

A Viderity White Paper



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How to improve e-government through user-centered websites

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Introduction: four key points

The use by government of the internet and other electronic technologies, or e-government, has allowed citizens to connect with their government more effectively than ever before in history. Yet this transformation has created a new challenge. The very success of e-government has caused citizens to expect even more from it. No longer is it sufficient that strong and effective information chains have been built, even as government processes have improved. It isn't enough that e-government provides convenient services to citizens while promoting transparency and the wise use of resources.

Almost three-quarters of Americans now use the internet, and they have grown to expect quick, clear interactions. This puts intense pressure on e-government to lift its game. Unfortunately, citizens who use government websites often have trouble locating information. They complain that the sites frequently are not user-friendly, especially in comparison to online experiences provided by the private sector. All the services and information offered through e-government must be swiftly available and easy to understand. Not only is this expected by today's internet users, but such improvements enable government to work faster, be more effective, and innovate. Improved e-government will help both citizens and government to save time and money.

Enter Viderity, a company whose mission is to make websites work better. We help e-government to create "user-centered" websites, through our evaluation and enhancement of them to make their content

and interface easy to understand. At the same time, the research, analyses, and insights of Viderity's expert team enable our clients to make informed decisions and conceive breakthrough ideas for their websites.

We have three principal goals aimed at promoting user satisfaction. The first is to enable new visitors to quickly and easily accomplish basic tasks. Second is to ensure that users will rapidly re-establish proficiency when they return to the site. Third is to create website designs that reduce user errors.

To reach this solution, we follow four key points:

- #1 The site must meet the needs of the citizen.
- #2 The standards of private company websites must be equaled or surpassed by e-government.
- #3 Design must be uncluttered, informative, and easy to navigate.
- #4 Best practices and the latest technologies must be continuously monitored and implemented.

Key #1- The site must meet the needs of the citizen

A design that meets the needs of an organization is a failure if it doesn't also fulfill the needs of the end user. Striking a balance between these two objectives requires an understanding of both the internal and external uses of the website. This is what Viderity means by the term "user-centered website." We create sites that are easy for all users to read, understand, navigate, and to perform tasks within.

By combining insights from your users' attitudes with analyses of their behavior, we develop a deep understanding of their experience. The Viderity approach to quantitative research focuses on collecting and interpreting data upon which our clients can act. Our methodologies include:

- ✓ Lab-Based Usability Studies
- ✓ RITE Studies
- ✓ Card Sorting
- ✓ Participatory Design
- ✓ Remote Usability Testing
- ✓ Eye-Tracking
- ✓ Mobile Testing
- ✓ Ethnography/Field Studies
- ✓ Focus Groups
- ✓ Concept Testing
- ✓ Ad Testing
- ✓ Stakeholder Interviews

If the website is already functional but requires re-designing, Viderity helps to identify areas in which users struggle with the site. Based on the results of this quantitative research, we make recommendations for improvement. Such usability testing not only helps to identify the needs of users, but indicates how these needs can be better met through improvements to your website design. The result is a more successful site, which also creates savings in money and other resources.

Key #2-The standards of private company websites must be equaled or surpassed by e-government

The rapid and continuing increase in internet-savvy American citizens has thrown e-government into competition with private businesses, as well as with all other government sites. Citizens, the end users of e-government, now compare that experience to all other online business they conduct. For government, the old rule that the customer is

king has never been truer. Just like private business, e-government must allocate funds wisely to make its services excel.

When e-government captures the attention and appreciation of its users, time and money are saved for both citizens and government. The efficiencies that flow from a well-made, interactive website include better use of human resources and capital through better processes without delays. When a government website generates good feedback, taxpayers become satisfied that their money is being well-spent. That's why the success of e-government should be measured by testing the end user experience to achieve customer satisfaction.

A great-looking web design is not good enough. The site must equal or surpass all other contemporary sites, private or government. To reach that goal, each step of a re-design must be made with end users in mind. Viderity has the expertise to analyze end user experience and do competitive research, which together can raise our clients' websites to the highest industry standards.

Our research program includes:

- ✓ Live Website Benchmarking Studies
- ✓ Intercepts
- ✓ Panel-Recruited Studies
- ✓ Behavioral Tracking
- ✓ Competitive Assessments
- ✓ Open Web Research
- ✓ Concept and Prototype Testing
- ✓ Interactive Ad Testing
- ✓ Mobile Benchmark Studies

These analytical tools go beyond merely helping our clients to compete and to keep their domestic customers satisfied.

Internationally, e-government has assumed an important role, as well, in providing information and direction to entrepreneurs and investors. E-government is critical to a strong technology market and to a healthy environment for research and development.

Key #3-Design must be uncluttered, informative, and easy to navigate

When a website's end users include most citizens, the design obviously must be universal. People of all educational and cultural backgrounds have to read and understand the content, navigate the site smoothly, and find the experience appealing. Accordingly, the design should be attractive without becoming complicated. Information must be easily accessible, and the tasks that users can complete must be straightforward. The only way to improve the accessibility and usability of a website is to fully understand the needs of its users.

For e-government, Viderity follows simple, proven steps to ensure that a client's website has universal appeal:

- ✓ Understand the objectives of the website and the needs of all users
- ✓ Take account of the needs and sensibilities of the website's target audience
- ✓ Use graphics elements that are appropriate to the demographic of the target audience
- ✓ Complement the website's central message, rather than conflicting with it or obscuring it
- ✓ Use unifying elements to reinforce the design throughout the site
- ✓ Impart trust in the website and, by association, in its owners
- ✓ Use cutting-edge technology

- ✓ Focus on achieving the client's business goals

Key #4-Best practices and the latest technologies must be continually monitored and implemented

Putting a website into top working condition is only part of the Viderity strategy. The site must be updated regularly to maintain its viability. This requires persistent usability testing, which is especially critical for e-government sites that provide essential services and have significant traffic. Citizens see e-government as the interactive face of government. As such, each government website should have long-term plans for its maintenance.

For high-traffic websites such as those of e-government, usability problems can lead to major setbacks. A government website cannot afford to remain stagnant in the face of changing population demographics, market conditions, and levels of user familiarity with the internet. Only through continuously improving usability can e-government hope to fulfill its mission of effectively serving the citizenry.

For e-government, making long-term commitments involves building internal capabilities, conducting training, and developing a grasp of change management. Government CIOs and webmasters must remain abreast of the latest developments in technology, such as Web 2.0. Many companies profess to know Web 2.0, but few immerse themselves in the

technology in order to truly understand it, as Viderity does. Our support to CIOs and webmasters extends to continuous training and the provision of design templates and other essential tools.

Keeping ahead of the curve is dependent upon continuous usability testing. Our e-government clients benefit in several ways from such tests:

- ✓ The needs and preferences of customers are periodically assessed and incorporated into website improvements
- ✓ Customer satisfaction and productivity are increased, leading to improved customer trust and loyalty
- ✓ Customer retention increases
- ✓ Site traffic and new visitors increase
- ✓ User errors and support costs decline
- ✓ Maintenance and training costs decline

What's more, the costs of technology updates and continuous usability testing are low, relative to benefits gained.

Summary

Viderity creates user-centered websites, through which our customers increase the value of their activities. We reach this goal by understanding the objectives of clients and end users, by innovatively applying appropriate design, and by continuously evaluating user experiences to ensure that websites stay competitive. Our techniques and technology help you to build winning websites, which attract and retain satisfied customers.