

# From eGovernment to eGovernance

*eGovernment is about more than streamlining processes and improving service. It's about transforming government and reinvigorating the way citizens participate in democracy.*

*Just as the Internet has revolutionized business, so it has profoundly affected the way governments interact with and serve citizens. But that's just the beginning, suggests David Agnew, executive director of Governance in the Digital Economy, a research program run by international think tank Digital 4Sight (Toronto). Agnew shares with Ariba his vision for how the Internet will transform the way government is organized and exercises power.*

**Ariba:** In what ways is the Information Age changing government?

**Agnew:** The effects are all-pervasive. As a starting point, we've seen a focus on getting government online and using the Internet to re-engage citizens. But from a broader perspective, the Information Age is having a huge impact on how economies are fashioned. This is the biggest revolution since the Industrial Revolution, and it's affecting governments accordingly.

**Ariba:** So eGovernment is about more than making information available on the Internet?

**Agnew:** As in the private sector, government first saw the Internet as a way to provide constituencies with greater convenience and 24/7 access to information. That evolved into the provision of online services. And with the Internet you have the possibility of integrating services into packages of services, regardless of which agency or level of government they come from. Of course, while many governments are talking about and even working hard at this, few have actually succeeded in true integration of services.

But eGovernment should go far beyond that ... [to] eDemocracy or eGovernance. There is great potential to use technology to change the way democracy works. What we've inherited from the last 150 years or so is a relatively passive form of democracy. In many developed countries, we're witnessing a decline in participation in and even the relevance of government. The Internet has the potential to re-engage citizens in a much more constant dialogue in democracy, in a way that was never before possible.

**Ariba:** Are there examples of governments doing that?

**Agnew:** A good example is an initiative in the Netherlands called Public Counter 2000. It seeks to reorganize federal services into buckets of similar services, regardless of which agency they come from, and to combine them with services from local governments. Citizens can go to a single service point, whether it's online or at a physical location.

But the initiative also hopes to go beyond that ... to drive the reorganization of government along customer-

focused lines. In most countries we have agencies that were formed decades ago along lines that may no longer be appropriate. Citizens care about the service, not about which agency the service comes from. So the Internet may influence the way government is organized.

We're also seeing governments around the world

Knowledge Los Angeles, created by UCLA and some community groups, and funded by various foundations. It takes data that the city of Los Angeles collects about vandalism, vacant lots, tax delinquencies, and other indicators of a neighborhood in decline, and publishes it on an interactive website. That lets citizens and community groups see which neighborhoods are getting into trouble, so they can take action to rectify the situation. So by working together, government, a university, community groups, and foundations have created a new value proposition that benefits all citizens.



experiment with technologies that involve people in policy development. They aren't pursuing direct democracy per se, because not enough citizens are yet connected to the Internet. But they're doing things like organizing "citizen juries" of people selected to offer input into policy development. This is profound.

**Ariba:** You have talked about "governance webs." What are these?

**Agnew:** Today, a single agency typically has end-to-end responsibility for provision of a service or creation of a policy. Governance webs involve a multiplicity of participants, not just from government, but also from the private sector, including community groups and even individual citizens. They all contribute to the creation of more value than can come from a single agency.

A good example is a project called Neighborhood

**Ariba:** Could such governance webs cross national boundaries?

**Agnew:** We'll see an evolution to that point. If you told someone 50 years ago that Europe would one day have a European Union where nations share currency, and national jurisdiction cedes sovereignty to another level of government, they would have said you were crazy. But increasingly, we'll see new forms of government rise to meet the challenge of issues that transcend national borders. Certain issues – the environment, trade, taxes, biotechnology – burst out of the national jurisdiction to a multinational or global level. So it's not wild to think of a day when people will source government services from around the world.

Of course, these are not easy issues. They're described in constitutions and built into the foundations of governments. But over time, we will be forced

to ask hard questions about how we do certain things. The Internet doesn't necessarily provide the answers, but it allows us to look at these questions in more creative ways.

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**Ariba:** *What should governments be doing today to respond to the Information Age?*

**Agnew:** Many governments are putting time and effort into understanding how they will meet the new challenges of pervasive technologies and networks. They're looking

hard at the services they offer and how they offer them. But government is often a very traditional organization, and change doesn't come easily or swiftly.

Governments need to engage their citizens in a dialogue about the role government plays and how the Information Age affects that. They must understand that something profound is happening in that citizens feel less engaged and less involved. But they must also understand that the Internet can just as profoundly reverse those trends.

The Internet promotes transparency and openness, and that is forcing governments to confront fundamental questions. [eGovernment] isn't about automation, but about transformation. We should be optimistic about what the future holds. It won't be easy, and as early leaders in eGovernment have discovered, there's a certain amount of skepticism and resistance. But these are transformative technologies, and this is a transformative time. There is a great potential for positive change and the reinvigoration of democracy. ▲