

Government 2.0, Choice and Opportunity

Citizen Outreach and Interaction

As soon as President Obama took office, he made clear that his vision of change included a new and vigorous focus on government openness, writing in one of his first directives, "We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration."

Technology offers the transformative power to promote this openness. With the advent of social networking in recent years, citizens now expect technology to play an instrumental role in creating a more transparent, participatory, and collaborative government. The Internet has the power to bring a transparent government closer to its citizens and to create a dialog that is essential to assisting the country in finding solutions to its most pressing problems.

Microsoft's Commitment to Change and Collaboration

Today's government and enterprise customers pursue missions in a diverse, ever-evolving technology environment. Some customers use traditional commercial software solutions, while others work with open source products. Increasingly, more customers are using "mixed source" applications, which combine both. With more choices than ever before, customers are demanding that software providers offer products that are interoperable in a mixed computing world.

Microsoft is listening. Microsoft has been a contributing force in advancing technology for the last 30 years, enabling individuals and businesses all over the world to innovate and operate the way they do today. But, for all the benefits people and businesses gained from a user-friendly platform used around the world, we also recognize some customers have felt frustrated by what they feel is a lack of choice, or that they are locked in to our products. Today, we know that our customers have complex needs no single vendor can address alone, so we are changing our business and technology practices to become more open, more transparent, and more interoperable.

We are designing products for the realities of customers who work in mixed computing environments. We are working with others in the industry, including competitors, to deliver solutions for heterogeneous environments. Moreover, we are actively involved in open source development, sharing Microsoft® code, and bringing our engineers into external projects. Today, more than 80,000 open source applications run on the Windows® operating

system, 30,000 of which were built specifically and only to run on Windows. And we are committed to continuing to partner with commercial companies and with open source communities.

"Our goal," says Microsoft's CEO Steve Ballmer "is to promote greater interoperability, opportunity, and choice for customers and developers throughout the industry by making our products more open and by sharing even more information about our technologies."

Supporting Interoperability and Standards

A mixed computing environment demands interoperability. With the ubiquity of the Internet, systems and technologies that once stood alone are now connected. Individuals, enterprises, and governments all put more records online every day; document sharing and collaboration is omnipresent. The ability for applications, devices, platforms, and components to connect and share data has become as essential a value in technology as security, privacy, and reliability.

There is no silver bullet to achieving interoperability. Some argue that open source or open standards are the solution. Software business models, though, are not what determine whether a product is interoperable, and mandating the use of one type of software based on its business model seems inconsistent with principles of openness. Industry standards, although important, are but one way to enhance interoperability. In fact, multiple standards for a given technology are quite common and promote innovation and customer choice. Among the most familiar are the several standards that overlap for digital images and digital media. Of course, open standards and open source coding are not the same thing. Developers of traditional commercial software and open source software can both use industry standards in their products to promote interoperability. They can further support interoperability by sharing ideas and information and collaborating to create broader customer value.

Balance is the grounding principle here. While interoperability can foster growth, competition similarly breeds innovation. Ultimately, the marketplace should be allowed to reward companies for innovative and creative differentiation that benefits customers and provides greater choice. Sensible integration of interoperable systems and innovation rewarded by the marketplace generates a richer, more creative technology landscape for all.

Government Neutrality Promotes Choice and Innovation

No single business model, software development model, product, or company can lay claim to realizing the promise of open government. Procurement rules should, therefore, not favor any one model, product, or company over others. Government officials must be free to choose from among many vendors' products, basing procurement decisions on value, as indicated not just by acquisition cost but by total cost of ownership (TCO). Ultimately, government purchasers—as any other customer—should determine which products best suit their missions, free of preferences.

Neutral procurement policies foster competition by creating a level playing field for businesses of varying size, development type, and licensing model. That competition, in turn, will drive innovation and growth among competitors, which is of course beneficial during a time of economic pressure.

Scores of state and national governments, as well as international bodies, have already voiced support for procurement neutrality. From the European Union to Japan, from the United Kingdom to Canada, from the International Chamber of Commerce to the United States Office of Management and Budget, "value for money" has been recognized as the most important guiding procurement principle.

How Microsoft Helps Create Open Government

Microsoft has a long history of helping governments deliver innovative solutions, become more efficient, and create economic opportunity. We are particularly well-suited to support the Obama administration's move toward openness in government. Microsoft technology enables government to help secure the data it has, and to simplify and optimize the nation's information management infrastructure.

Governments today already rely on many Microsoft products, precisely because of their interoperability and the foundation for innovation they offer. In times of economic distress, it makes sense for governments to leverage those existing assets as they build and innovate in an open way.

The Microsoft platform facilitates transparency, bringing more information to citizens as they look to play a greater role in their government. Because our platform is scalable, it can provide government agencies the tools they need to increase responsiveness to the public and give citizens greater access to services. At the same time, our products encourage the streamlining of processes, saving time and money.

Our platform also provides for more participatory and collaborative government. With Microsoft products, agencies can encourage a robust dialogue with citizens, soliciting their ideas and opinions in open public networks. Additionally, Microsoft products facilitate collaboration within and among government agencies. Users can work together simultaneously online, bringing together formerly disparate lines of business tools and services, providing enhanced insight and thus better decision-making by managers. And because Microsoft tools are familiar, training costs are minimized.

Online Resources

- Microsoft Interoperability Home
<http://www.microsoft.com/interop/default.aspx>
- Microsoft Interoperability Principles
<http://www.microsoft.com/interop/principles/default.mspix>
- Microsoft Interoperability Policy
<http://www.microsoft.com/interop/policy/default.aspx>
- Microsoft Interoperability Government Resources
<http://www.microsoft.com/interop/government/default.aspx>
- Microsoft Open Source Home
<http://www.microsoft.com/opensource/>