.gov Reform Initiative

Department of Homeland Security 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 Homeland Security, 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 Homeland Security.

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

No.

DHS is creating its first agency-wide web strategy in coordination with the web governance system we established this year. Our governance is informed by the Secretary's Action Directive to streamline customer access to DHS services, improve DHS web content management and reduce costs by establishing a strategy for web-content management and web-hosting services through consolidation and centralized hosting of DHS public-facing websites. We have three types of websites: content, applications and login sites. For content sites, DHS expects to leverage a common service offering for all Components to consolidate CMS tools and host in the public cloud. The Office of Public Affairs manages content sites. Our goals are to simplify and unify, promote DHS policies and goals and foster open government. Application sites are federated to support the mission. HSIN is the Department's system for operational SBU information sharing and collaboration with external partners through login sites.

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

The action directive has had a positive impact at DHS.   It resulted in a first-of-its-kind data-call and benchmarking report to evaluate the state of the Web at DHS, completed in April 2011.   It also spurred the creation of a unified governance structure with participation by the component units and HQ support offices through a Web Council and an Executive Steering committee, both of which are formally chartered.

The Web Council has four standing committees - platform requirements, metrics and user experience, web workforce and enterprise content.   The Content committee has been charged by the ESC with formulating a web strategy document.

We are working to transform web team staffing from OCIO contract employees to federal positions that will be detailed to OPA from OCIO.   There are four core content management positions: content strategist, web community outreach manager, standards and practices specialist and metrics officer. When fully executed, this change will:

- map functional responsibilities to the proper organizational unit
- shift from expensive contract support to a sustainable federal civil service staff model

- assure Web publishing subject matter expertise will reside with civil servants, so OPA will enjoy enhanced continuity of operations and provide for inherently governmental activities to be handled by civil servants with release authority instead of contract employees

DHS Public website technologies are overseen by the DHS CIO and Component CIO organizations.   This oversight of technology, by DHS CIO and Component CIOs is complementary to how Public Affairs' offices within DHS manage content and the business aspects of web management. The Web Steering Committee consists of senior IT and Public Affairs officials from across the DHS Components and is Co-Chaired by the CIO and Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs.

Our workforce committee has been charged by the ESC with examining best practices at other agencies for managing the public web function and a conducting a web workforce survey to gain a better understanding of staffing levels, sources and other relevant information to build a stronger workforce. Recommendations from the benchmarking study and workforce survey will be made to the ESC after this research is complete.   One staffing structure concept under exploration is at use by the White House: a public web directorate reporting to the OCIO.

We are making incremental reforms to structure more traditional workflows at headquarters.   Our operational components have a mix of staffing tactics, with some running centralized operations and others operating highly decentralized publishing. We learned from our benchmarking survey completed in early 2011 that a large percentage of our workforce is part-time, which we believe has significant impact on our performance.   In fact, the datacall and benchmarking report found the web workforce is effectively a collateral duty as assigned.   We identified 1100 people across DHS with some responsibility for web, but 93% of them are part-timers and some units report there is effectively zero.

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

Our current process to assure content is subject to continuous improvement is based on leveraging feedback from users and publishers as well as periodic spot checks for best practices by the Director of New Media and Web Communications. Because our web publishing is fragmented across nearly 300 websites we struggle with harmonizing our processes to achieve the best results.

Those sites that leverage customer satisfaction surveys are able to identify top voice of the customer issues that impact satisfaction.

Our enterprise content committee is currently developing some best practice tools to aid web managers to do content inventories that root out content that is redundant old and trivial.

As we make plans to consolidate many of our web properties on a uniform content management system we are starting to compare practices between components. The expectation is that we will harmonize our editorial guidelines and institute more DHS-wide training for content providers and publishers in an effort to improve content management.

OAST, our office in charge of assisted technology is well financed and staffed through both the OCIO and the Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Office. Unlike other factors that are known contributors to high performing sites, such as usability engineering, getting clearance from OAST is now a required step in the configuration control process managed by the OCIO.

The foundation of any content improvement process is to understand your audience. At HQ, we have recently adopted a question as part of our satisfaction survey which asks people about how frequently they visit the site. From this data we can cull who our power users are, who our frequent users are and who are new or infrequent users are. We learned that most of our users are new and infrequent. This knowledge has helped inform our efforts to repackage our content to better serve their needs. Dense page content is making way for content that is packaged for a bite-snack-meal way of layering the pages.

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?

Developing Web metrics at DHS is a key goal for the Web governance bodies.

We learned from the secretary's 2011 data-call and benchmarking report about our baseline on web metrics. Only one component has a key performance indicator program and of the eight operational components only three use satisfaction survey data. Furthermore, nobody is actively managing search and we pay for multiple implementations. For human performance testing for usability there are limited efforts at work and but no agency-wide strategy.

The Metrics and User Experience Committee is leading the charge to develop a more mature approach for how DHS measures our investment in online communications. Performance measures for the Web ideally cover five areas:

Usability testing – We are starting a usability program with a best-practice scorecard to evaluate how sites perform key metrics including usability heuristics.   The scorecard, now in a pilot, measures several factors in a weighted system that provides each site on a 100 point scale. The metrics factors map to those listed on page three of the federal domain survey. We hope to gain an apples-to-apples comparisons in how our sites perform. The scorecard, in an excel workbook with formulas, has an accompanying handbook which explains the factors included in the scorecard and how to measure your performance with each factor so it can be a self-assessment tool.

Web analytics – Behavior-based data on factors like traffic, page views, bounce rates, and time on site can be captured as key performance indicators and require an enterprise wide analytics tool. We are making plans to roll-out an agency wide implementation of Google Analytics in FY12 after we clear all the policy hurdles.

Satisfaction surveys – The backbone of any satisfaction survey is measured in three questions: Were you satisfied? Would you come back? Would you recommend to others?   Right now DHS has five websites

across three operational components that utilize satisfaction surveys.   We aim to have more uniformity in question sets as part of our improvement plan.

Search – Insights here can help us actively manage search.   We are currently limited by the lack of a common search appliance.   We are examining the GSA search offering as an opportunity to make gains in the execution of search, which hopefully will lead to gains in search performance.

Business goals – The Department's Efficiency Review office has identified cost-avoidance as a key goal for us to measure, including accounting for expected savings from the shift to cloud computing. Other business goals - which are in development - can build on this foundation.

As we take steps toward turning website management into a data-driven process, the metrics committee's work will give us firm ground for success. The metrics committee has a mandate from the Executive Steering Committee to take a number of steps in FY12 to make improvements. The group will also recommend key performance measures to be used across all of DHS. This will give us an apples-to-apples way to talk about how sites are performing. A roadmap to common metrics tools and a monthly metrics dashboard will cap the committee's initial push for change.

Another exciting aspect of the metrics committee's work is the forum where we'll take a collective look at our Web customer service standards. The outcome of this discussion will be captured in the Customer Service Plan developed in response to the Executive Order on Customer Service.