

Mobile government gets closer to the people

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"The idea is essentially to support and encourage access to new e-government services at any time and any place through the use of mobile communications and internet technologies," explains Dirk Tilsner, project coordinator for the IST programme-funded project, USE-ME.GOV.

To this end, the project has developed an open service platform for mobile users that can be shared by networked authorities and institutions in terms of technical infrastructure, information and other content, while also providing a framework for commercial exploitation.

From the outset, the emphasis was placed on creating a platform that would be easy to use and specifically tailored to the needs of administrations and service providers. That meant designing software that incorporated features such as usability, openness, interoperability and scalability, and would allow for networked operation.

"The idea is to enable authorities to share the platform as technological infrastructure and also to adopt a common exploitation framework," says Tilsner. "In the same way, the platform interfaces to mobile operators and all kinds of content providers that participate in this framework."

The broad goal of the project is to harmonise the quality of public services and to overcome problems associated with the digital divide. Based on attractive business models, platform sharing is a means to provide the conditions for cost-efficient mobile services, especially in geographical areas with low internet penetration. USE-ME.GOV aims to

provide new types of services targeting specific user groups as well as the wider public. These services will be configurable, personalised and dedicated to thematic content.

The advantages of such an approach are straightforward, believes Tilsner. "For a start, it becomes easier and faster to integrate new services because the platform already provides the core functionalities and interfaces. It also means that the sharing of costs as well as knowledge make the platform, and the mobile services provided through it, accessible to all authorities, ensuring sustainable service operation," he says.

According to Tilsner, the beauty of the platform is that there are few restrictions in terms of what services can be adapted to work with the system. "The platform has been conceived for mobile services, but can easily be integrated with other platforms that use other dissemination channels, typically the internet. Apart from simple messaging, mobile services are browser-based and are thus compatible with virtually all current 2.5G and also future 3G and UMTS mobile devices on the market," he says.

Services that might be used on such a platform include personalised information broadcasts on matters of local interest: for instance, traffic updates, upcoming public meetings, special events or announcements concerning administrative procedures. The platform could also be used for the submission of complaints and other requests from the public, thereby cutting red tape and speeding up response time to particular problems. Another potential application is the 'mobile student', enabling communication between the school and parents relating to curricular information, assessment results, school events, and so forth.

The platform has already been successfully integrated and tested in a simulated stress environment, says Tilsner. In the validation phase, the

platform was installed and operated in four countries, while various services were also tested in several countries accessing the platform installed in Madrid.

After a successful demonstration of the platform concept at a recent workshop in Lisbon, the main remaining challenges relate to strategic rather than technical objectives, says Tilsner.

"Technical improvements are always desirable, but are not the key challenge at the moment. The major challenge is educating and preparing public authorities to move to the mobile channel, build public-private partnerships and adopt networking strategies for sustainable deployment of these services," he says.

Commercial exploitation is also definitely in the pipeline for some of the commercial partners involved in the project such as EDISOFT and Indra Sistemas. For public administrations, however, the value of the platform lies beyond any commercial gain. Rather, all end-user partners in the project are evolving their own particular strategies for short- or medium term usage of the platform and the provision of services.

Source: [IST Results](#)

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