




Digital Strategy

October 2018

Digital isn't a list of things to do. It's about how you think, how you behave, what you value, and what drives decisions in your organisation.

Introduction

Over the last ten years, the technological landscape has changed significantly – right around the world. Websites have changed from something organisations should consider to essential communication channels, wifi became common not just in the home, but also expected in public places, social media has moved from "emerging" to the most common use for the internet, smartphones emerged and rapidly became considered an "essential". We now literally carry the world in our pockets, and this changes how customers expect to do business with us.

It's also now common to see new technology significantly affect the value proposition of well-established goods and services – good examples of this are IPTV/Netflix (which essentially eliminated the video hire industry), or Uber (who have fundamentally changed the taxi industry), or Air BnB (who are the world's largest hotel chain, without owning a single hotel). These are well known examples, but these situations where technology fundamentally changes an industry are now common; this is known as digital disruption.

It also significantly alters customer expectations – and the interesting thing about customer expectations, is that people have the same expectations for all the services they engage with – whether that's their local store, an online shop, an app based service, local government or central government.

Digital disruption is not a scenario that is unique to business – it has equal potential to significantly alter the services of local government. Consider that Matamata-Piako District Council has only recently started accepting credit cards over the counter, yet in parts of China, customers can pay by facial recognition. Imagine if surveyors or works staff could see the gps location of utilities by wearing a pair of smart glasses. Consider the additional efficiencies of one driver being able to operate two mowers. Or think of the impact driverless vehicles could have on car ownership, and what this would mean for roading networks and parking. All of these technologies already exist, and it is not a question of if they will impact our services, it is a question of when.

The key question for Council to address is where is all this technology heading, and how can we manage it in a way that means we continue to meet our customer's expectations?

Where we are now?

Positioning

We believe that in 2018 Matamata-Piako District Council is in a reasonable position. We are towards the leading end in the local government sector – for example we were the first Council in NZ to handle the whole building consent process electronically, we are advising on the working group for the national online voting trial, we do testing for Civica, advise on the Regional Digital Strategy Group, and are relatively well known within our sector as early adopters.

However, when compared to the private sector, Council is lagging. Customers generally expect to be able to complete all their transactions with businesses online, using any device. While Council has been working towards this for a number of years, progress has not kept up with progress in the private sector, and as noted above, customer expectations do not vary between private and public sectors.

Issues

Legislation

In many cases, New Zealand legislation has not kept up with changes in technology, limiting our use of digital solutions (examples include using prescribed forms, providing printed copies of documents, placing public notices, or requiring signatures on forms). Many government departments are aware of this and are working through the process of updating legislation, however, this is likely to take several years. Where possible, we will seek to work with central government and challenge areas of legislation that create barriers to operating in a digital environment.

Infrastructure

In recent years digital technology has moved towards more cloud based services and software as a service models. These trends are likely to continue to grow, however, the infrastructure (e.g. broadband and mobile coverage) in the district is not sufficient to rely solely on web based systems – both due to speed and coverage.

Increasing use of digital technologies also creates additional costs such as larger storage capacity and increased data use. These increasing costs will need to be factored into future budgets – however, it is also recognised that these costs decrease over time. For example, data is cheaper now than it was five years ago. Similarly, connecting to UFB will initially be expensive, but the costs of future connections and internet costs are likely to decrease in future (which will be balanced by the increased use).

Resourcing

Staff and elected members generally see significant value in delivering online services, with many good initiatives being requested, with varying priorities. The majority of Council's digital projects are undertaken in house, generally led by IT or Communications staff. However, current staff have reached a tipping point where the maintenance and development of existing systems is outweighing their abilities to support or develop new systems. This slows Council's progress and can easily lead to attitudes that inhibit innovative solutions, or frustration from staff who just want to see their projects moved forward.

Consistency

Projects also tend to be tackled on an ad hoc basis across the organisation, with teams jumping to or being sold a solution without fully analysing the problem, or investing in solutions that benefit one area of Council, without looking at its wider issues and potential. Often the simple projects ('low hanging fruit') are tackled first, to achieve easy wins, or projects will begin with phased implementation to get the ball rolling, but the second or third phases remain undelivered due to other priorities. These issues mean that progress is still made at a slow, but steady rate, but is not as efficient or effective as it could be.

Where do we want to be?

We want to get MPDC to a point where digital isn't considered as a solution to a problem or a list of things to do. We want it to be about the way we think, behave, value, and what drives decisions in our organisation. To get there, we've set the following mission and vision.

Our Mission

To provide our community and staff with the best digital services in local government

Our Vision

We are leaders

We want to be known as a leader in the digital space – not just within local government, but within our community and the public sector.

We are open

We want to facilitate digital sharing by opening access to our data (of course limited to the data we can legally share without impacting privacy). Open data is widely recognised as a method for fostering innovation and attracting business, improving transparency, and developing networks of trust between Government and other partners who access the data.

We are digital only by 2025

We aim to be digital only (or at least digital first) by 2025. Making things like applications, payments, and submissions digital only could save huge amounts of time and money, as well as work towards Council's waste free by 2045 goal. We want to lead by example in looking for digital solutions and encourage our customers to use digital solutions too.

What does success look like?

- Quicker, easier, and more convenient ways for people to access council services
- Increased number of services available online 24/7
- Our internal processes are smarter, smoother, and faster
- We can leverage off others, and they can leverage off us

Guiding principles

Creating a culture change to make MPDC truly a digital first organisation is not a simple task – it is something that will require investment in people, systems and demonstrating the value of change.

The following guiding principles will help to guide our digital initiatives and achieve our vision and mission:

People are at the centre of everything we do

While we aim to shift as many services as possible to digital only, this does not mean digital services are the right solution for every problem. People are key to the success of any digital initiative – including both customers and staff. Initiatives that either don't meet a true user need, or are not user friendly will at best have a poor uptake, but at worst could have a negative impact on Council's reputation.

To address this, customer journey mapping will be included in the planning phase of any digital project to identify the customer's ideal interaction with council. User testing will also be undertaken during the build phase (and potentially also during the prototyping stage depending on the scale of the project) to ensure the solution meets the needs of both customers and staff. Solutions will also be assessed against recognised standards for government in regards to design, security and accessibility. These steps apply regardless of whether the solution is being developed in house or

procured through an external supplier, and have been incorporated into Council's Development Workflow (Appendix B).

We are flexible and adapt to change

Technology evolves at a rapid rate, and key to being a truly successful digital organisation will be our ability to see those changes coming and adapt at an equally rapid rate.

In practice, this will mean assessing the technological landscape at the outset of any project, to ensure the work being done is not just meeting the current needs, but can also meet the needs we see on the horizon (or be easily adapted to meet those future needs). This is particularly important when undertaking procurement – this needs to be seen as an opportunity to review how we do things and opportunities for improvement, rather than simply replacing like with like.

It may also mean changing priorities in our work programme to meet an emerging need that will have a more significant impact for our community or how we do business. This means that while the Roadmap (Appendix A) provides good guidance on priorities, it will constantly be subject to review and change.

We empower our staff to use digital systems

Staff at MPDC are generally supportive of digital initiatives, however, as with any change different people require different levels of support.

When digital initiatives change how we do things, a key to success will be supporting staff to work with new systems and see the benefits. For some this could have a significant impact on their roles. For others it may be helping with basic training (such as how to use a smart device). Council is employing a corporate trainer to specifically assist with this, however, to create a digital culture, this will become everyone's responsibility (for example, HR will need to look at learnability as a key factor in recruitment, Managers will need to support and encourage this learning in their staff, Communications and Developers will actively need to promote the benefits of new systems, and colleagues will need to help and support their peers).

It will also be important that Managers provide adequate resourcing within their teams to implement any proposed solutions. This will need to be considered during the planning phase of any project, and has been incorporated into Council's Development Workflow (Appendix B).

Seamless, end-to-end processes

Council has ongoing issues with the introduction of systems that are either not compatible with existing Council systems or that are being developed in phases. Typically these systems create a digital interface for the customer, but then require additional work by staff to enter data or capture records into the appropriate system. While these systems usually deliver an improvement to the customer, they only deliver limited efficiencies for Council, not meeting the true potential for time and cost savings of an end to end system.

To deliver true digital systems a key focus on future development and procurement will be end to end processes that integrate with existing systems and mean data is only entered once (not handled manually in the middle or end of a process). In some cases this may mean a project or procurement should not proceed until a better solution can be found.

We share and collaborate with others

We plan to open our data (that we can legally share) for others to access and use for their own purposes. Open access to data is proven to foster innovation and attract business, improve transparency, and develop networks of trust between Government and other partners who access the data. Where possible, we will look to work with other entities in how we share that data to make it as accessible as possible for collaboration and innovation.

Where possible we will also look to collaborate with other entities (such as neighbouring councils, or government agencies) to deliver digital services together. Delivering services together can have multiple benefits, such as cost savings, standardising customer experience, improving access to data between agencies, or improved capacity for future development. For each opportunity to collaborate, we will assess the benefits and disadvantages (for example, if collaborating on a project delays the delivery of other projects). This may mean altering the timing of projects in the Roadmap (appendix A) to capitalise on opportunities.

We will also make solutions developed in house available to other Councils to allow them to leverage off our successes. Leading by example in this space will help encourage others to collaborate in future. Sharing of solutions externally needs to be considered during the development phase of any project – for example, ensuring code is properly commented, a common framework is used for development, and GIT environments are set up for development and master. These factors have been incorporated into Council's Development Framework (Appendix B)

We are continually improving

Due to demands on resources it is not uncommon for projects to have been developed in house, then left (or only had minor fixes) until they are surpassed by other systems, requiring complete redevelopment. A more efficient model would be for these systems to be developed and launched, then enter a continual cycle of maintenance and improvements. This would mean systems are continually improved over time, and able to keep pace with changes in customer expectation or advancements in technology.

Based on experience, we believe a developer can develop approximately three new systems before the maintenance and improvements to those systems outweigh their ability to make substantial progress on new developments. Achieving this will require ongoing additional resources over time in both Councils Communications and IT teams.

Similarly, when procuring external systems, a key consideration should be the support provisions and the future roadmap for development of that system.

We are committed to action, and move at pace

Technology evolves at a rapid rate, so it's important that Council also continues to evolve and deliver digital services at a rapid rate. This means being committed to driving digital projects forward and looking for solutions to barriers, rather than letting them halt progress and cause a backlog of work.

This also means taking an organisation wide approach, and looking at how projects could benefit multiple areas to deliver as much value for money as possible from every digital initiative.

As noted above, to maintain momentum as well as ensuring existing systems are maintained and improved will require ongoing additional resources over time in both Councils Communications and IT teams.

Our systems are compatible across all types of devices

Dramatic changes have taken place in the use of technology in the last ten years (with a major shift from web and PC based technology to apps and mobile devices). These innovations in technology and shift in customer expectations mean systems we develop or procure need to be compatible across multiple devices (e.g. computers, tablets, smart phones).

This will also mean continually monitoring trends on the horizon to ensure systems can also meet the needs of those trends or be easily adapted to meet those future needs (good examples of this in the current environment would be voice activated search or Artificial Intelligence).

Focus Areas

It's important to remember that digital is about how we think and set priorities as an organisation – not just what projects/solutions we are delivering. That is why our Roadmap/planned projects are an appendix to this strategy – not part of the strategy itself.

For each of those projects, and any additional projects we are considering, we will give priority to those that contribute to the following focus areas (this will be addressed in project briefs).

Service improvements

Projects that improve the services we are delivering to our customers – for example, putting more services online or improving their experience in dealing with Council

Internal improvements

Projects that create efficiencies (such as reducing double handling or data entry, speeding up processing, or automatically linking into other corporate systems), greater standardisation (so that customers get consistent service across the organisation, and across local government) and better value for money.

Data

Projects that make our data more accessible for collaboration and innovation.

Risks

Security

The need to use encryption, electronic signatures, and other security features increases with the sensitivity of the data that is being transmitted electronically. Security will be a key consideration for the development and/or procurement of any digital system, as well as for the sharing of any system with other agencies. Security audits are completed annually for both IT and online services, with code review also being built into web security budgets.

Privacy

Similarly, making information available electronically (particularly opening our datasets) increases the risk of people accessing information about others. Privacy is a key concern for all digital initiatives Council undertakes. Appendix B identifies privacy impact assessments (PIA) to be undertaken for any projects that involve significant risks from collecting, using or handling personal information in the planning stage (ahead of any development taking place, as the PIA may determine whether or not the project should proceed).

Record Management

Operating in an increasingly digital environment and opening our datasets to others also places increased emphasis on managing digital records and the accuracy of that data (data integrity). Council has a team dedicated to Record Management, whose input should be sought at the planning stage of digital projects, and whose input will be critical for high risk projects (e.g. those where a PIA is required). This is included in the Development Framework (Appendix B).

Best Practice

The New Zealand Government Web Standards apply to public sector websites throughout New Zealand. Councils are not required to meet these standards, but the standards outline good practice for accessibility and usability that should be included in Council's online services (including those developed in house or procured externally).

Staff responsible for delivering digital solutions should regularly refer to digital.govt.nz and the UK Government Digital Service for best practice guidance.