.gov Reform Initiative

Department of Veterans Affairs Web Improvement Plan
Working Draft as of 10/11/2011

Background

In the [August 12, 2011 Agency Instructions for Completing Web Inventories and Web Improvement Plans](), Agency CIOs were asked to work with their Agency Web Manager and Office of Public Affairs to submit an Interim Progress Report on their efforts to streamline Agency-managed .gov domains (due September 6, 2011) and to begin development of an Agency-wide Web Improvement Plan.

> "By October 11, Agencies shall develop a Web Improvement Plan that communicates their **strategy for managing web resources more efficiently, improving online content,** and **enhancing the customer experience of Agency websites**." This comprehensive plan will "address the broader objectives of **streamlining content, infrastructure,** and ultimately **improving customer service**."

The purpose of this Web Improvement Plan is to identify the strategy, actions, measurements, and timelines that the Agency is using to streamline website infrastructure, improve web content, and enhance the customer experience with Executive Branch websites.

Agencies are being asked to create a Web Improvement Plan that will be developed iteratively over the next few months. In this plan, Agencies will describe Agency-wide efforts to effectively manage publicly accessible websites in the .gov domain. Only agencies in the Executive Branch are required to submit a Web Improvement Plan. The initial plan for the Department of Veterans Affairs, due to OMB by October 11, 2011, is in the following section.

Step 1: Current State of Agency-wide Web Improvement Efforts

Over the past few months, Agencies have been reviewing their .gov domains, web operations, and other web-related efforts in response to OMB .gov Reform data collection efforts (individual domain inventories, web governance survey, interim progress reports, etc.). The following describes the state of current web improvement efforts at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1) Does your Agency currently have an Agency-wide web strategy?

Yes.

VA uses Directive and Handbook 6102 dated July 15, 2008 is the current policy governing web strategies to guide the enterprise web-strategy. The Directive and the Handbook are under revision as a request from the Agency's Web Governance Board.

2) How does your agency currently ensure that Agency-wide web resources are managed efficiently (e.g. governance, technology/infrastructure, hosting, staffing, operations, etc.)?

VA has recently established the Web Governance Board (WGB) which is responsible, on behalf of the Assistant Secretaries of the Office of Information and Technology and the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, to set the overarching web communications strategy for VA. The WGB includes representatives from all administrations across VA and focuses on standardization, enforcement and training for all externally facing sites that VA maintains. The WGB provides advice, guidance, and information to the 6102 Subcommittee, which is responsible for revising Directive and Handbook 6102 and the Training Subcommittee, which is responsible for setting up a scalable, enterprise-wide web introductory class. The WG is also the main oversight body for a usability study that will examine the usability of www.va.gov and other highly trafficked, customer service-oriented VA sites. The usability study will ultimately result in the creation of the Web Standards Guide, which will provide guidance, in addition to 6102, for the look and feel, branding and navigation of VA's sites. The WGB will be responsible for enforcing the standards and continue to train web managers on updates and changes to VA's policy.

The WGB relies on Program Offices and Facility to update their site's content to ensure that information posted on the site is current, accurate, factual, and relevant to VA's mission. Each facility will appoints a Webmaster/Web Content manager that reports through each office's Web Communication team. Each Web Communication team actively engages with the WGB, OPIA and OIT.

3) How does your Agency currently ensure that website content is readily accessible, updated, accurate, and routinely improved?

The Webmaster and Web Content Mangers provide and maintain the quality and accuracy of the information posted on VA Web pages. Information on VA Website must be current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA mission, spell-checked and grammatically correct. The content for publication must be approved by appropriate VA management who have line authority over the Web site, and must be updated as often as necessary to ensure public information is current and accurate. Web pages are written at a seventh grade level to ensure the broadest level of comprehension for the subject matter presented to the target audience.

Web content managers test pages to ensure that the appearance conforms to the VA's current look and feel standards, that there is consistent navigation, that all required links appear on the page, that there is no broken links, and that all mandatory requirements, include Section 508 compliance, privacy, date stamps and formats are maintained. The VA Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) provides Webmasters and content managers with a number of options for authoring content and Web site development. The ECMS provides automated support of business processes such as content review and approval, change control for tracking and managing updates, such as versioning and rollback, and compliance verification for specific VA standards and requirements. Web content is authored and managed solely via the ECMS. This tool must be used by all VA Internet Web sites.

VA published a Web Best Practices Guide in March 2011. VA Web Best Practices Guide provides employees and contractors who work with technical or content aspects of preparing VA Internet websites in addition to guidance found in 6102. The Best Practices Guide provides web developers an overview of best practice elements to be included on VA web pages, along with overall considerations for creating VA websites. This Best Practices guide is subject to VA Directive and Handbook 6102 and does not supersede that document.

4) How does your Agency currently ensure that websites are meeting user expectations and needs and that the customer experience with websites is continually enhanced?

VA conducts American Customer Satisfaction Surveys (ACS) monthly. These surveys have been conducted since 2006 and are posted on the VA Intranet Site. The survey is comprised of questions in the following areas: content, functionality, look and feel, navigation, search, site performance, satisfaction, if the individual would recommend our website to another person, and they are likely to return to the VA Website. VA uses these surveys to track the trends of each question and graphs the results for the preceding 12 months.

Additionally, VA Web Operations deployed WebTrends for all VA Internet website. WebTrends is the analytics software that analyzes each Website or sub site's traffic. The results from the analysis are posted on VA's Intranet and allow VA provides web content managers with real time access to the reports. The reports include a high level review of number of visitors per day, average length of stay and

in-depth reporting on number of pages an average visitor hits, the URL the visitor is entering and exiting the site, how many hits are single page hits, path analysis for entry into the website, and the number of failed hits to the Web site.

Most VA Websites conduct traffic and search log analysis and utilize customer satisfaction surveys and feedback from contact forms to ensure user expectations are met and customer experience is enhanced as necessary. VA is also instituting a usability study, as mentioned earlier to find out the best way to reach VA's customers. VA also takes feedback from non traditional outlets such as social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.