



Earning Citizen Trust through Content Engagement @ Scale



Australians rely on our governments for many of the services that are essential in our lives. As interactions have transitioned to online channels, agencies have brought greater emphasis to ensuring the content that supports those interactions is fit for purpose. Creating robust content strategies was the focus of a recent online roundtable hosted by 6 Degrees Media and supported by Sitecore. Guests including the Chief Executive Officer at Service NSW **Damon Rees**, Deloitte Consulting’s National Head of Content & Communications **Debra Taylor**, and Sitecore’s Enterprise Account Executive **Hilary Beeby** joined CXOs from across public sector agencies to discuss content strategies and how to deliver exceptional outcomes for citizens in the digital age.



Top (left to right): Damon Rees, Chief Executive Officer, Service NSW; Debra Taylor, National Head of Content & Communications, Deloitte. **Bottom (left to right):** Hilary Beeby, Enterprise Account Executive, Sitecore; Brad Howarth, Journalist/Moderator.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a massive jump in digital interactions between citizens and governments, but one agency that was better prepared than most for the sudden increase was Service NSW. This one-stop-shop for services for citizens, businesses, and partner agencies in NSW had already produced a solid track record for digital service delivery before the pandemic, and stepped up its efforts significantly to handle its sudden increase in responsibility.

According to Chief Executive Officer Damon Rees, when it came to designing and delivering digital services, he and his team had a very clear focus. “We take a laser focus of making sure that our experiences

are really, really simple,” Rees said. “It can be the little things - have we expressed things in the words people expect them to be expressed in? And it can be more complex - are we asking people to unnecessarily provide the same information over and over again?”

“We bring that lens to everything that we do - have we made this as easy as possible?”

Cross-Agency Collaboration

One of the key challenges that Rees and his team have had to overcome is drawing together services from different NSW Government agencies to create seamless journeys for citizens.

“At its heart, that’s a very complex change leadership exercise for any organisation to undergo, let alone a jurisdiction of scale and complexity,” Rees said. “There were some very clear, bold decisions to commit to a different operating model for government that set us up for the journey that we’ve been on ever since.”

Just as important as the vision however has been the execution. “We started very small,” Rees said. “We had one service centre when we started, down in Kiama. And we really learned, and got that experience right, and delighted our customers on the things that were going to make a difference for them. Similarly for digital, we didn’t try and solve everything overnight, but we picked some of those experiences where we were really failing customers in terms of their expectation.

“That’s been our approach – be laser focused, move quickly, learn very quickly, and adapt quickly. For us the last eight years has been about continuing to build momentum and ensuring we’ve got the adaptability to step into the spaces that our customers, our partner agencies, and our government ultimately need us to.”

According to Sitecore’s Enterprise Account Executive Hilary Beeby, for other government agencies to emulate Service NSW’s success, they would have to overcome significant internal challenges, including their siloed nature.

“That probably worked fine when you had a small number of channels,” Beeby said. “Today what we find with a lot of our customers is that they could have upwards of 15 different channels.”

She said this proliferation of channels presented a significant challenge in terms of ensuring the content they carried was aligned and consistent with their goals.

“We now need to look strategically at how we plan content across all of those channels,” Beeby said. “What channels should we be using that our citizens want us to support, and do we have the right tools in place to provide governance and that speed?”

Fitting content to purpose

One of the key considerations that government agencies were paying closer attention to was the quality of the experience they provided.

According to Deloitte’s National Head of Content & Communications, Debra Taylor, this was driving the need to produce better content, and more CXOs were acknowledging that poor content could be a barrier to service adoption.

“When I first started on this journey with Deloitte and building the content team, it was a really hard conversation because it wasn’t really seen as a problem,” Taylor said. “Now there’s a real acknowledgement that content is the problem.

“One of the problems that’s not been solved is the forest of content around most government agencies. We do content audits and we most often found 80 per cent of traffic is going to 20 per cent of your content. There’s still the need to cut down that forest before anything else can be done, and to really understand that less is more with content.”

Another important factor for Taylor was to ensure that content was contextually fit-for-purpose.

“We test for comprehension, because if you don’t, a person can read it and not necessarily get it,” Taylor said. “What we do is take that comprehension level of



“One of the problems that’s not been solved is the forest of content around most government agencies. We do content audits and we most often found 80 per cent of traffic is going to 20 per cent of your content. There’s still the need to cut down that forest before anything else can be done, and to really understand that less is more with content.”

– Debra Taylor, Deloitte



“Fundamentally we need to look at what the citizen needs. What we need to do is understand that insight, and we need to then anticipate what they’re really looking to get an answer on.”

– Hilary Beeby, Sitecore

me understanding an action I need to take, or do not need to take, from 40 per cent comprehension rate to 80 per cent. And that makes a big difference.”

These needs also had to reflect the reality that communication cycles now were much faster than in the past. For Rees, the speed of content delivery spiked during the COVID-19 crisis, especially the need to rapidly communicate changes in health orders.

“You had experts that needed to agree to those health orders, you needed laws that enforced those health orders, and then you needed to quickly turn that into content for customers,” Rees said.

“We’re getting better as a department on how we do those loops more quickly, but the big opportunity is to recast this the other way around. It’s not about us pushing out our content, but it’s about us redesigning knowledge, guidance, services and support for the customer’s need.”

One example of this approach could be seen in the way Service NSW operated its cost-of-living program, which helps citizens determine if they are suitable for any of the 70 different support programs the state offers.

“That content was all there, but it was in 70 different stove pipes for 70 different programs from not quite 70 different agencies,” Rees said. “It was technically all correct, but as a customer, I didn’t have a way of quickly navigating that overwhelming number of choices to start to get to the things that were really relevant to me.”

Rees said the program had been a great success, with people finding on average \$500 worth of savings and support.

Meeting Rising Expectations

Having delivered a string of projects and programs for the people of NSW, Service NSW now finds itself under pressure to live up to the high expectations it has set. For Rees and his team, this creates an ongoing challenge in terms of deciding which project they will tackle next.

“Agencies across government have all got priorities,” Rees said. “A lot of the change that’s generated for our organisation comes externally, which then means we put a huge focus on our agility as an organisation, to be able to respond to that change and respond to those simultaneous demands that we receive.”

Beeby agreed that simply pushing content out was unlikely to produce a great experience for citizens, or an effective outcome for agencies. She said citizens already generated large amounts of data about their needs and wants through their online interactions, and it was time to use that information to serve them better.

“Fundamentally we need to look at what the citizen needs,” Beeby said. “What we need to do is understand that insight, and we need to then anticipate what they’re really looking to get an answer on. That’s where we should head. The technologies are there, and we can do a lot without getting too concerned around privacy.”

Beeby said agencies needed to start by thinking about what citizens were trying to do, and then ask whether they had organised their content by the needs of citizens. Only then should they be looking to deploy new technology to further enhance the experience.

Trust is the New Currency

If agencies are to establish stronger relationships with citizens, then there is one factor that has to be considered above all others.

“Trust is paramount,” Rees said. “People are relying on our services every time they sit down and have a coffee. They’re relying on us to keep them safe. That means we need to be rearchitecting government digital services for a level of trust and availability and security that they haven’t had to necessarily stand up to in the past.”

According to Taylor, trust was also connected to the experience that consumers had with content, and especially what she described as the chain of content across different channels.

“A breakage in that chain can immediately break trust,” Taylor said.

“We really need to look at what people understand, what they want to know. The voice of the citizen needs to be coupled with validation by the citizen of what they actually want.

“We did this with a health agency, and sat down with the different cohorts who might need to use their services, just understanding how they felt about them, how they were interacting with these services, and what mattered to them.

“We wrote the content then based on those things, and when we did the research at the end, the feedback was 80 per cent of people would prefer to use the site that we built rather than the existing one, and 75 per cent understood it more.”

Connecting with Citizens @ Scale

Emerging technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality also present exciting new options for interaction with citizens. However when it came to assessing new technology at Service NSW, Rees said his organisation always defaulted back to its goal of making things simple. “We just obsessively focus on making our customer experience about our customers,” Rees said. “We realise that one of the things that customers really value is choice, depending on who the customer is, depending on when, depending on where, depending on what they’re trying to do.

“For many of our customers the convenience of their phone whilst they’re on the couch watching telly is great for 80 per cent of what they want to do. But if they’ve got a really complex situation going on, we find they’re saying they want that extra level of confidence and empathy and assurance and problem solving that they get by talking to one of our frontline team.”

Taylor agreed the focus should be on servicing citizens in the way that worked best for them and urged attendees to sit down with users and understand what they needed.

“Just try to understand what impact your content is having,” Taylor said. “A little bit of research will reveal an enormous amount of things. It’s always that what you think you know turns out to not to be what people are experiencing, so that’s why I always do the behavioural research.”

Ultimately however, Rees said it always came down to having the will to get started. “Some of this is hard, but some of it’s actually surprisingly easier than you think,” Rees said. “I wouldn’t get lost in the big hard stuff; I’d just find somewhere to get started.”



“We just obsessively focus on making our customer experience about our customers.”

– Damon Rees, Service NSW



About Sitecore

Sitecore delivers a digital experience platform that empowers the world's smartest brands to build lifelong relationships with their customers. A highly decorated industry leader, Sitecore is the only company bringing together content, commerce, and data into one connected platform that delivers millions of digital experiences every day. Leading companies including American Express, ASOS, Kimberly-Clark, L'Oréal and Volvo Cars rely on Sitecore to provide more engaging, personalised experiences for their customers. Learn more at [Sitecore.com](https://www.sitecore.com).



About 6 Degrees Media

6 Degrees Media was established by Angela Horvat, former Editor and Publisher of award-winning publications including *Computerworld*, *Information Age*, *My Business*, *The Who's Who of Financial Services* and Founder of FST Media; and Emma Charter, one of Australia's most connected and respected media and events strategists with more than 15 years' experience in delivering C-Level engagement strategies for clients in Australia and the UK. For more information, please visit 6DegreesMedia.com.au.