

Project Background

Historical Setting

The Government of Canada has always demonstrated a firm resolve to provide quality services for all Canadians. Yet a 1997 study on citizen satisfaction (Faye and Strickland, 1998) found a high level of dissatisfaction among Canadians with the public services provided by the federal government. The main complaint was difficulty in accessing services (44%), while 25% said they did not even know where to find the service they needed. Meanwhile many government departments were trying forms for electronic services or one-stop centres, but these fragmented and scattered attempts to modernize the delivery of public services reached few, if any, people.

Strategic Setting

At the same time, the Government of Canada announced a few of the priorities that would guide its actions in the Speech from the Throne (Government of Canada, 1999a). One of these was to ensure that all government services would be available electronically by 2004. Another priority and corollary of the first was to facilitate Internet access for all Canadians, whether living in urban or rural areas. The **Connecting Canadians** (1) program addressed this need. Lastly, a policy favouring the use of partnerships for planning and managing development projects had also been formulated by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) in the Auditor General's Report (Government of Canada, 1999b). Add to all this the fact that the vast majority of industrialized countries had already embarked on reinventing or at least modernizing their services, and the Canadian government had always played a leadership role on the world stage. Moreover, the country was enjoying a stable political climate and fast-growing economy. All of these factors fostered the quest for alternatives to the way in which federal public services were being delivered at the time, and the creation of a strategic development plan.

Institutional and Legal Setting

In 1998 the TBS was given a mandate to explore the options for adopting an integrated approach to the delivery of federal services in order to create a new image for the government, and to do so within two years. A working group was quickly formed and undertook a comprehensive study of the services offered with a view to proposing a strategic business plan for the Service Canada Initiative (SCI). It should be noted here that the TBS received another mandate along with the SCI, namely the Government On-Line Initiative (GOLI)(2), which aims to

deliver public services on-line so that all citizens can interact with their government electronically. Although intrinsically connected, the two initiatives competed indirectly for resources.

The situation analysis done by the SCI team identified the basic federal government information services:

- The 1-800-O-Canada government call centre managed and run by Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) supported by a database containing information on some 1,000 programs and services;
- The Blue Pages phonebook listings of government departments and agencies;
- The approximately 30 information kiosks set up by various departments and agencies, primarily Human Resources Development (HRDC);
- The 450 independently managed department and agency portals and websites;
- The approximately 413,000 brochures and forms published by nine departments and distributed through various channels.

The federal government was offering nearly 1,000 different programs and services at some 11,000 access points and 450 websites, and operating 170 call centres while spending a total of approximately \$1.6 billion on government information services. This was the starting-point (Service Canada Implementation Team, 1999). The challenge was all the greater because it meant integrating channels for which various departments were responsible.

(1) See the website at <http://connect.gc.ca/en/100-e.shtml> for more details.

(2) See the initiative website at http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/index_e.asp for more details.