

The Government On-Line International Network Project on Portals

1 Mandate, background and objectives

Mandate

At the GOL meeting in Leiden between October 8 and 11, 2000, Norway was given the mandate to oversee a working project initiated by the Network. The objective of this work is to develop a basis for the discussion on Internet Portals at the GOL meeting in Mexico in September 2001.

Background

At the Leiden meeting, several countries highlighted the need for a discussion within the Network on Portals. Different “portal topographies” are emerging in the participating countries, and it may be timely to start a dialogue on the portal policies. In the future, we will continue to witness a rapid development towards an Internet-based communication and information flow. The authorities should also prepare for this future. It is of current interest to focus both on the possibilities and the common challenges facing the different participating countries. At the same time, the divergent characteristics of the participating countries’ governmental structures and traditions may lead to different policies and solutions.

Objectives

The main objective of this project is to increase awareness of the use and the policy of Internet Portals in the member countries. Through country reports and discussions in the Network, the intention is to create a framework for developing strategies for Portals in the years to come. The scope will cover the use of portals on all governmental levels.

More specific objectives are that:

- The participating countries get an insight into the **policies and visions** on Portals of the other countries in the GOL Network.
- The participating countries get an insight into the **experiences** of the other countries.
- The Network may highlight common challenges that call for **joint action**.

The content of the project report includes:

- The template and the accompanying letter/background materials.
- Country reports from all the participating countries.
- Extracts from the country reports that provide the basis for the Network discussions.
- Minutes and conclusions concerning portals from the GOL Network meeting (Mexico, September 2001).

2 Realising eGovernment

The ongoing development in electronic technologies, in particular the Internet, provides opportunities that government sectors can employ in several ways.

Governments all over the world should seize the opportunity to exploit the Internet for several reasons. Objectives like democracy development, improved quality in business operations, development of the welfare system, improved government services in general, etc. may be enhanced by Internet services. What we are advocating is the effective realisation of governments activities on the Internet – the creation of “eGovernment”.

eGovernment is not a new or different government, but rather an additional means of making public services available, by using the medium of the Internet .

In broad terms, eGovernment can encompass various activities such as supporting “democratic dialogue” in the country, improving transparency within government departments and seeking ways in which to enhance customer-centric services. In this project, the focus is on how the Internet can support interaction with individuals and business players as the main user groups.

eGovernment and the individual

Access to the Internet in homes, in the public and the private sectors is increasing rapidly. The trend towards the Internet as an information, communication and service mediator is set to intensify. These conditions are favourable for focusing on the further development of Internet solutions.

By adding the Internet as a medium, great improvements and progress can be made, something that is essential for all modern governments. Efficiency, quality, and adjustment to the user needs (both private and business users) are central concerns and motivate all departments to deploy web solutions.

At the same time, individuals are making ever-increasing demands on their governments. They expect a higher level of service and greater access to government information. Information can be communicated rapidly through the Internet, regardless of time and place, in a “seamless” way, and can be adapted to the specific user’s needs. It is possible to create integrated solutions towards a “*seamless government*”, by creating a *user interface* common to all government administration levels and sectors. Employing the Internet to communicate with private and business users could be one way of meeting the voiced expectations of greater availability of access and a wider range of services.

Integration of services and information

Current government Internet solutions throughout the GOL countries probably vary in terms of levels of integration. We are likely to observe an evolution towards more advanced and integrated services on web sites in the next few years. One purpose of the working project is to highlight any variations on status and trends among the participating countries.

One approach is to compare solutions and services in the different countries. We presume that the level of integration and complexity is essential to describe the service development. Integration could be set out according to the following terms:

- **Information** (common, one-way information delivery)
- **Interaction** (communication adjusted to different extents)
- **Transaction** (focus on support to value added transactions)

Government Portals

The rapid development of Information Technology would imply that it is difficult to provide a working definition on ICT - more specifically on Portals. We will, however, try to summarise what we believe are the central characteristics of government portals. This is meant to be a basis – from where the GOL Network is invited to discuss further.

A framework definition, which may be deployed in this project, could be:

A government portal may be considered to be a dedicated service that co-ordinates and presents information and services from different, independent suppliers into one interface, typically a web site. The information is categorised in accordance with given criteria, like topics, geography, or other subjects related to the users' needs.

Using this definition, the concept of a government portal is regarded more as a draft than as a specific definite entity. Your comments on this suggested definition in your country report would be of great interest .

This conceptualisation would imply that the topic is open to discussion on a rather general level. The GOL Network may be interested in discussing more specific concepts and classifications on government portals. At this stage, however, we will only show a general framework that, hopefully, is applicable for all countries.

Portals have been given terms such as: No wrong door, one stop shop, universal shop, jumping-off-point, single aggregation point, etc. Nevertheless, independent of popular concepts and variances in political and cultural frameworks, it is suggested that the discussion focuses on why the public sector wants to employ Portals.

The GOL Work Programme includes a focus on the effects of new technologies and the solutions for business and social processes in which they are embedded. Therefore, it would be of great interest to look more into this issue when writing the country reports.