidding for work:
1. You don't get the work;
2. You get the work.

In the first case you are out of work. Result: no income. In the second you probably missed something others saw. Result: net loss. A net loss is worse than no income. It is important to learn to get jobs. It is just as important to learn not to get some of them.
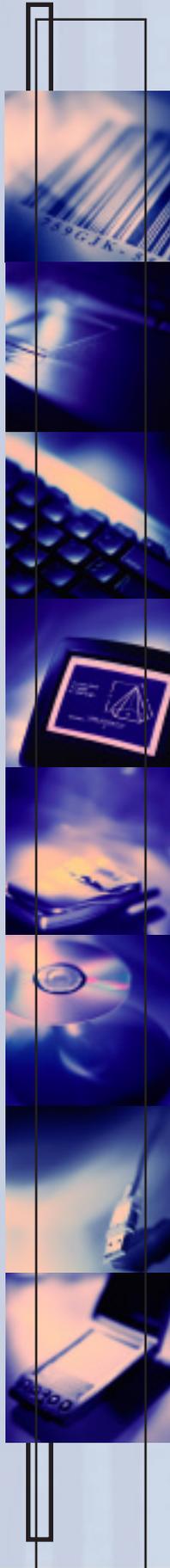
After years I learned that it is much better not to bid against other contractors. This is accomplished by developing a good product and by being able to explain the value of your offerings. The customer is not always right, but the customer is always the customer. It is important to tell a customer what they need to hear, not always what they want to hear.

My primary duty as Director of Digital Government is to change State government. I was recruited to this position to bring some of the private sector lessons and a more "entrepreneurial spirit" to Information Technology in State government. I will proclaim that the State should not and cannot operate like a business. Any of those "lessons" have to be filtered with the laws, rules and politics of operating in a government environment. Businesses can fail, declare bankruptcy, behave erratically or simply decide that they don't want to continue part or all of their operations. Businesses answer to stockholders or owners or their own whimsical nature.

State government answers to a host of requirements and "requirers." It cannot decide tomorrow that it will not provide food stamps or not license drivers or not continue any of the hundreds of services that government provides. Everything we do is public and is overseen by the three branches of government, the citizens, the media and various constituencies within each of those groups. Government is different. It has a higher responsibility, more constraints, and more oversight than any business.

Given all of the above my modus operandi is to listen, listen, listen. Listen. The Governor and his office, the Legislature and the ITD oversight committees have given some pretty clear directions on how we should proceed. Provide government where and when Iowans want. Do so cheaper, better, and faster than before. Reduce duplication of effort. Increase coordination and cooperation in building and buying IT systems. Improve the quality of the information derived from the data we have. Reengineer the processes of state government. Create digital government.

Listen. Citizens want input into the government. Government should listen and act in accordance with what citizens want. The citizens of Iowa want their government to be easier to use. It should be available when they want, 24-7. Reduce the "hidden taxes" of complying with government requirements. Don't make citizens stand in line or drive to a government office or take time off from work because government wants to do business between 8 and 5. Citizens generally don't know and don't care whether government is federal, state, county or otherwise. They care and know even less about what department or branch they have to deal with. It is government's responsibility to deal with those issues so that citizens don't have to deal with them. Government/we have to work to reduce the overhead that citizens pay to perform the necessary functions that government requires.

Listen. The people in government and the agencies and branches have constraints, rules, laws, environments and situations that lead to ways of carrying on operations. You can't figure out where to go if you don't know where you are. Without paying attention to others' situations it is difficult to craft solutions that will meet the requirements we all have been given.

I am at the same time flabbergasted by how nonsensically and illogically government sometimes operates and astounded by the dedication of government employees and the amount of work they accomplish. I think that I have one of the best jobs around and I look forward to it (almost) every day.

IOWAccess Portal Receives Prestigious "Trailblazer" Award

ITD recently received the following message after it nominated the IOWAccess portal for the prestigious E-Gov Pioneer awards.

"Congratulations! Your nomination for the E-Gov 2001 Pioneer Awards, received the E-Gov 2001 "Trailblazer" honorable-mention award. In presenting this award, the Government Solutions Center Selection Committee is pleased to recognize your efforts to promote innovative Electronic Government programs--yours is one of only twenty-two Trailblazer Awards selected from more than 300 highly competitive nominations."

Dan Combs, Director of Digital Government at ITD and the person who nominated the IOWAccess portal for the award, stated "Everyone throughout State government should be proud of the award-winning portal Iowa has developed to be the entry point that citizens use to access government services. As we move closer in meeting Gov. Vilsack's goal of 100% E, IOWAccess will be showcased at even a greater extent. Thank you to everyone who has made IOWAccess what it is today."

Board of Nursing - License Renewals

On August 21, 2000 the Board of Nursing made online renewals of nursing licenses available. This project covered renewals for LPNs, and RNs. The project serves as a great example of collaboration between state agencies and ITD in better serving Iowans via electronic government.

The following are representative of comments from the "pilot" nurses who renewed their nursing license on-line since August:

I thought the on line renewal process was awesome. I did not have any problems, and it was nice to be able to do it so fast and I received my license a couple of days later. I hope that you decide to do this all the time, I told coworkers about it and they were very excited about the chance to do this. Thank you.
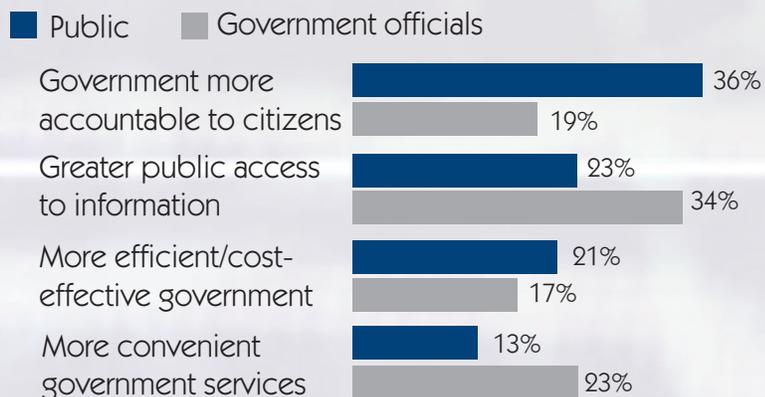
-Debbie Buckley

The online licensing renewal was great! The only place I had trouble was in entering the contact hours. I use one source for my renewal and a fast exit to payment might be helpful. This is a wonderful process, I hope we continue to use the Internet.

-Vivian Morrow

Key benefits of e-government

Major benefits expected from e-government by the public compared to those of government officials

■ Public   ■ Government officials

Benefit	Public	Government officials
Government more accountable to citizens	36%	19%
Greater public access to information	23%	34%
More efficient/cost-effective government	21%	17%
More convenient government services	13%	23%

Source: Hart-Teeter poll
from http://www.msnbc.com/news/468914.asp?cp1=1#BODY

Canada Leads in e-Government According to Study

In January 2001, researchers at Accenture attempted to conduct business with 22 governments via the Internet, role-playing citizens and businesses in their own countries. Researchers focused on the following areas: Human Services, Justice and Public Safety, Revenue, Defense, Education, Administration, Transportation, Regulation and Democracy, and Postal. In all, 165 services potentially offered by national government agencies were studied. The resulting report, "Rhetoric vs. Reality: Closing the Gap," categorized Canada, Singapore and the United States as "Innovative Leaders," whose continued leadership in the creation of eGovernment and more mature online services set them apart from the other 19 countries studied.

Canada secured its leading position as a result of the government's adoption of a cross-agency approach to eGovernment. This approach is intended to make it easier for citizens and businesses to interact electronically with government. Canada also scored high in the area of Delivery Maturity, scoring 60 percent--more than twice the country average of 30 percent-and surpassing Singapore and the United States. The score is largely a reflection of the Canadian government's recently launched portal. The single entry point provides a gateway for Canadian citizens, business, and non-Canadians to access major services.

While the research revealed the gap is slowly closing between what government leaders are saying and what governments are doing, the research also showed that understanding and use of eGovernment is progressing. Portals are emerging as a means of bringing order and customer-focus to online services. However, few good portal sites exist and those that do have a long way to go to be truly customer-focused. Among the few government organizations demonstrating this level of delivery maturity and employing customer relationship management is the U.S. Postal Service. Its customers can establish an online postal account to purchase stamps or pay utility bills.

Governor's On-line Chat a Success

Gov. Vilsack used popular technology to receive input and answer questions for constituents by participating in an on-line Chat. The Chat took place on the evening of January 30th, and was scheduled for a 1hr. duration. However, the Governor arrived early, and was eager to get started, so he did. This was a moderated Chat, which means that all in-coming questions were filtered by the moderator for appropriateness, before they were passed to the Governor. He conducted the Chat in the ITD Training Labs, and the traffic was projected on both screens. The press was invited, and they observed and interviewed the Governor, afterwards.

Just over 500 people participated (502, to be exact). The Governor and his aides fielded a total of 53 questions, and the Governor answered 16 of those. It is interesting that an aide began by typing responses that the Governor dictated, but the Governor himself took over at about mid-point of the evening!

The Chat transcripts may be viewed (on the Governor's Agenda page) at http://www.state.ia.us/government/governor/agenda/transcripts01-30-01.htm .