

Report a Food Problem

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Organisation: Food Standards Agency

Country: United Kingdom

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Health

Type: Communication, Data, Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2016

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Food Standards Agency (FSA), is an independent government department, and our service allows consumers to report a food problem they have experienced or seen (e.g. rat in restaurant, dirty hands serving food, foreign object in food), and does the hard work of getting that report to the local food safety/environmental health team responsible for food businesses in the area.

We have a nationwide view of food problems and are not limited to one local authority area (some local authorities offer their own online report forms). We link reported businesses to another dataset we hold that gives registered food businesses food hygiene ratings (these ratings at www.food.gov.uk/ratings and the supporting API show the food hygiene standards on the date of inspection by the local authority food safety officer). Food hygiene ratings give consumers an informed choice about where they eat out or buy food. We have opened up the data internally for our analysts and intelligence officers to classify and apply, and in time we expect to make the dataset publicly open and accessible, to support our commitment to be an open and transparent organisation – and put consumer pressure on the food industry to increase business compliance.

The challenges in the UK are common to other countries and the evidence suggests that the pressures on the food supply system are only going to become more intense, so food security and sustainability for the future will be under increasing pressure. A lot of different things will affect the supply of food to this country and the world over the next 25 years and beyond – potentially very radically. To enable replication of the solution, we provide the open source code (Drupal) at: <https://github.com/FoodStandardsAgency/food-gov-uk/tree/dev/report-a-problem>

Why the innovation was developed

- One of our key strategic priorities is to be genuinely open and engaging, finding ways to empower citizens both in our policy-making and delivery, and in their relationship with the food industry. This is why in February 2016 we launched our service that would transform our digital presence and help us to be lead in our class on openness. We use the service to listen to citizens, involve citizens and empower citizens, to influence industry to provide food we can trust. The data from the service is primarily used by: The FSA and the National Food Crime Unit – to find the stories (the nature of problems, where they are, the type of businesses reported, and when, for example) and inform our strategy and policy. Local authority food safety teams (these are food safety enforcement officers) to deliver their service, allocate resource, based on risk. We plan to open the data up externally too for developers, academics and others to use as they will.
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Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve service quality, Increase citizen engagement

Main beneficiaries

Academia, Businesses, Civil Society, General population, Government staff

Results

Efficiency

- We have reduced the burden on staff on how to handle incoming food problems. The service manages the food problem reports for us. We just manage the service.
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Effectiveness

- We harness data internally. Our analysts have applied a categorization algorithm to learn the stories, get insights and share these with the National Food Crime Unit to add to their intelligence.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- The service works on mobile devices so people can report a problem at home, on the street, at the very business.

Responsiveness:

- We can now engage more effectively and efficiently with people contacting us on social media, or via our Helpline wanting to report a food problem.

Reliability:

- Nearly 14,000 reports submitted via the service in first 5 months. FSA staff couldn't have handled this number. A service was needed.
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User satisfaction

- Consumers are positive about the service, our KPIs tell us that. Local authorities are positive about service iterations made, based on their feedback. Performance monitoring shows the changes are working because the service continues to meet the user need.
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Other improvements

- Our 300 'FSA Voices' staff advocates on social help tell family, friends, online followers about the service. This innovative advocacy programme empowers our people, who for years hadn't felt it necessary to reach out, to do exactly that, and in turn, deliver real benefits to consumers and citizens. Report a food problem service is very much part of this. We know the service is making a difference to delivery. Some consumer reports will lead to local authorities being told about unregistered food businesses. Early on, in April 2016, we learnt that one consumer report submitted via the service told a local food safety team about an unregistered business operating from a boarded up, derelict building at basement and ground floor levels. The team managed to enter the premises for an initial inspection and apply appropriate interventions. In this case, we saw how empowering the consumer can impact directly and very quickly indeed, on a business's operations.

Development

Design

Digital communications staff consulting with users.

Every decision was based on the user need and their feedback. See answers above about user research and user testing. The user research was guerrilla style (on the street) and user testing of the service including testing in foyer of a local authority to ensure we tested with citizens with low or no digital skills, with group of older (elderly) people at a digital skills session, and online (the prototype of the service in Alpha phase – this will move to Beta and Live phases is due course). We also tested with our Helpline callers wanting to report a food problem, and those coming in via social media.

Testing

- We carried out independent user research to understand the user need, and supported this with some rapid prototyping to test what might work for users wanting to report a food problem. We then continued our agile approach by carrying out user testing of service prototypes, developed in Drupal, following an iterate, test, iterate, test cycle whilst monitoring performance and periodically surveying local authorities to see how the deployed prototype service was working for them, and iterating as required. During this process we put the service and delivery team through a Government Digital Service (part of the UK Government Cabinet Office) assessment to check progress and the FSA service passed first time – a first for an organisation such as ours. This is testament to our testing approach. The public report can be found at: <https://gdsdata.blog.gov.uk/report-a-food-problem-service-assessment/>
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Implementation

Tools used:

- Agile project management Drupal open source code (published on Github) Application of patterns already used for the services at GOV.UK, patterns that had already undergone rigorous user testing, saving FSA resource

Resources used:

- A small agile team comprising a product manager, a service manager, a delivery manager, a technical architect, an external developer, supported by an external user research supplier, and other ad hoc staff offering expertise in data and mapping requirements, quality assurance and other technical areas.
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Challenges and solutions

- We didn't have the right level of skills in-house so we had to up-skill at pace and buy it in as required. This ensured we delivered a service that met the user need and passed the service assessment. Local authorities' feedback showed they expected contact details of persons who reported food problem. This was a challenge as it risked compromising the user need (by making the service less simple to use). We carefully iterated the service by only mandating email address and closely monitored performance before committing to the change. We monitored these to inform the decision: Our KPIs, which include an aggregate user satisfaction score and completion rate. Daily user feedback coming in via the feedback option on each service page. Local authority feedback from 3 surveys and through FSA staff interfacing with local authorities.
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Partnerships

Local authorities

Other Public Sector

Local authority buy-in was essential as they are the partners processing and handling the food problems. Careful communications about their needs, and reviews, maintained the positive relationship and use of the current delivery model. Without these partners the innovation would be ineffective simply because the service continues after the online transaction is complete.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Define the user need and test that you've got it right because all decisions will need to support meeting that need. Get the right team in place with right skills. We perhaps didn't at beginning and delivery was delayed. We could have kept a better log of the iterations. Keep a log as you change, or soon after, don't do it all retrospectively. You could lose track. User test throughout all phases. We completed a privacy impact assessment to make sure we didn't collect or store any personal data that wasn't needed, and made clear to the user, at the interface, how their data would be used. We ensure we meet data protection and data governance requirements. The service was built in Drupal and where ever possible the developer empowered content managers so they could change as much of the service as possible without needing to recode elements. Produce technical architecture diagrams.
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Conditions for success

- We used an agile approach and had a strong service manager, which was vital to ensure resources were well managed and we were moving in the right direction. We had separate dev, test and live environments and a backup system. Give permission to fail fast. Invite and nurture ideas.
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