

Vision

The “single window of government,” i.e. the one-stop shop, was first conceived in New Brunswick in response to citizen dissatisfaction with service quality. In the “single window of government” pilot, a number of advisory committees were created to design approaches to identifying customer needs and monitoring customer satisfaction. The value that citizens play in this process was validated in the pilot and their role was institutionalized from that point forward.

“Technology has changed the way we live, work and do business. People expect to do business with government as simply and easily as they do business with the private sector. Our government understands this and gives top priority to initiatives that improve the delivery of service.”

Peter Mesheau

Former Minister Responsible for SNB

The pilot project proved the potential of the “single window of government” strategy for reducing costs and improving services. It also confirmed the value of the inclusion of citizens and other stakeholders in the ongoing process of needs identification and performance measurement. The vision for SNB was secured at this point - improved services for citizens through a highly transparent and citizen driven, financially self-sustaining, multi-channel service delivery model.

Initially the vision of SNB was clearer than the operating policies. The years since then have produced a highly refined and effective set of operating principles and policies framed in this vision. Creating an organization that would systematically listen to stakeholders, deliver public value and be financially sustainable was the task they faced. A number of key decisions along the way showed that the SNB visionaries, and those they would attract by their vision, were up to the task.

Creating a World-Class Service Culture

The first investment necessary to get SNB off the ground was brick and mortar. But, early visionaries understood that a cultural transformation would also be necessary. “We had to take an organization that was enforcement focused and turn it into a service operation where the customer was king or queen.” New goals and objectives were necessary. Significant investments were made in training and have continued to be made since then. To establish the service centers for the pilot in 1992, three-week intensive general training was provided to both service representatives and management. Between 1992 and 1998, both groups continued to go through general intensive training programs targeted at changing the culture of the organization. General and specialized training continues to be offered to both new and existing staff at SNB to sustain and even further this transformation. Another example of the commitment to service is the management of error rates. SNB has policies and procedures in place for identifying and measuring error rates and then responding as appropriate. In some cases, when rates are not acceptable, new training programs might be developed or in some cases, responses with specific individuals are undertaken. SNB uses the error rates to identify areas to help them focus attention where attention is needed.

Listening to Stakeholders

Citizen dissatisfaction was one of the primary catalysts for the creation of SNB. Monitoring and responding to customer feedback, and more broadly, stakeholder feedback, as a consequence is a foundational element of its design and success. Stakeholder feedback is gathered and is used in many ways at SNB. It is captured through meetings, focus groups, surveys, and study tours. Citizens, businesses, government leadership, agency managers, and others are contacted and listened to regularly. In general, the results of these consultations are used to set priorities and drive decision making. In addition, they are used to make statements about the value SNB provides to citizens and businesses specifically, and to the government of New Brunswick, more broadly. SNB has mastered the art of conducting needs assessments and responding to the needs identified.

The first investment in stakeholder needs and expectations analysis was required by the Cabinet as part of the pilot. Following those consultations, SNB institutionalized the process of connecting to and listening to stakeholders. Through the aptly named Service Quality Support (SQS) unit SNB stays in touch with its

stakeholders. The primary responsibility of SQS is managing the SNB Service Quality Model (see Figure 1); looking at and evaluating customer requirements and needs and feeding that information back to the operations division for use in setting and managing priorities. Consultations are conducted every 18 to 24 months by the SQS unit to understand business requirement changes from stakeholders, for online services, telephone services and over-the-counter services.

The service quality model helps SNB make tradeoffs between different investment strategies as well as to make users part of the decision-making process. According to Thériault, “Regardless of the situation, the story is the same. It doesn’t matter if we’re talking with the general public that goes to get a driver’s license or a hunting license. We sit with them and ask them those same questions. If we’re talking to commercial truckers we’ll use focus groups; we’ll use their professional associations. We’ll use different means to go and sit with them and understand their business stressors, especially as they relate to the government of New Brunswick. And they’ll tell us what would be useful and helpful to them. The result, in this case, can be seen on our website; we have a section completely for truckers where they can get information on weather, on bridges, on ferries, on all kinds of transportation issues relevant to them specifically.” The results of the consultations are used to allow SNB to benchmark against itself with similar surveys and with other business providers. The results are also used to find both strengths and areas for improvement. SNB administers surveys in-house as well as participates in national surveys.

Figure 1. SNB Service Quality Model

Figure 2. Citizen Satisfaction with Government Services in Canada, 2001

Figure 2 is derived from results of a national survey conducted in November 2001 by R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. for the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC). In November 2003, SNB commissioned this same survey, using the CMT (Common Measurement Tool) and the 92% was re-confirmed. (4) The CMT allows an organization to measure satisfaction against 10 different drivers across the three service channels (See Table 1).

Table 1. Ten Drivers of Customer Satisfaction Measured by the CMT		
Over the Counter	On the Web	Teleservices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timeliness• Competence• Extra mile/extra smile• Fairness• Outcome• Security/privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visual appeal• Complete info• Easy to find	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication

Developing a Technology Strategy

The technology strategy adopted by SNB has allowed them to retain a focus on their core business; creating public value through effective service programs. SNB cultivates internal expertise in the areas of gathering and analyzing service needs, developing service programs, and the maintenance of those programs over time. The success of their technology strategy rests primarily on two principles; buy, don’t build, system development expertise and leverage existing investments, in this case, investments in applications, hardware, software, and skills. Essentially, SNB invests in the resources (hardware, software, skills) necessary to maintain its service programs over time and buys the skills necessary to develop new services each of which are developed by leveraging the infrastructure resources already available. Developing specific new applications to support a new service offering, for example, is generally contracted out to appropriate experts. Using existing components and core capabilities, such as servers and authentication systems, to deliver new services, keeps the cost of new projects down, allowing SNB to think differently, when necessary, about a project of high public value and limited or even no financial return. Through this strategy, SNB is free to focus its expertise in refining their particular brand of market research, product development, product delivery, and quality control and to take some “risks” where others might not be able to.

A key partnership for SNB, in terms of its technology strategy, is the one they formed with CGI Information Systems and Management Consultants Inc. in the late 1990's. CGI and SNB came together to develop applications according to the "spin the terminal" philosophy. This philosophy requires all new development to be conducted with the citizen user in mind, enabling the application at some point to be 'spun' to provide direct web access for the citizen. gBiz was developed through this process and has become the core element of the SNB technology infrastructure and a key factor in the flexibility and affordability of its business model.

Creating Public Value Through Balanced Portfolio Development

SNB's home page characterizes the organization as "market driven."⁽⁵⁾ Being market driven allows SNB to change, expand, or retract its scope and priorities, based on the needs of their market – the citizens of NB. To ensure that changes are consistent with the needs of the market and with the goals of SNB all new business opportunities go through the Business Advisory Group's "business casing" process. Decisions about projects are then made at the Board level. The Board is responsible for using public value as a threshold criterion for any investment or de-investment and for keeping a balance within the portfolio that ensures the financial sustainability of SNB. Project proposals must be accompanied by a detailed financial evaluation worksheet, somewhat standard in content. Information about level of effort and associated cost is required for planning and scoping, development, staffing and support, user support, equipment and installation, and marketing. A project summary sheet which includes information such as overall project costs, milestones and deliverables, known risks and resource requirements and implementation considerations must be included as well.

Project evaluations are framed in an ongoing consideration of the principle objectives of SNB by the use of a Project Proposal Evaluation process. Evaluators rate each project in terms of factors such as strategic value, service improvement, customer demand, staff capacity, risk and financial return. Proposal ratings are then used by the Board in their discussion and decision making process. The instruments support these discussions and in particular, they serve to formalize the goal of maintaining the balance between public value and financial sustainability.

SNB manages and expands its business portfolio in a number of different ways. The first, and the most public and familiar, is through the development of formal agreements to act as the service arm of other New Brunswick government agencies, the second is a formalized transfer of responsibility from other government agencies to SNB, the third is to seek out new lines of business that leverage current capabilities and investments. The following sections illustrate how the three different portfolio development approaches are used to maintain the balance between public value and entrepreneurialism in the SNB portfolio.

Formal Agreements to Act as the Service Arm for Other Agencies

The Business Development unit meets regularly with all service delivery partners, primarily departments and municipalities, to keep in touch with both existing service relationships and possible new opportunities. An SNB team meets regularly with all partners in what is essentially a "tour." The team tours all agencies with existing agreements as well as potential partners that provide service delivery to the public, to talk about the next level of services and listen to the concerns of agency staff. "We make an appointment with them and we go and meet with them." The tours enable a communication of concerns; concerns which often go beyond service delivery itself. Concerns about costs, about losing the ability to deliver services directly, losing resources, and losing staff are often the focus of these discussions. The tour enables SNB to engage directly with agency staff on the commitment to delivering public value and to make the point that the question of who delivers that value is less important than the delivery itself. The tours also include more operational level discussions of business requirements and costs. These discussions enable SNB to craft proposals back to agencies about how partnering with SNB will allow an agency to meet its service objectives, or even in some cases, to "push the envelop beyond those objectives."

During the tours SNB gathers information from agencies about performance goals and mechanisms for tracking performance against those goals. This information, when it is available, is used as part of the proposal process. SNB seeks information about service performance measures, customer satisfaction ratings, error rates, and costs. Most often agencies are not able to provide this information; most agencies, SNB has found, seldom have established standards for their own performance nor have they developed evaluation processes to determine if they have achieved their performance goals. Further, service delivery costs are rarely fully tracked. SNB is compelled, because of its requirement of financial sustainability, to be very clear about its costs. "We've come up with a fairly comprehensive estimate—we don't have any choice; we're a business. If we charge a department two dollars and our cost is \$3.50, it won't be long before it's going to drain us as a corporation, so we really have to

understand all of our costs.”

In some cases, the tour launches SNB and an agency into conversations about a formal agreement, in other cases it doesn't. The conversations that do get launched play out over time and involve a give and take between SNB and the agency. The give and take includes detailed discussions about the current agency costs, projected SNB costs, as well as the development of associated service standards and Service Level Agreements (SLA). SLAs represent another area where SNB leverages existing investments. Each service agreement with an agency is formalized through an SLA; SLAs for new offerings are generally modifications of the most relevant from among existing agreements.

Understanding resistance to the idea of transitioning service responsibility to SNB and responding to it, is also part of the conversation. Often resistance to a service agreement with SNB comes from agencies believing that their costs are less than they actually are. SNB will work with departments to develop more detailed cost estimates. Once full costs are accounted for the SNB service model usually competes very well with agency models.

Formalized Transfer of Program Responsibility

The case of the CR was presented above to illustrate the flexibilities afforded SNB due to its status as a crown corporation. It also represents an example of a formalized transfer of responsibility for an entire program from a traditional agencies, in this case the Department of Justice, to SNB. The entire CR unit was moved from DOJ to SNB including the policy and management arms of the program.

New Lines of Business Leveraging Current Capabilities and Existing Investments

In 2003, SNB was well established and well run. However, the newly established administration was anxious to see SNB be more aggressive in terms of its impact on the province. A strengthened Business Development and Marketing division was challenged to think beyond the current business models, beyond services and registries, and even beyond the province. The primary focus of the staff in this division is now marketing SNB services to other local and international governments.

One concrete example of this broader mandate is the recently concluded agreement with the Government of Canada for the provision of pleasure craft licensing services. The focus of this effort is two-fold. Provide public value to the citizens of Canada through a financially sustainable service (made possible by leveraging existing investments in SNB components), and develop a downstream market as an economic development opportunity for the province. This project, as all others was required to navigate through the BAG using the same business case process as any other project.

(4) The common measurement tool was developed through research of the Institute of Citizen Centered Services (ICCS), Toronto, Ontario. The company that did the survey was Orion Marketing Research of Fredericton.

(5) <http://www.snb.ca/e/4000/4003e.asp>