

Customer Service Tools for Agencies

In April 2011, the President issued the Executive Order *Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service* (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/27/executive-order-streamlining-service-delivery-and-improving-customer-ser>). In it, he called on federal agencies to find “ways to use innovative technologies to accomplish...customer service activities[,] thereby lowering costs, decreasing service delivery times, and improving the customer experience.” This document lists tools that are available to agencies for meeting this mandate. Please note that the listing of a commercial product or service here does not constitute an endorsement by the federal government; agencies are encouraged to explore a very wide array of technologies for meeting customer service goals, using the list below as a starting point.

Tools Created by GSA

These tools have been created/modified by GSA specifically for quick deployment by government.

Challenge.gov – A governmentwide platform for hosting challenges and contests and inviting the public to co-create solutions. Agencies could use this in a variety of ways, from a simple contest to create a video PSA (<http://healthyswimming.challenge.gov/>), to a more advanced contest to create a mobile app that provides citizens with important information on the go (<http://fluapp.challenge.gov/>).

Apps.gov NOW (<http://citizen.apps.gov>) – A suite of free, hosted tools, including WordPress and MediaWiki, that agencies can quickly deploy, customize, and host in a public-facing way. This could be used to create a blog that communicates with external stakeholders (<http://blog.citizen.apps.gov/NIAIDFunding/>), a wiki to coordinate public-facing events (<http://wiki.citizen.apps.gov/fccdeveloperday/>), or similar uses.

USA.gov Mobile Apps Store (<http://apps.usa.gov/>) – This section of USA.gov offers citizens a single marketplace for web-based and downloadable mobile applications. Agencies should consider creating mobile apps for placement in this marketplace.

USASearch Affiliate Program (<https://search.usa.gov/affiliates>) – The USASearch program offers free search services to any federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial government agency through an Affiliates Program. As an affiliate, agencies can create a customized search experience that best fits your customers' needs through a simple, online administrative console.

HowTo.Gov – HowTo provides agencies with focused, relevant content on providing excellent customer service. Agencies should consult it when looking for ways to fulfill the President’s executive order. Visit <http://www.howto.gov/customer-service>.

Tools Available on Apps.gov

These tools are available in the Social Media section of Apps.gov. While not fully vetted for government use, these tools all have a GSA-negotiated amended Terms of Service that significantly reduce legal barriers to quick deployment.

Survey Tools – Surveys are a critical way to include the voice of the customer in policymaking and service delivery, particularly given OMB’s recent guidance on accelerated PRA clearance for routine surveys

(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-26.pdf>). Apps.gov features 4QSurvey and SurveyAnalytics, and will soon add Survey Monkey.

Web Analytics – Web analytics let you understand how users are navigating your web presence, and what content and tasks they are most likely to need. Apps.gov features Google Analytics and My.ComMetrics, which provide this kind of analytics.

Blogging and Commenting – Blogging is a key way for agencies to communicate with the public in a current, authentic voice. Apps.gov offers WordPress, Blogger, Posterous, and Tumblr, so that agencies can quickly deploy a blog and begin communicating with customers right away. A comment section is also critical to ensure that blogs engender two-way communication and foster a positive relationship with citizens. Apps.gov offers Disqus and IntenseDebate, which make it easy to host and moderate a comments section inside your agency's blog.

Maps and Data – Agency customers are served by being able to consume government information in engaging, interactive ways. Apps.gov offers Socrata for quickly publishing datasets, and ZeeMaps and MapBox for easily creating usable maps out of geographic data.

Ideation and Online Dialogues – These platforms allow you to communicate with and hear from customers, and, crucially, allow your customers to connect with each other and surface ideas that are promising for future implementation. Apps.gov offers UserVoice, IdeaScale, Google Moderator, and the Delib Dialogue App to help you quickly launch an online dialogue, get great ideas, and act on the ones your customers like the most.

Offline Engagement – One of the most powerful ways to engage your customers is to turn online interaction into offline action. Apps.gov offers tools like FourSquare and Meetup, which you can use to help prompt your customers to take action or locate important services.

Images and Video – Communicating with customers with visual media is a great way to ensure your message is clear and shareable. Consider using Apps.gov tools like Blip.gov, TubeMogul, YouTube, Flickr, Hulu, or UStream to create videos that explain your offerings to customers and let them participate directly in important events.

Other Tools

These tools have not been reviewed by GSA for compliance with government requirements, but are popular in other sectors, and may have important applications in government as well.

GetSatisfaction (<http://getsatisfaction.com/>) – This tool enables you to create and moderate a customer community by embedding simple code right on your website. Get users' ideas, give a voice to top customers, and drive better solutions.

HighRise CRM (<http://highrisehq.com/>) – HighRise lets a large organization more easily manage contacts with stakeholders and customers, making it easier to be highly responsive to emerging needs from your customer base.

UserVoice HelpDesk (<http://uservoice.com/helpdesk>) – This product is a quickly-deployable HelpDesk solution that lets multiple users review and respond to customer issues.