

# Introduction

The United States federal government is the world's largest creator, maintainer and disseminator of information. The federal government's information technology (IT) portfolio of investments for 2003 is approximately \$52 billion; a portion of this includes the development of about 900 major projects, which account for \$18 billion of the total IT Investments for fiscal year 2003. This makes the United States the largest investor in IT in the world.<sup>(1)</sup> Under the Bush administration, the expansion of electronic government is one of the five government-wide initiatives highlighted as critical for improving government performance. This is a continuation of the strategic focus on information technology that began in the Clinton Administration with the creation of the National Performance Review. The implementation of FirstGov.gov, the first federal government-wide portal, was a major project endorsed, developed, and launched under the aegis of the Clinton administration.

The portal concept of electronic commerce has become a dominant theme in today's Internet environment. At its most basic, a portal is a main doorway for users to access the Web. It is similar to a homepage, becoming not only a favorite entryway to the Web, but also, a place Internet users come back to which meets a range of their information and commerce needs. Government is moving towards a quasi-portal model of business in an effort to offer a more integrated or horizontal view of government - one that minimizes the "agency" aspect of services and information and capitalizes on the "content" aspect, or the subject of the information need. The development and use of a single point of access application to government is seen as a necessary condition in the move to a more citizen-centric federal government. It is envisioned that an electronic government portal will transform the citizens' relationship with their government. Governance will also be facilitated, with portals creating communities of interest that will function around political issues and elected officials, enabling an unprecedented flow of conversation between citizen and government. FirstGov.gov was designed to enable government-to-citizen (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), and government-to-government (G2G) interactions and transactions to occur.

FirstGov.gov was launched September 22, 2000 with an initial size of 47 million U.S. federal government web pages. FirstGov.gov, the only official U.S. government Web portal, is described as a single, trusted point-of-service for U.S. citizens and businesses to gain entry to federal services and information resources. The Presidential Memo of December 17, 1999, "Electronic Government," stimulated the development of FirstGov.gov by calling for a government-wide portal that would be accessible by type of service or information needed. The vision for this portal, FirstGov.gov, is to be a high-speed, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, user-friendly entry point to every online resource, be it information, data, or service, offered by the Federal government, and ultimately, to all levels of government in the United States. FirstGov.gov is also seen as the vehicle to substantively reduce government bureaucracy, enable a more responsive and customer-focused government, and enable a new and active citizen participation in democratic processes. It serves as an example of a public-private partnership to provide electronic government services and information to the public. Today (December, 2001) FirstGov.gov contains information and services from more than 22,000 federal websites containing more than 35 million pages of information, services and transactions. First Gov.gov also accesses an additional 16 million pages from the Internet portals of all 50 states and the District of Columbia<sup>(2)</sup>.

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(1) Executive Office of the President. Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2003. Analytical Perspectives. Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office. ISBN 0-16-051029-5

(2) FirstGov.gov. Accessed December 1, 2001 on the World Wide Web at [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov)