

# Instant messaging: collaborative culture at work in the government

Since 1994, impoverished and ordinary citizens have had high expectations regarding improved service delivery and, almost two decades later, one could argue that little has changed. Despite attempts at reforming on a national, provincial and local level, government is yet to find a successful way to deliver effective and efficient services. Patrick Evans, MD of Advanced Cloud Technologies, said that government has been slow in its uptake and use of mobile technology to improve service delivery issues.

Every day in every suburb across South Africa, we see examples of burst water mains, traffic light outages, electricity outages and potholes, to name a few. Evans said that this is not isolated to South Africa: "Public service reform and service delivery challenges are global.

Since the mid-1970s, governments have grappled with public sector transformations aimed at achieving greater efficiency, as well as more responsive and flexible services.

In South Africa there are 1.6 million public servants trying to service a population of an estimated 52 million." He said that this is made more complex by the geographical spread and diversity of the rainbow nation and the disparity between the have and have-nots.

Despite this, he said that there is a very simple solution and one that has not been exploited. Most citizens have had some level of exposure to SMS or BBM as a means to communicate. "Imagine if such a service was available on any mobile phone for all citizens in a municipal area and allowed bi-directional communication? Talking to your municipality would be as easy as talking to a friend. This technology exists, it works across all phones with a data capability, such as the widely used Samsung E250, and is easy to implement. It is called ZING360, from Blazing Chilli, and is an ideal, low-cost, effective communication platform, and the answer to many citizens' and municipalities' prayers.

## A collaborative, responsible community spirit

"Using mobile technology solutions such as ZING360 will create a highly collaborative, responsible community spirit. Imagine walking, cycling or driving around your suburb or en route to somewhere and you notice something amiss, like a burst water pipe. ZING360 will allow you to report the problem immediately to the relevant municipal authorities, who through a responsible citizen's early warning, can dispatch a repair crew immediately, thus reducing water wastage."

The same ZING360 mobile app can also be used to publish community information publicly, to an entire community, such as a road closure notice for the Discovery Walk for Life, or the 94.7 Cycling Race.

Evans said: "Mobile phones are always-with-us, always-on devices that virtually every citizen has access to. Imagine the potential of a community working together with its local municipality to make its city or town the best it can be. Issues will be resolved faster, restoring services will be quicker, and the collaborative culture will significantly lead to a decrease of costs to the local authority. Isn't this what a world-class city really looks like?"

According to Evans there are three common drivers for the adoption of a mobile technology solution: Changes in citizens' expectations of government services and ICT use; advances in technology; and addressing the current gaps in ICT leadership, governance and skills. "All of these drivers will provide exactly what is required, high-level direction on the design and use of information and technology to deliver better government services," said Evans.

"South Africa and its challenges are perfect for a mobile technology solution. It has geographically distributed communities with different income levels and varied phone types, and no or limited access to a PC or the Internet. By utilising the ZING360 communication platform, local government will lead the world showing how mobile technology can underpin and shape service delivery.

"Re-imagining the way we use information and technology should result in major benefits. The use of mobile technology to improve service delivery and service remediation is one small way that can make a big difference," concluded Evans.

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