

Cape Gateway Evaluation

Report for the Centre for E-Innovation
Provincial Government of the Western Cape

By
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Executive Summary

This report is an evaluation by Radian of the PGWC's Cape Gateway project, assessing to what extent it is meeting its objective of providing easy access to government information. Cape Gateway consists of three major components, all of which are considered: a walk-in centre, a call centre and an online portal which supports both as well as being directly accessible over the Internet.

The report identifies the following **strengths** of Cape Gateway:

1. Goals and objectives are clearly understood by a well-motivated and harmonious team.
2. The portal is a valuable resources for the walk-in centre and call centre.
3. The call centre (which handles both calls and emails), walk-in centre and portal are all functioning well and providing a valuable service to citizens.
4. Cape Gateway has been able to help some government agencies, for example the Office of the Consumer Protector, to improve their internal processes and become more efficient and effective.
5. Cape Gateway has been effectively marketed to citizens and has developed a strong brand.

The following **weaknesses** are also identified:

6. Organisational weaknesses
 - 6.1 There is some confusion about Cape Gateway's objectives in the rest of the PGWC, notably a failure to understand the difference between providing information as a service to citizens and providing a promotional service to departments and politicians.
 - 6.2 Liaison and synergy between various elements of the Cape Gateway team and government departments is weak in many cases. This shows itself in lack of response to citizen requests made via Cape Gateway, among other things.
 - 6.3 The call centre in particular generates valuable intelligence about citizen needs and government service delivery, and there is no reliable system for capturing and acting on this intelligence.
 - 6.4 Many government processes and procedures are not well defined, which makes it difficult for Cape Gateway to provide accurate information.
 - 6.5 Cape Gateway has a unique (for government) working environment and style, which sometimes makes interactions with other government departments cumbersome.
 - 6.6 Important co-operation and technical agreements with other government agencies are not yet in place.
 - 6.7 Responses to emails sent via the Cape Gateway portal are not optimal.
 - 6.8 Lines of accountability are not always clear and co-ordination between the walk-in centre, call centre and portal content team is inadequate.
 - 6.9 Cape Gateway's success has created new work, which has in turn created new staffing and management needs which are not being met.
 - 6.10 Cape Gateway is understaffed, with consequences including lack of proactive planning, inefficient use of resources, expensive use of consultants and contractors, failure to capture tacit knowledge and low morale.
7. Technological weaknesses
 - 7.1 Portal content management is increasingly complex.
 - 7.2 The data model for portal content has some limitations.
 - 7.3 Bandwidth constraints and network reliability are serious problems.

- 7.4 Bee Version 2 is heavily browser-dependent.
 - 7.5 The walk-in centre needs a proper customer relationship management system.
 - 7.6 There is no knowledge management system in place.
8. Strategic weaknesses
- 8.1 Cape Gateway remains inaccessible to the poorest citizens of the Western Cape.
 - 8.2 Synergy and co-ordination between Cape Gateway and other government agencies is weak.
 - 8.3 Some of Cape Gateway's broader citizen-focussed goals are not being achieved and may need to be reviewed.

There are some important **opportunities** for Cape Gateway to take advantage of:

- 9. Solve network and infrastructure problems.
- 10. Solve staffing and human resources problems.
- 11. Appoint e-champions in PGWC departments to be responsible for liaison with Cape Gateway.
- 12. Urgently undertake a change management exercise to clarify Cape Gateway's role within the PGWC.
- 13. Provide better access for Cape Gateway staff (including call centre staff) to government information systems.
- 14. Develop a shared customer tracking system for Cape Gateway's different channels.
- 15. Create new channels to improve citizen access, particularly more walk-in centres and an SMS callback facility.

There are also some major **threats** to Cape Gateway's future success:

- 16. The most significant threat, the reverse side of the most important opportunity, is that network infrastructure issues will not be addressed. This will significantly hamper Cape Gateway's ability not only to roll out new services, but even to continue delivering its current services at an acceptable cost and quality.
- 17. Failure to address synergy and co-ordination problems between Cape Gateway and other PGWC departments could marginalise and disempower Cape Gateway, reducing it to one more buffer between the state and citizens.
- 18. Accumulated knowledge and skill may be lost if staffing challenges and knowledge management challenges are not met.
- 19. Cape Gateway may not be effective in creating real access to ICTs for the poor.

While Cape Gateway is meeting its planned objectives overall, some urgent action is required both to ensure that it continues to perform at a high level and that new opportunities are effectively pursued.

Introduction

In May 2001 the Provincial Government of the Western Cape (PGWC) set out a ten-year strategy for dealing with the challenges facing the province. This strategy planned to channel the forces of globalisation toward the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of people to lead fulfilling lives. The Cape Online strategy was developed to explore the potential of e-government. The Cape Gateway portal was one of the projects contained in this strategy, specifically designed to improve internal efficiencies in service delivery, enhance the overall competitiveness of the region and improve the lives of the Western Cape's citizens through improved access to government content and services. Cape Gateway and its information portal are the first step in the staged introduction of e- government in the Western Cape.

In September 2005 Radian was engaged as an external consultant to conduct an independent evaluation of the Cape Gateway service, and was tasked with evaluating the channels used for delivering the service, against Cape Gateway's objectives. Specific questions addressed were: does the Cape Gateway project comply to best practice principles? Does the service give citizens real access to online government information?

Radian conducted interviews with all channel managers and related staff, analysed the management reports for each area of service delivery and reviewed a set of email interactions that were provided. We did not perform any quantitative market research or usability testing, but rather sought to comment on the findings of the analysis especially in relation to the objectives and to assess whether the project delivered real access.

This evaluation report presents a SWOT analysis for the Cape Gateway service offered to date, provides feedback on the business processes and is intended to provide resource materials for planning and implementing future steps in the Cape Online Programme and related initiatives.

Strengths

1. Team alignment and vision

The overall objective of Cape Gateway – to provide easy access to government information and services – was well understood and clearly articulated by everyone interviewed.

In addition, staff members commented on the very positive attitude and atmosphere that has been created within Cape Gateway. There is a general feeling that everyone on the team understands and is deeply committed to the project. Staff go out of their way to help citizens, especially the disadvantaged, to get the information they need. Cape Gateway was described as “least confusing”, “accessible”, “understandable” and “clear”.

2. The portal is fulfilling its objectives

Call centre and walk-in centre staff who use the portal daily noted that it was an extensive and valuable resource, although “you need to get to know your way around” and some knowledge of government jargon is needed (for example “termination of pregnancy” instead of “abortion”).

3. All channels are providing a valuable service to citizens

3.1 Call centre

Although there are many challenges particularly in handling the liaison between Cape Gateway and individual departments (see below), the call centre is providing a valuable service, most especially where call centre staff have access to internal information systems beyond what’s on the portal. Access to information such as the social services database and the special licences database enables them to give callers instant feedback on the progress of applications. As a regular element of their work, call centre staff will call a district office or department to obtain information that is not yet available on the portal, and call back to the citizen who requested the information.

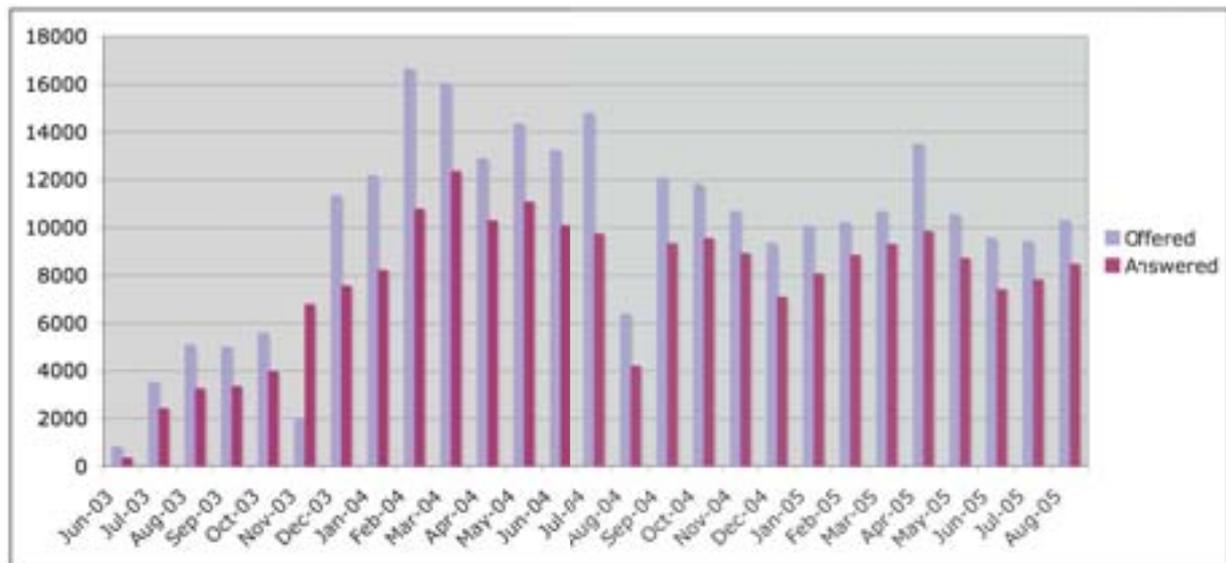
The call centre also receives many calls from other provinces, which it is not often able to handle; in general agents try to redirect people to the appropriate agencies using information available on the Cape Gateway portal or national Gateway portal.

Call centre operations are outsourced to the Dialogue group. The reporting channels between Alex van Breda and call centre manager Heidi Powell are effective and other than a few minor enhancements the reporting process and structure have remained effective and consistent.

Most citizens who use the call centre do not have access to alternate channels, or lack the skills to use technology: the call centre operators fulfill an immensely valuable role by providing a simple, accessible and responsive service. The team spirit appears to be higher than the average government employee, which is felt by the callers.

The following diagram shows the number of calls that have been offered and answered over the past two years.

Figure 1: Calls handled by the Dialogue group call centre on behalf of Cape Gateway



3.2 Email

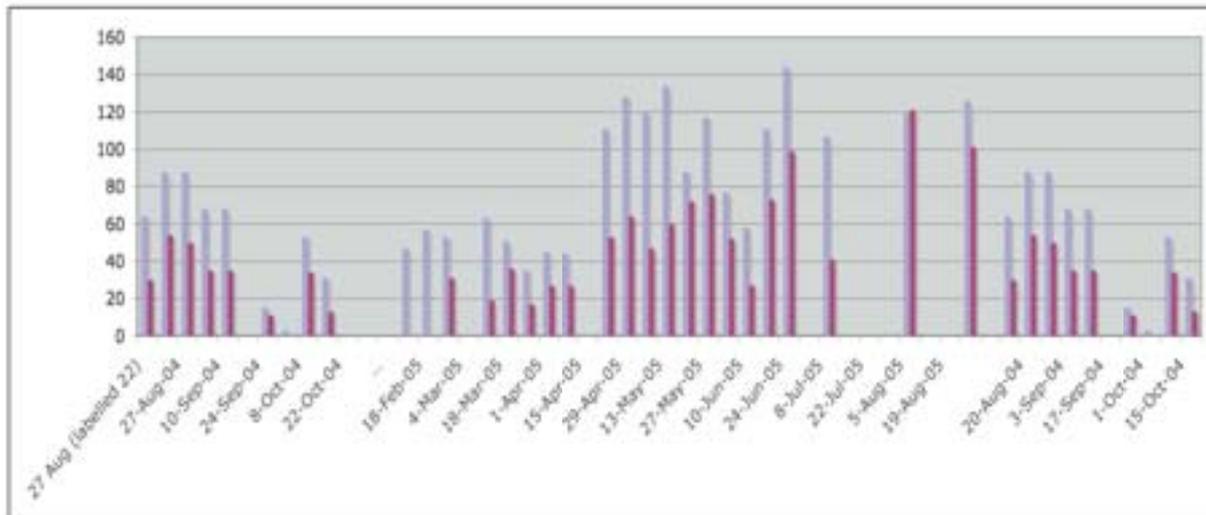
Citizens and business that use the email channel (questions@capegateway.gov.za) tend to ask more sophisticated and complex questions than callers or walk-in citizens. In turn, email questions generally require more research and investigation, since those who send email have most likely already read the web site before asking their questions.

Answering of email is also outsourced to the Dialogue group, with a copy of all email questions and answers sent to a PGWC employee to enable a regular internal check. This audit is performed by Thys Hattingh of the PGWC communications unit, in order to ensure that emails are all answered timeously and accurately. This system appears to be working well and Mr Hattingh reports that the service provided by Dialogue does provide the least confusing, accessible and clear government information. Although there have been occasional delays and other issues, the problems have been quickly identified and corrected because of this important monitoring function.

This is not a highly utilised service that requires more rigorous investigation; nevertheless, from our interviews it appears that most email users are pleased with the service provided and there are a number of complimentary emails sent every month.

The following diagram illustrates the number of emails sent and responded to by the Cape Gateway email.

Figure 2: Emails (questions@capegateway.gov.za) handled by the call centre staff*



* light blue = total emails received for the week (incl. spam, delivery notifications and compliments)
red = total emails processed including escalation emails (this is the more useful number to note).

Over the past year, Cape Gateway (mostly in the form of the call centre) has responded to an average of 40 emails¹ per week.

3.3 Walk-in Centre

The walk-in centre has succeeded in changing people's frustration with government into rewarding experiences. Face-to-face contact is especially useful for less educated and literate citizens, for whom dealing with traditional silo based government service delivery is difficult. For example, someone dealing with pension grants is not always au fait with disability grants or child support subsidies and may often inadvertently make it difficult for disadvantaged people who are not aware of all the government services available to them.

Although many other government departments also offer face-to-face contact, the Cape Gateway walk-in centre is unique for its lack of red tape and focus on the customer.

The walk-in centre is operated by PGWC employees Corlie Liebenberg and Ndumi Zathu. They report that people find out about the walk-in centre by word of mouth and many citizens return because of the personal, friendly, welcoming and surprisingly caring culture of the environment. These employees take the extra effort to make people smile and ensure that citizens experience a fast turnaround time – which people are not used to for government. When people are too frustrated to smile, walk-in centre staff are understanding and allow them the opportunity to vent their frustrations.

The walk-in centre provides both written and spoken information. Printed brochures, information pamphlets and other government publications are used to attract passers-by and to provide citizens with access to, or their own copies of, printed government information materials.

Since the private Internet connection was installed (Telkom ADSL vs the legacy SITA connection that all other government employees use) the free internet access offered by the walk-in centre has worked well. The availability of a functional laser printer has also been very beneficial to the walk-in centre staff in the delivery of surprisingly good service.

¹ This figure is used purely as an indication as a number of inconsistencies were found in the reports that were provided for the analysis.

The following diagram illustrates the number of interactions with the public between August 2004 and July 2005. The high number of visits in February 2005 has been credited to the Premier's PR campaign at the time.

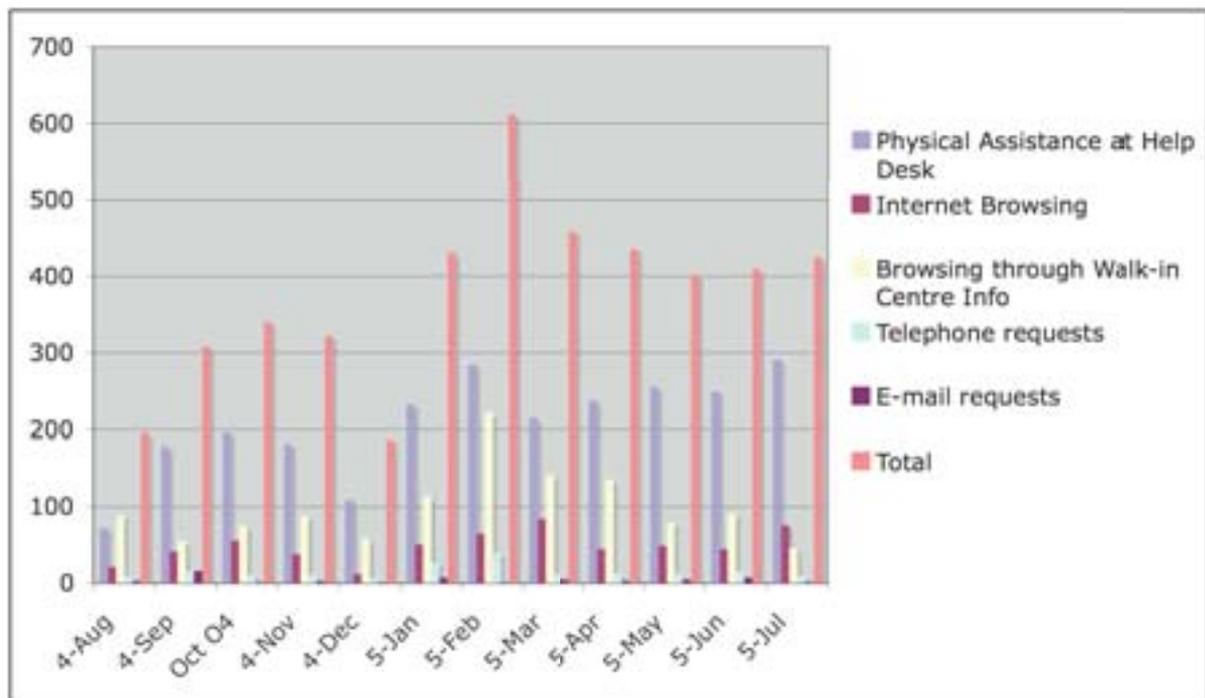


Figure 3: Interactions handled by the Cape Gateway walk-in centre staff

3.4 Portal

The Cape Gateway portal (<http://capegateway.gov.za>) has successfully provided the information (“back-end”) required for each of the other channels. Considering that these channels are each managed separately and differently, this in itself is a success.

The number of individuals accessing the portal grew each month to July 2005, since when it has largely stabilised although the number of unique host visits and individual page impressions has fluctuated. This is quite normal. The trend for all portals should be growth, and during the next 6-12 months Cape Gateway needs to monitor the portal carefully to ensure a growth trend.

Analysis of portal usage yields the following indicators:

- Jobs are the most viewed and sought after information, followed by tenders.
- Over 80% of users are South African
- Over 14% of use is from inside government
- Most users are looking up specific information
- Most users are returning (i.e. they come using a bookmark/favorite or enter the URL directly into their browser)
- More than 85% of users that find information on Cape Gateway using a search engine, use Google

The table overleaf compares usage of Cape Gateway during September 2005 - with the top sites in South Africa according to the Online Publishers Association of South Africa². This puts Cape Gateway in the top 40 most-visited web sites in the country.

Customer feedback

The following feedback was sent by Diana Worwood of the Computer Sciences Corporation:

“I would just like to take this opportunity to compliment you on a very very good website. The real test of a good website is being able to find some specific information when you need it. I needed to find some information out about Child Grants on for my char ... I was so pleasantly surprised at how easy it was, how all the information was available and up-to-date, and that I could print the pages in Xhosa for my char. I really expected to spend hours trying to understand what needed to be done, but it was so easy. (I even called the toll-free number, and I have to say expected less than helpful service. On the contrary, I was amazed at how helpful the call centre agent was). So well done on a great site, it must have required TREMENDOUS effort (and ongoing efforts!) to get it into such a user-friendly and useful site.”

² The Online Publishers Association (OPA) is the body that provides audit capability for web advertising in South Africa, for more information see <http://www.opa.org.za>.

Table 1: South African web site usage, September 1 to September 30 2005

The following table is a list of web sites that are audited for the purposes of advertising sales. This is a subset of all the websites in South Africa and Cape Gateway has been inserted for illustrative purposes only.

Aggregate			Unique Browsers	Page Impressions
Market Aggregate			2,007,959	96,440,560
Rank	Publisher	Site	Unique Browsers	Page Impressions
1	Media24	news24.com	509,422	12,296,127
2	MWEB	www.mweb.co.za	504,034	17,054,415
3	Independent Online	iol.co.za	381,627	7,676,022
4	Ananzi (Pty) Ltd	ananzi.co.za	303,751	3,139,774
5	Media24	health24.co.za	194,939	3,299,890
6	Media24	Finance24.co.za	186,966	2,744,994
7	iafrica.com	iafrica.com	175,754	5,467,918
8	CareerJunction	careerjunction.co.za	163,313	7,520,189
9	Media24	wheels24.co.za	114,238	1,530,268
10	Media24	women24.com	107,487	925,391
11	Mail & Guardian Online	http://mg.co.za/	101,798	1,140,012
12	Mail & Guardian Online	mg.co.za	99,883	1,130,201
13	Telkom SA	aardvark.co.za	99,236	1,487,779
14	Johnnic Communications	sundaytimes.co.za	97,446	1,305,660
15	SuperSport Zone	supersport.co.za	84,518	578,578
16	Media24	Property24.com	83,939	2,226,478
17	Independent Online	tonight.co.za	83,252	493,634
18	MWEB	tiscali.co.za	81,320	592,258
19	Bizcommunity.com	Bizcommunity.com	79,797	1,822,528
20	Private Property	www.privateproperty.co.za	78,724	2,987,863
21	Independent Online	busrep.co.za	77,072	416,531
22	Yellow Pages SA	yellowpages.co.za	76,340	1,046,874
23	Independent Online	motoring.co.za	73,021	580,704
24	ITWeb Limited	itweb.co.za	69,153	496,328
25	SuperSport Zone	Kaizer Chiefs	67,574	1,440,720
26	Independent Online	star.co.za	66,765	459,626
27	Ananzi (Pty) Ltd	search2.ananzi	63,170	360,324
28	5FM	5fm	61,789	1,308,322
29	Ananzi (Pty) Ltd	search1.ananzi	60,146	329,848
30	Ananzi (Pty) Ltd	Brabys.com	56,366	587,951
31	Media24	food24.co.za	48,912	317,806
32	BDFM Publishers	businessday.co.za	46,458	557,751
33	Moneyweb Holdings	moneyweb.co.za	46,422	858,754
PGWC			42,860	456,834
34	Media24	Kick Off South Africa	41,161	660,384
35	SuperSport Zone	superrugby.co.za	41,046	555,163
36	Media24	Love2meet.co.za	32,734	1,696,046
37	Ramsay, Son & Parker	cartoday.com	31,068	895,526
38	Independent Online	capeargus.co.za	26,636	168,393
39	SuperSport Zone	supercricket.co.za	25,727	1,011,607
40	Independent Online	capetimes.co.za	23,813	142,106
41	SuperSport Zone	Sundowns	21,752	289,795
42	Media24	Litnet	21,741	523,809
43	Media24	Careers24	20,755	292,146
44	SuperSport Zone	supersoccer.co.za	20,093	252,013
45	BDFM Publishers	financialmail.co.za	17,231	98,650
46	Ananzi (Pty) Ltd	search.ananzi	17,116	79,601

47	Media24	News24_CityPress	17,102	129,666
48	Independent Online	pretorianews.co.za	16,145	85,232
49	Ananzi (Pty) Ltd	Ananzi Dating	15,258	1,388,652
50	365 Digital Publishing	Rugby365	15,240	142,692
51	Creamer Media (Pty) Ltd	www.engineeringnews.co.za	15,165	61,118
52	SuperSport Zone	supercycling.co.za	14,269	152,932
53	Media24	Landbou.com	14,127	73,898
54	Ramsay, Son & Parker	getawaytoafrica.com	14,013	155,513
55	Independent Online	persfin.co.za	12,621	54,551
56	Independent Online	dailynews.co.za	11,520	54,623
57	SuperSport Zone	superwheels.co.za	10,623	78,536
58	Independent Online	themercury.co.za	10,242	47,830
59	SuperSport Zone	supergolf.co.za	9,773	66,778

4. Cape Gateway has been able to change some government processes for the better

Cape Gateway's intervention has helped some agencies to improve their back-office processes, leading to better service to citizens. At the Office of the Consumer Protector, for example, it previously took 15-20 minutes simply to register a query using the old paper-based process. The call centre now captures all information online before referring it on, not only speeding up the process but also enabling accurate reporting. This system can still be improved in many ways, as more than one interviewee noted – but it is much better than what went before.

5. Marketing

The partnership with KFM has been very beneficial for Cape Gateway. However, because of the high costs of radio and print the most successful area of marketing has been advocacy. Exhibiting at public and well targeted trade shows as well as expeditions into rural communities has contributed a great deal toward the development of the Cape Gateway brand and awareness. Examples of programmes include school week, listening lunches and other interactive programmes.

Weaknesses

6. Organisational

6.1 Confusion about Cape Gateway's objectives in the rest of the PGWC

Cape Gateway's primary objective, well understood within the team, is: to provide easy access to government information and services for citizens and businesses. In other words, citizens (including government employees in their capacity as citizens) are Cape Gateway's primary clients. In this context, government departments are among Cape Gateway's primary suppliers: they need to provide the information that is communicated via the portal, for the benefit of citizens.

However, in practice the relationship between the portal content team and government departments is often understood the other way around: that the departments are the clients, and that the content team is delivering a promotional service on their behalf. In effect, the objective has shifted in the eyes of many provincial departments, from delivering information to citizens, to promoting the PGWC and its departments – and even, in the worst case, political office bearers.

This is a subtle but very significant shift, which has probably arisen for several reasons:

- The content team does not deal directly with the portal's end users;
- Departments are under no obligation to provide Cape Gateway with information, and so in an effort to gain their co-operation Cape Gateway has stressed the benefits to the departments of using the portal.
- Many of Cape Gateway's contacts in government are departmental or ministerial media liaison staff, whose objective is to promote their departments or ministers. These tend to treat Cape Gateway as an extension of their own function, like a PR or advertising agency.

6.2 Synergy and liaison between Cape Gateway channels and PGWC departments

There are a number of issues related to inadequate communication and liaison between and among the call centre, walk-in centre, content team and supplier departments. These include:

1. Some departmental staff use the call centre or walk-in centre as a way to avoid citizens. Examples of this include rerouting departmental phones to the call centre without notifying Dialogue, and referring callers to Cape Gateway inappropriately (some staff of the City of Cape Town's motor vehicle licensing office have been referring queries to Cape Gateway even though Cape Gateway has no access to the motor vehicle licensing information systems.)
2. Departmental staff sometimes fail to respond to queries from the call centre. This includes calls and emails left unanswered, voicemail never returned, failure to provide information that has been requested, "that's not part of my job" and refusal to give names on request.
3. Departments do not routinely provide hardcopies of publications and documents to the walk-in centre. As a result walk-in centre staff are constantly asking for documents, and often find out too late (when citizens walk in the door asking for them) that some publications exist. When they do find out in time, they are often required to collect these publications themselves, which means personally collecting and transporting heavy boxes.
4. Departments do not brief Cape Gateway adequately: the call centre and content team are not routinely briefed when departmental liaison people change jobs, go on leave, go on training or are in meetings. This is particularly problematic when there is only one person in a department who can deal with queries.

It has also happened that departments use the 0860 142 142 in advertising campaigns without informing the call centre or content team. One case mentioned involved a newsletter to schools in which parents were asked to contact 0860 142 142 regarding special sports shoes, but no liaison person was appointed in the department to deal with the resulting queries and no notice was given to Cape Gateway – with the result that agents found themselves fielding calls on a subject they knew nothing about.

In a similar case, job applicants to the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport were referred to the call centre for updates on the progress of their applications – again without the call centre being notified.

5. The call centre uses a simple database to track and report on customer interactions for Cape Gateway. This system is not available to the walk-in centre. This prevents integrated reporting and will hamper scalability of the walk-in centre.

In general, where the call centre is required to refer callers to departments the system was not felt to be working at all. With the exception of the Office of the Consumer Protector, departments provide no feedback to the call centre on the progress of referred queries.

6.3 Valuable intelligence is going to waste

The call centre is perfectly located to collect citizen feedback on government service delivery and to identify problem areas across all departments. For example, call centre agents volunteered the information that:

- There are long delays in the processing of disability grant applications: it can take several weeks for applications even to be logged on the central system. Calls about this are received more or less daily. As far as call centre staff are aware, there is no single individual within the Social Services department responsible or accountable for managing this.
- Social services district offices at Atlantis and Caledon are a serious problem, with child grants, foster grants and welfare grants in general just not being processed.
- Clinics and Social Services district offices turn citizens away once their quotas for the day are filled even where there is capacity available; staff arrive late at work or not at all and treat citizens with contempt.
- Citizens are afraid of taking up grievances with the Departments of Social Services and Health for fear of victimisation.

Cape Gateway staff have apparently reported these problems on numerous occasions with no effect. There is no formal mechanism for this reporting, nor for feedback on what action has been taken. Not only is this a missed opportunity, it is causing serious frustration among call centre staff who deal daily with desperate callers and are unable to offer meaningful assistance. On a scale of 1 to 10, all reported their frustration as a 10 without hesitation.

6.4 Government processes and procedures are not well defined

Call centre staff reported that they are often asked to help citizens with grant applications, licence applications and the like, which they are not able to do online. However, they are at least able to tell people what documents will be needed – in theory, valuable information which may save people from having to make additional trips. However, either Cape Gateway does not always have accurate information, or departments do not have or are not applying clear standards: call centre agents noted that “we get told different things by different people” and that in practice people often arrive at offices with all the documents they have been told to bring, only to be asked for yet another.

6.5 The Cape Gateway working environment is atypical of government

For reasons that probably include its halfway position between citizens and government, its physical location and the preponderance of staff members who have not previously worked for government, Cape Gateway “doesn’t work like government”, in the words of one staff member. Cape Gateway staff members view this as positive and some noted that they would not be willing to work under the conditions regarded as normal in the rest of the public sector. However, this does create problems where Cape Gateway has to interact with the rest of government, whether this be asking for information, getting approval for new posts, working with tender processes or

getting access to equipment and resources. Cape Gateway's expectation is of private-sector service levels; these are not matched by the reality of government processes.

6.6 Intergovernmental agreements not in place

At Cape Gateway's inception it was recognised as important to make co-operation and technical agreements with other government organisations that have service-oriented switchboard operators, call centres, portals or other information resources. Crucial partners that were identified included the City of Cape Town, DOC, DTI, Home Affairs and DPSA.

These agreements have yet to be made, with the City of Cape Town being the most urgent. Many calls to Cape Gateway need to be referred to the Unicity, but there is currently no system for doing this. Agreements will enable information sharing and for calls to be channelled to the appropriate areas of responsibility.

6.7 Email requires a more sophisticated response

A scan through over 100 emails received in September 2005 shows that insufficient time is being taken to research and understand the questions to ensure appropriate answers. Too often the response is that Cape Gateway cannot help, often accompanied by useful alternate URLs. Often there is in fact a government service that could help – but because departments take a long time to respond to queries, and Cape Gateway staff try to respond quickly, the information is simply not getting to the citizen.

There is some feeling that email should not be outsourced because of the higher level of query and the need to have a closer understanding of government and its associated services. This view is not universal – but it is worth noting that there is no policy or guidelines on how to deal with email queries.

6.8 Unclear lines of accountability and lack of co-ordination

The recent restructuring of the Centre for E-Innovation has introduced new lines of reporting, with Cape Gateway being located within the new Planning and Development unit. This decision is not supported or clearly understood by all team members. In particular, it was felt that Cape Gateway suffers from not being managed as a single product, with the content team, walk-in centre and call centre channels all reporting to different places. Managers with direct responsibility for the three channels rarely, if ever, meet to co-ordinate and report on their activities; some co-ordination and feedback happens as a result of accidental meetings where people are in the same building, but otherwise this is a problem.

Similarly, feedback from the walk-in centre and call centre to the content team is ad-hoc and tends to happen only when other tasks – answering phones and dealing with clients – are not more urgent. The call centre team in particular feels isolated from the rest of Cape Gateway and is far closer, despite all the problems, to individual departments.

6.9 Managing the results of success

Cape Gateway has grown progressively more complex and challenging to manage. The number of queries via the call centre, walk-in centre and portal has increased; the volume of information available has increased; and the scope of Cape Gateway's work has increased as new areas are added to its remit.

This increasing complexity has created new management and staffing needs which are, by and large, not being met. In particular, there is a need for a dedicated liaison between the call centre and the rest of the Cape Gateway team. Monthly calls to the call centre have increased from

3,557 in its first full month of operation (July 2003) to 10,331 in August 2005, with a high of 16,659 in February 2004 due to the Social Services Farm Dwellers Campaign. At the same time the call centre is taking calls on behalf of an increasing number of departments and government services providers, most recently including public transport licensing services. This creates a need for more sustained, systematic liaison not just between the call centre and the rest of the Cape Gateway team, but also between the call centre and the rest of government.

This is particularly important because the call centre receives daily valuable feedback on government services from citizens – but has no assured way to communicate this feedback to the relevant departments.

6.10 Understaffing

Taking into account that the decentralised content creation model has not worked out and considering the current centralised approach, there are a number of problems related to understaffing, and staffing at inappropriate levels:

a. Lack of proactive planning due to excessive individual workloads

Several members of the Cape Gateway team are performing a range of tasks beyond their official functions. Short-term crisis management and crisis prevention have taken considerable time during 2005, with the result that important longer-term work has been neglected and there has been little or no time for strategic development and thinking. The content creation team is concerned that strategic content development work has suffered because of what was described as “constant firefighting”; similarly, there is little time available to devote to planning for expanded and improved Cape Gateway services, despite a recognition that “it needs continual refreshing to keep it at the edge.”

b. High-level staff being used for low-level functions

Low-level tasks such as inputting information on tenders, jobs and the court roll is being carried out by staff who are overqualified for the job – partly because no other people are available, and partly because of bandwidth and usability issues.

c. Slow appointments lead to expensive short-term solutions

Two appointments to the content team were due to be made in February but only happened at the end of September due to a variety of organisational issues beyond the Cape Gateway team’s control. A third post has been created but it is unclear when this will be filled. In the meantime, tasks which cannot be postponed have been contracted out to third parties, an expensive solution.

It was noted that a content staff structure signed off in 2003 has still not been actioned and that that the process of post evaluation is slow, inappropriate and difficult.

d. Proliferation of tacit knowledge

The content team noted that it was important to document the process of creating and maintaining the portal and to set up a system for knowledge transfer – but this has not happened due to time and resource constraints. As a result all the skills and knowledge need to maintain the portal, which have been built up over a period of years, are in the heads of three people – two of whom have very recently been made permanent employees and one of whom is still on a contract. This presents a serious risk to the project.

e. Morale and motivation

The problems named above tend to reduce job satisfaction and morale, and there is a strong possibility that some staff members may be facing burnout. This is exacerbated by a lack of latitude within which to reward excellence.

7. Technological

7.1 Portal content management is an increasingly complex task

The content team noted that the skill requirements for the job have grown as they are beginning to push the limitations of what is possible within a template-based site, largely in response to departmental demands for more flexible and customised content. This is creating a need for more specialised HTML skills and possibly for an in-house graphic designer.

7.2 Constraints of the data model

Some government initiatives – the RED Door project was given as an example – are difficult to fit into the existing Cape Gateway data model. This classifies items as projects, services, news items or events, with each class of item creating an associated set of automatic links and placements which are not always appropriate. The team has created a set of workarounds for the problem areas but notes that fitting real content to government structures can be intellectually challenging, and that this has resulted in a portal which is extremely complex and difficult to replicate. This in turn has implications for the level of skills required – see notes on understaffing above.

7.3 Bandwidth and network problems seriously hamper productivity

Some relatively minor usability problems with Bee V1 have been exacerbated by bandwidth constraints and network unreliability, with the result that productivity and time management suffer. Members of the content team noted that simple tasks which should take five minutes, such as inputting tender information, could take up to half an hour because of bandwidth problems and network glitches.

It was noted that “no one person seems to understand the whole network” and that between the CEI transversal team and SITA, it is usually unclear where the responsibility for fixing problems lies. This has been formally raised as a project issue and a task team has been put together, but without any discernible difference being made. At various points team members have worked off site to get around the network problems.

In another case, a web application commissioned to speed up interaction between the call centre and the Office of the Consumer Protector is currently unusable because of bandwidth constraints.

This is a potentially fatal problem for Cape Gateway as it remains unaddressed since well before the implementation. Since most applications rely on the network, and if CEI is an enabler for PGWC systems, this issue must be urgently addressed. Both the capacity and the reliability of the network have been monitored and as a representative sample we identified the week 15 – 22 September 2005. During this week there were 25 network failures (as measured by CEI staff using Solarwinds Network Monitor). This item remained listed as a major problem hampering the content team on every monthly report since inception.

7.4 Concerns about Bee Version 2

The content team expressed a concern that BEE V2 was heavily browser-dependent and since browser or Internet related systems rely so heavily on network capability and capacity, this would

further aggravate the problem of the network reliability and bandwidth constraints. In particular, it would militate against any attempt to re-introduce decentralised content creation by the departments.

7.5 Walk-in customer relationship management

Whilst the call centre uses a proprietary customer relationship management tool, the walk-in centre works on manual systems. Because of the small scale of the current walk-in environment, this does not yet hamper the continuity of customer interactions because staff usually recognise previous visitors and a personal relationship is developed. The only constraint at present is that reporting is not integrated (customer interactions in each channel) and the issue will have to be addressed if the walk-in environment is expanded.

7.6 Knowledge management

The initial plans for Cape Gateway allowed all those providing the Cape Gateway public service (as well as all stakeholders willing to contribute) to be able to contribute to the content of the portal. For various reasons this decentralised model was not enabled, and hence the dedicated portal content team is responsible for all updates. This has resulted in each of the channels creating their own little information/knowledge repositories to store information that they feel may be useful but is not included on the portal. This content includes examples such as contact information ('my little black book' was mentioned by the call centre staff) as well as topics like 'how to export gold'. There is a threat that these isolated knowledge repositories will be lost. Good knowledge management should ensure the longevity of this information and provide an added benefit of sharing and building upon this knowledge.

8. Strategic

8.1 Accessibility and access

The Cape Gateway project is - or was - part of a broader e-Government strategy that included consideration of the issue of access to ICTs (including telephones and computers). It was recognised that the vast majority of the provincial population do not have access to the Internet and cannot afford the current costs of telephone calls. All those currently involved with delivering services to the public at large recognise this as the greatest challenge facing Cape Gateway. The majority of the population cannot get access because of the high cost of telephone calls, nor can they afford travel to Long Street to interact face to face – even though many of the poorest citizens feel most comfortable interacting on a face to face basis.

Several suggestions were made to expanding the network of face to face staff although there are varying ideas of how best to do this. Intermediaries were suggested, including 48 NGOs in Khayelitsha as well as RED Door offices and MPCCs – although Cape Gateway has dealt with citizens who have negative reports on their attempts to get help through the latter two channels.

8.2 Synergy

Synergy between the different departments and agencies of government is a strategic requirement for the growth and success of Cape Gateway, yet this is not always present. This applies on one level to the delivery of materials, information and follow-up required from each of the departments involved. At another level, greater collaboration is needed when all PGWC marketing and communication includes the Cape Gateway number and URL. This will require greater integration between most departments and Cape gateway processes and functions.

Many communications professionals within PGWC appear to believe that external communications is a function of the political element of the organisation. This is seriously hampering the acceptance and support of Cape Gateway within the administration (see discussion above under “confusion about Cape Gateway’s objectives”).

8.3 Citizen-centric

Initiatives such as Cape Gateway deal particularly with the relationship between the government and other organisations on the one hand (including other public agencies, private sector companies, non-profit and community organisations), and between government and citizens on the other hand. Citizens interact with Cape Gateway both as voters/stakeholders from whom the public sector should derive its legitimacy, and as customers who consume public services.

At the outset this created a broader remit for Cape Gateway than simply making government information available:

- Working better with business
- Developing communities
- Building partnerships
- Talking to citizens
- Listening to citizens
- Improving public services

Three years on, it is necessary to re-assess whether these goals were appropriate. In any event, the enabling environment is not yet present to be able to fulfil these ideal goals other than on a superficial level.

Opportunities

Some of the following recommendations are direct responses to problems raised during the review process; others are aimed at further enhancing successes.

9. Fix the infrastructure (network problems)

As we enter the information age (or knowledge economy) so the importance of network capacity becomes central to any enterprise that wishes to stay in business. For government, embracing the knowledge economy is essential to keep the Western Cape globally competitive. Citizens and businesses in the Western Cape believe that it has the potential to be globally competitive, but it will require exceptional officials to enable this. Network reliability and bandwidth have been problems since Cape Gateway’s inception which have not been fixed despite numerous reports and appeals.

10. Deal with the staff and HR issues

Again, these problems are not new but have remained unresolved for a long time, partly because Cape Gateway’s needs have changed and partly because it fits uneasily within the traditional provincial government HR processes. Some high-level pressure might help to move things along.

11.Re-appoint departmental e-champions

The Portal Task Team, made up of departmental e-champions appointed by the heads of departments, was successful in the initial implementation of Cape Gateway in that it established a formal channel and regular communications with - and between - departments. It has been recognised that Cape Gateway is the most successful transversal system ever developed by the PGWC, but in order to ensure its future success, departments must be involved in a more programmatic way.

In order for Cape Gateway to traverse the bureaucracy Cape Gateway staff are required to think laterally and provide service. This requires a different attitude than the rest of the organisation and each citizen facing member of the Cape Gateway team must drive change in attitude. It's been recognised that there are situations where front desk staff in other citizen facing jobs often do not help, and this is unfortunately mostly found in disadvantaged areas. In order for the Cape Gateway staff to be effective in driving the change in attitude there must be departmental representatives that they can depend on to assist.

Some of the problems to be resolved through departmental representatives include:

- Clear communications channels with clear levels of responsibility
- An understanding of the information society
- Proactive and timely information
- Contact detail updates.

At the very least the people involved in each of the channels should be given the opportunity to meet their counterparts from each of the departments that deal with the public.

12.Change management

Some work is needed to clarify Cape Gateway's role within the provincial government and re-engage support. In particular, the following should be done urgently:

- Improve top management's understanding of the different roles of Cape Gateway vs traditional communications functions, and ensure that communications officers share this understanding.
- Improve knowledge and understanding of middle managers in line departments of how and why to contribute toward the Cape Gateway content and marketing.
- Departments must designate liaison people to deal with queries from Cape Gateway and members of the public. These may or may not be the same as the members of the portal task team.

13.Improve access for Cape Gateway's staff to government information systems

- The walk-in office staff need (secure) access to systems such as the pensions system database, motor vehicle licensing system, and any others that may enable them to answer queries accurately and promptly. This will require some business process adaptation but is more useful and appropriate than developing fancy public interfaces into these or other 'online' systems.
- All Cape Gateway staff (including those in the call centre or other citizen facing intermediaries) need access to Groupwise, in whatever form is most convenient, to ensure they are able to identify appropriate contacts, and obtain telephone numbers, email addresses and other contact information whenever necessary.

14. Develop a shared customer tracking system

- The walk-in centre and call centre need to be able to share information about customers more easily. If possible, the walk-in centre should be given access to the call centre customer tracking system.

15. Create new, more accessible channels

- For many of the province's poorer citizens cellphones are more easily accessible than fixed-line phones even though high call charges might dissuade them from calling Cape Gateway. The ability to SMS a callback request to the call centre might increase usage.
- More walk-in centres should be established in areas such as Khayelitsha where there is high demand for access to government services, but it is difficult or expensive to travel.

Threats

The following threats have been identified. These are ordered by level of significance.

16. Inadequate infrastructure

The costs of bandwidth in South Africa have increased over the past ten years, even though comparable costs in other countries have decreased. The costs of ICT infrastructure for government departments have been further increased by the SITA legislation, which has exaggerated the cost hikes. This has led to infrastructure constraints which will inhibit not only the development and future success of Cape Gateway, but any other network-based information system. If this is not urgently addressed it will lead to decay of the organisation and its products. This is the most significant threat to Cape Gateway and its underlying objectives and must be aggressively and urgently addressed.

17. A disempowered Cape Gateway

Synergy is a key success factor for any organisation operating in the knowledge economy. Since the lack of synergy between Cape Gateway and other government departments has been identified as a multi-faceted weakness in the Cape Gateway service, it represents the other major threat to the future success of Cape Gateway.

The danger here is that an inadequately empowered Cape Gateway can hinder, instead of facilitate, citizen access to government information and services. Call centre staffers, for example, noted that at times "we feel like just another buffer between government and the people" and that "we're just an answering machine, we can't deliver a real service".

18. Losing the capability

E-government capacity development is one of the key challenges facing Cape Gateway. By capacity development we mean the human resource capacity, as well as the organisational capacity represented through business processes, lines of accountability and appropriate level of sophistication (of service delivery). Some of the specific risks are:

- That the capability that has been created by establishing Cape Gateway may be lost due to poor human resource management and/or the lessons learned through this development exercise may be lost by a total staff turnover.

- That the decisions required in order to address Cape Gateway challenges will not be made.
- That useful intelligence, information and knowledge may be lost due to poor management, lack of planning, lack of rigour or just plain apathy.
- That intergovernmental agreements will not be supported by self-centred politicians or leadership or possibly worse, senior management officials simply do not engage with each other.

19. Missing the poor

Access to ICTs is an essential requirement for poor people. This is not just in order to narrow the digital divide, but more importantly to assist in the delivery of information (which may influence a life or death situation).

At present the poor are the most disenfranchised by the Cape Gateway service. The threat of missing the poor is not only a politically charged issue, but a more practical issue relating to broader economic and social development goals.

Although there is little research indicating any the direct relationship between access to ICTs and economic development, in this case the poor may directly benefit from access to information. This is seen as a high priority constitutional right and as such the accessibility to Cape Gateway for the poor must be addressed, or those leaders responsible for its future must accept the associated political and economic risks of not developing the environment so as to make Cape Gateway more accessible to the poor.

Conclusion

The evaluation found that the Cape Gateway service meets its planned objectives. The service is widely accepted as adhering to, and often establishing, best practice. Yet to take full cognisance of the needs of the citizens of the Western Cape more attention must be paid to real access and continuous improvement.

The Cape Gateway team continues to encounter a number of obstacles, most of which are outside their control. Wherever possible they have overcome these obstacles and the lessons learned will be invaluable for the later stages of this project. Principally, the need for improved infrastructure, an empowered organisational structure, and increased synergy are further issues that need to be addressed.

We commend the efforts of the team and we are confident that the Cape Gateway service will deliver the standard expected. We hope that other administrations in South Africa and elsewhere will learn from this experience.

References

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Interviews

Alex van Breda – Cape Gateway manager
Heidi Powell – call centre manager
Siya Ndamane – researcher
Thys Hattingh – email manager
Petro van Rhyn – walk-in centre and communications manager
Ndumi Zathu - walk-in centre
Corlie Liebenberg – walk-in centre
Katherine de Tolly – portal manager
Helen Alexander – portal content team
Germaine Grammer – portal content team
Amanda Ketsekile – call centre agent
Elsa Somerset – call centre agent
David Hamilton – call centre agent