

Speechbubble

Published On: 17 June 2014

Organisation: Australian Government Department of Human Services

Country: Australia

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services, Health

Type: Communication, Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2011

Overall development time:

6 months

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Speechbubble is an online forum to inform and engage with the public, staff and stakeholders in designing its initiatives and services. It enables multi-way communication whereby the general public and staff alike can ask questions, provide comments, and make suggestions on the department's initiatives.

The forum is open for set periods of time to collaborate on a specific initiative, for example, 'Tell us how you want our humanservices.gov.au website to be enhanced to suit your needs and preferences'. Each time, the department receives hundreds of comments that are used to help shape the service or initiative in line with citizen expectations. The department provides outcome reports on how public feedback was used. Speechbubble is assisting the Department of Human Services to meet its objectives of using new technologies to engage with the public to produce high quality services using a collaborative approach.

Why the innovation was developed

The Department of Human Services has made it a priority to deliver better services for the public; services that are high quality and tailored for the community. To deliver these, the department is asking the community to be involved in the development of initiatives — the aim to improve customer satisfaction and create services that more closely match customer requirements and expectations. The department is also committed to meeting the government mandate of harnessing Web 2.0 tools to become more informed, responsive, innovative and citizen-centric.

Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

- Involve the community in the development of new initiatives and improve customer satisfaction.
 - Create services that more closely match customer expectations.
 - Enable the department to engage in a less formal and more immediate way with the public.
 - Explore a more immediate and cheaper way to get user feedback in comparison to formerly used instruments such as focus groups or market research.
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Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- Only internal staff for feedback activities, e.g. initiative on shaping a new Mature Aged Workers Strategy for the department.
- Customers (and staff) if the activity is for external and internal audiences, e.g. providing feedback on preparing a child for school.

Results

Efficiency

Reduce costly spending on feedback and evaluation by citizens through free online blog-tool and in-house hosting.

Effectiveness

Feedback provided on speechbubble helps shape the department's initiatives. Some examples include Our Service Commitments, humanservices.gov.au website, Mature Age Workers Strategy and telephone self service. Comments are taken on board to enhance or finalise an initiative, and the public are told how their feedback was used, closing the feedback loop.

Service quality

Accessibility:

In providing an online forum where feedback can be provided in an open and anonymous way, we are enabling people to be directly involved in shaping the initiatives and services delivered by the department.

Responsiveness:

By allowing customers to comment in a direct and immediate way on various initiatives we are giving them the opportunity to shape our department's initiatives, provide comments and opinions, as well as ask questions in a thoroughly consultative manner.

Customers feel that they are consulted and heard as the department reports back after each consultation and shows how citizens' comments have been included.

Other improvements

By allowing staff to comment in a direct and immediate way on initiatives that affect them, either as staff or as customers, we are empowering them to shape our services.

Evaluation

Feedback to citizens is provided after each consultation. Comments are taken on board to enhance or finalise an initiative and the public are told how their feedback was used, closing the feedback loop.

At the end of each speechbubble activity, the Digital Media team of the department creates an evaluation report which includes background information, objectives, key performance indicators, analysis of the results and learnings, as well as statistics from Google analytics. This report is distributed to the respective initiative.

The initiative subsequently analyses all the data and comments posted on speechbubble and supplies Digital Media with information about the outcomes of the project, which is then posted on the speechbubble site to inform participants how their feedback was/will be used.

<http://speechbubble-blog.dhs.gov.au/outcomes/>

Development

Design

As part of the Australian Government's Declaration of Open Government, the Department of Human Services has committed to improving its services through open collaboration and engagement. The department aims to take a strong collaborative approach to achieve better outcomes for government and customers. To deliver these, the department is asking the public to be involved in the development of initiatives - the aim being to improve customer satisfaction by creating services that more closely match customer requirements and expectations.

Testing

- The free, online blog-tool Wordpress was customized to meet brand requirements and accessibility compliance was tested across multiple devices and browsers by a software engineer.
 - Development of moderation policy and Terms of Use by legal service branch.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- Wordpress, an open source blogging tool.
- Online moderation of comments by specially trained in-house staff that examine comments and are able to delete inadequate information.

Resources used:

- Free online Wordpress blog.
 - Staff to customise theme.
 - Staff to moderate discussion.
 - Staff to prepare evaluation report.
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Diffusion

Since speechbubble, the Department of Human Services has launched another internal collaboration space called 'iDHS'. iDHS is part of a strategy to improve and encourage innovation within the department. Staff are able to contribute their ideas, or post feedback on other ideas, that they believe will improve the department's processes. The department has a team dedicated to moderating this forum, evaluating ideas and implementing improvements where appropriate. The iDHS forum is always open for discussion.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Having a well-defined framework and clear rules of use. This helps the discussion stay on track. When several comments require minor moderation, the community accepts this as they have been referred to the Terms of Use. The community is able to effectively self-moderate, with participants also providing feedback to each other, in addition to discussions between moderators and the public or staff.
- Blogs are an effective research method. Their simple interface enables anyone with a computer, internet access and basic computer literacy to participate. Most of the feedback is insightful and informative and relevant to the initiative. This was gained in a much shorter timeframe than many other research methods we currently use and at a significantly lower cost. It was delivered in an immediate and direct way—all ambiguous comments could be clarified and more information could be probed.
- Having skilled staff and appropriate resourcing is essential to monitor the site effectively and facilitate an ongoing flow of discussion. Also essential is an expert of the initiative being available to approve comments within a short timeframe (ca.15 minutes). An online discussion cannot work if it takes hours or even days to respond and elicit further feedback.