ABOUT THIS GUIDE

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH GOVERNMENT. MOVING PEOPLE TO ACTION.

In 2015, public sector organizations will focus more than ever on driving citizen satisfaction with online services and resources. The more each citizen interacts with the private sector online, the more they've begun to expect similar levels of service from the public sector organizations they interact with as well. To account for this, the public sector is being forced to raise their online game to meet the growing demands of their audience.

Satisfying those audience demands starts with delivering a great digital experience, which means using proactive communications to engage your community at the right time. But, the experience you deliver is only as effective as your reach.

While digital communications can transform the citizen experience in strategic ways, you have to build that audience first. Organizations with winning digital strategies are acquiring new audience members through every digital channel, and are then able to reach that audience quickly with new information at any time.

A growing number of digital channels, like email and text messaging, have now replaced traditional outreach channels, such as direct mail and mass advertising. Innovative public sector organizations are taking advantage of these digital channels to reach their growing audience and send targeted, direct messages with measurable results. This, in turn, creates an improved experience for every citizen.

This guide focuses on building these direct connections, which can be used to promote new and important content, nurture relationships through engagement, and drive a growing audience to take actions that improve their lives.
OPTIMIZING GOVERNMENT WEB PROPERTIES

Today, government organizations are putting more effort than ever into building dynamic and engaging websites, but the opportunity to provide information to your visitors may be limited to their visit. In order to offer the greatest service to website visitors, your organization must offer opportunities for visitors to receive clear, compelling and ongoing updates.

To accomplish this, government organizations leverage their websites as portals to attract visitors and convert them to subscribers of digital information. This is done best when website visitors are presented directly and repeatedly with opportunities to sign up for updates on specific content of interest.

GET THEIR ATTENTION. The most prominent way to convert website visitors into subscribers is with a light window overlay. According to a 2012 GovDelivery client study, this is the fastest and most effective method to gain new subscribers. Government organizations see between 250% - 500% subscriber growth. Overlays should be simple, unobtrusive and appear when someone arrives on the website. By using cookies, these overlays display to first-time visitors only. As a prevalent and successful tactic used in the private sector, top government websites have adopted these same audience-building techniques with excellent results.

VALUE

Overlays are simple to create, customizable, and free to GovDelivery clients.
INCREASE SUBSCRIPTION VISIBILITY. Email subscription boxes drive more subscribers when positioned correctly throughout your web properties.

Steps for increasing visibility:

- Stand out. Be careful not to “merge” sign-up boxes into the site design or search bar
- Place subscription call-outs “above the fold” of your website (the horizontal halfway point on your website, just like the fold of a newspaper)
- Utilize high-interest areas, such as the right sidebar or left navigation bar, to highlight email or wireless subscription options
**LEVERAGE EVERY PAGE.** Visitors to your website must be able to find your sign-up box quickly and easily on both the home page and pages they land on through keyword searches. At a minimum, visitors to your top 25 visited web pages should be able to easily sign up for email updates. Add more opportunities to sign up for alerts throughout your website and in various locations, like these:

- Contextually, where people are browsing
- In-line and adjacent to relevant information
- On new pages created to address timely issues

While one sign-up box on a page may convert some visitors to subscribers, having two or three subscription options on a page may drive two to three times as many subscriptions.

**INCLUDE YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION.** Many websites undersell the email value proposition, using a sign-up box or link with instructional text like “Sign Up for Email” relegated to the home page footer, or worse, not on the page at all. If you want to get more subscriptions, use a benefit-based call-to-action. For example:

- “Don’t miss out on free activities from the Parks and Recreation department!”
- “Stay in the know when tax laws change. Sign up for new tax information!”

Give your visitors the benefit-based calls-to-action; you may be surprised by how many people sign up to receive information and how engaged they are with your messages.

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GovDelivery makes it easy to promote direct sign-ups from any page on your website and provides sample code and graphics to make sign-up promotion easy.
INCLUDE SIGN-UP OPPORTUNITIES ON CONTACT FORMS. Do you have contact forms or submission materials that continually draw visitors? Take advantage of your contact forms, registration pages, and most highly trafficked materials by including an email sign-up option on the form. This strategy is particularly successful in subscribing people at the time they are engaged and active on your website. A pre-checked box works well to set expectations for what the visitors will receive when they enter their email addresses.

GovDelivery provides many ways to connect existing applications and carry out activities such as importing email addresses from offline and online sources directly into GovDelivery for ongoing outreach.
LEVERAGING PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

As digital communication matures, public sector organizations need to take advantage of the unique opportunity to cross promote and offer citizens better information from a variety of logical partners with common characteristics. For instance, organizations that share similar services, close physical locations, or offer general public service opportunities (flu shots, tax forms, health risks, elections, etc.) can connect to create an essential network of government expertise.

NETWORK DURING SIGN-UP. In the private sector, when you purchase something from a major online retailer, they’ll market other similar products to you. The public sector is now seeing amazing results from this same strategy. Since public sector organizations aren’t competitive, they can now connect with other public sector entities to promote each other’s content topics and effectively drive outreach. The GovDelivery Network leverages this strategy by automatically connecting similar organizations to increase reach and visibility.

The GovDelivery Network automatically connects similar public sector organizations, yielding a 500-1000% increase in subscribers. Currently, hundreds of government organizations ranging from the City of Baltimore to the State of Minnesota to NASA to the Office for National Statistics (UK) work together to cross-promote content and reach more people using the GovDelivery Network.

FoodSafety.gov receives nearly two times as many subscribers from its partners in the GovDelivery Network than it does from direct subscriptions on its website. This includes organizations such as ChooseMyPlate.gov, MedlinePlus, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Vaccines.gov and Flu.gov.
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FOOTER. Government organizations are taking cross-promotional opportunities from the sign-up process and applying them to their email communications. Regional cities and counties, or similar federal agencies, can capitalize on this opportunity by adding temporary call-outs in the footers of their emails. By simply updating the email footer, different call-outs can be swapped in depending on the time of year.

GovDelivery can find relevant partners and assist in the implementation of footer promotions across some or all email campaigns. Additionally, GovDelivery Professional Services can dramatically extend your reach using “outreach acceleration” initiatives.
DIRECT CROSS-PROMOTION. Go beyond footer messaging by sending a dedicated email campaign to your subscribers that promotes subscription content for other relevant government organizations. By reaching out directly to subscribers with a dedicated message, partnering organizations see the most impact on growth.

GovDelivery can find relevant partners and provide email templates for direct invite campaigns.
UNCOVERING EXISTING SUBSCRIBERS

When people sign up for your communications, they open the door to an ongoing relationship with an organization. But organizations evolve over time, adding programs or initiatives that may not have existed when a subscriber first signed up. This results in new opportunities to promote updated content from your organization. Whether you’ve recently launched a digital communications platform at your organization, or whether you’ve been sending digital communications for years, you likely have a list of existing subscribers that you can re-engage to deepen your relationship.

UNCOVER EXISTING DATABASES. Anyone who has supplied your organization with his or her email address has started a relationship with your organization. So, if you find a list of stakeholders in a different office or department, consider sending a one-time invitation asking those stakeholders to subscribe to the other topics you offer.

How do you find these existing databases or lists? Start by talking internally with other departments. Make connections with other offices, programs, or individuals in your agency who also interact with the public. Here are some places where you might uncover lists you didn’t know your organization had:

- The IRS or State Taxpayer Services may receive e-payments with attached email addresses
- Parks and Recreation departments often collect email addresses online for classes, activities and events
- Departments of Natural Resources typically get email addresses for hunting, fishing or other license renewals
- Libraries may have email addresses for library card registration or book availability notifications
- Any programs or agencies receiving grant applications
- Water or other services collecting utility bills
- Departments who oversee driver’s license or tab renewal
- Departments receiving passport applications
- Any other area of your website with online form submissions or that collects online payments
PROMOTE NEW LISTS. As your organization evolves and grows their digital communications program, different departments and groups may set up new distribution lists. Every month or quarter, send a message to subscribers of similar lists and let them know what’s new.

GovDelivery can help audit and uncover untapped stakeholder lists, as well as provide communication templates and proven strategies for opting in the highest percentage of email addresses possible.
MAKE IT SHAREABLE. Word of mouth is a powerful tool. Encourage your subscribers to share your message with their friends and family. Add a social media “share” button and email forwarding share link, or encourage your subscribers to forward your email to their friends.

GovDelivery automatically appends share links to all outbound emails, further increasing the reach of your message across the social networks of your subscribers.
TRANSACTIONAL OR PERSONALIZED MESSAGING. Departments in your organization are probably sending transactional or triggered messages. License reminders, property tax renewals, and other types of triggered messaging are the perfect opportunity to promote your subscriber lists. Your transactional messaging provider should allow your organization to swap out footers to promote different lists or upcoming events and new initiatives.

GovDelivery provides templates and footers to populate marketing or communications content into the body or footer of transactional messages such as property tax renewals. You can also send personalized transactional messages through GovDelivery to integrate your messaging more seamlessly with your ongoing mass communications.
INTEGRATING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Email should be the core of your digital communications program, but you can’t ignore social media. It should also be a part of your toolkit. Social media allows government to engage with their constituents in highly interactive ways. However, only 15% of the people who like you on Facebook will see all of your posts (Mashable). Likewise, Twitter feeds contain a dynamic flow of real-time information, which pushes your content down in the blink of an eye. While social media can work well as an engagement tool, it can also be a powerful tool to get more people to opt in to your direct email or wireless communications.

ADD A STATIC EMAIL SIGN-UP. Let your organization’s Facebook page do the work for you with a sign-up app. Apps automatically display for any Facebook user who navigates to your page. Set it up once, and it will continue to convert casual browsers and Facebook fans into direct connections and subscribers over time.

GovDelivery provides an app that integrates directly with Facebook, as well as step-by-step instructions on how to add an opt-in to your organization’s Facebook page.
FOURSQUARE AND LOCATION-BASED SIGN-UP. Location-based social networks such as Foursquare allow government to engage citizens and push them toward e-government services nearby. You can take it to the next level by integrating an email or wireless text messaging alert sign-up option into a Foursquare tip in order to provide ongoing information. Add either the general sign-up link, or a sign-up link specific to a certain topic, like road construction or national park tourism. Then, users can sign up directly from their mobile phones for communications from whatever topic is relevant to their check-in.

GovDelivery makes it easy to promote direct sign up within Foursquare by using a short URL that can be left as a tip on any location.
PROMOTE EMAIL & SMS UPDATES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA. People who like you on Facebook or follow you on Twitter may not know that you have an email or wireless text messaging communications list. Use social media channels to convert observers into subscribers of your content. Don’t forget to include your value proposition, which entices users to subscribe.

INVITE NEW SUBSCRIBERS TO PROMOTE YOUR OUTREACH OPTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA. People are more likely to take an action (like signing up for information) if their friends or family recommend it to them. Let subscribers share and broadcast their new subscriptions with their friends, allowing you to reach substantially larger audiences.

GovDelivery can append social sharing promotion message templates to the end of any subscription process.
TURNING OFFLINE MOMENTS INTO DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

Providing information to stakeholders cannot be a solely digital experience, as many government organizations still engage in offline or in-the-field activities that allow them to encourage engagement with stakeholders. Events, community meetings, or initiatives can be optimal situations to reach citizens and engage them with your communication efforts.

OFFER SUBSCRIPTION OPPORTUNITIES AT CALL CENTERS, 311 SERVICES OR CUSTOMER SERVICE TOUCH POINTS. 311 services and call centers provide a timely opportunity for representatives at an organization to ask callers for an email address to subscribe to information from that organization. Customer service interactions are the optimal time to capture citizens while they are engaged with your organization. When your constituents want to know what’s going on, or are unhappy and contact you to resolve an issue, you can offer them future updates on the topic they care about, like trash pick up alerts or road construction information. Take a negative experience and show your stakeholders you care enough to proactively communicate with them on their topic of concern moving forward.

PROMOTE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AT FAIRS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS. Community events draw large crowds throughout the summer, making it a perfect forum for public outreach from state and local government agencies. Host a special booth allowing residents to sign up for your digital communications. Try handing out magnets and flyers to spread the word. By utilizing this on-site, in-person acquisition technique, you’ll engage your citizens face-to-face, and deepen your stakeholder relationships with digital communications.

GovDelivery can provide training and script resources to be used by call center agents.
PROVIDE QR CODE OPTIONS. Creating a diverse set of sign-up methods gives your organization flexibility and helps people interact with you in a way that is convenient and comfortable for them. One tactic that has been used in both the public and private sectors is a QR (or quick response) code. Stakeholders with a smartphone can scan the QR code with their phone, pushing them to your organization’s subscription options. Just like the sign-up on your website, make it clear to the end user that there is a benefit to signing up.

Also, be descriptive about what action you want viewers to take. The average person may not know what a QR code is, may not know what to do when they see one, or may have a QR code scanner on their smart phone, but don’t know how to use it or where it is. Add messaging that gives the public instructions and options.

GovDelivery can generate and send a QR code that corresponds with any subscriber list within an organization.
PROMOTE EMAIL USING PRINT MAIL. You may find that you have a great list of postal addresses for your stakeholders, but you lack email addresses for them. Wouldn’t it be great to have a choice whether to use email or direct mail to communicate?

One interesting tactic is to send recipients a postcard to tell them about the benefits of subscribing to your digital content. Offer people the option to “go paperless” and still receive your updates. You can use a short URL that directs them to your email or wireless subscription link. This can be a very effective way to convert your direct mail recipients into email recipients, saving you direct mail costs in the long run.
USE DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDER AUDIENCES TO PROMOTE SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS. For example, if you work with schools or youth outreach programs, send students home with information inviting parents or guardians to subscribe to receive updates directly from the school or program. Prince George’s County Public Schools, one of the nation’s 25 largest school districts, has 204 schools, approximately 125,000 students, and nearly 18,000 employees. After they launched their digital communication system, they put fliers in their students’ backpacks to communicate with parents and promote their digital communication services.

GovDelivery makes it easy to promote your digital communications by providing a short URL that can be printed on any collateral.
ADD SUBSCRIPTION OPPORTUNITIES TO MOBILE APPS. Expand your reach and drive more engagement with the general public wherever they can consume your content – whether that’s from a desktop computer or a mobile device. The promotion of email/wireless text messaging subscriptions through apps has proven to be an effective way of building your digital audience. Allow app users to enter in their email addresses to receive your communications.

GovDelivery provides many ways to connect mobile applications to GovDelivery through application programming interfaces (APIs) and makes it simple to upload email and wireless addresses from offline and online sources directly into the platform for ongoing outreach.

The Internal Revenue Service used APIs to integrate their mobile app with GovDelivery. The impact of this integration was an enormous increase in direct outreach for the IRS. In the first month, more than 14,000 subscribers signed up to receive tax tips from the IRS, and 72% of those subscriptions could be traced directly to the mobile app. As a point of comparison, subscriptions to the same topic last year during the same one-month period only totaled 4,390.
MAKE USE OF TEXT-TO-SUBSCRIBE FUNCTIONALITIES. In situations where an individual may not be near a computer or may have limited access to the Internet, traditional methods of signing up for email updates through an online process might be inconvenient. Setting up a text-to-subscribe functionality gives your audience the ability to send a simple text message with their email address and a keyword in it to receive email updates on a specific topic.

GovDelivery provides mobile functionality to capture subscribers using inbound text messages.
While capturing email addresses through a mobile opt-in helps grow your audience, you should also be building a list of wireless subscribers by offering 2-way SMS text messaging. In King County, Washington, people can text “KING” plus their zip code to 468311 to get information about healthcare enrollment. By using a short code, a subscriber’s phone number is captured when they text in their information.

GovDelivery can reserve custom short codes, like the King County example below, for a branded mobile experience.

Not only is 2-way SMS messaging convenient, it casts a wider net for subscribers. Many low-income or rural citizens are more likely to have a cell phone than internet access. Where the internet and traditional media fall short, text messaging fills in the blanks. It’s also critical to promote 2-Way SMS messaging programs anywhere you interact with potential subscribers.
CAUTION

AVOID BUYING OR RENTING EMAIL LISTS. While it may be tempting to purchase or rent an email list, this is almost never a good idea. Not only is it a bad experience for the end user, but it can negatively affect your deliverability if the resulting email file contains old addresses or spam traps.

BEWARE OF EMAIL APPEND SERVICES. You likely have a large database of physical addresses, but no email addresses. There are 3rd party companies that can run your list of physical addresses against a large database to find a matching email address. You can then send an opt-out campaign to this list. These processes tend to be timely, expensive, and often times don’t yield results.

NURTURING AND RETAINING SUBSCRIBERS

You’ve got subscribers. Now what? Welcome them. Your subscribers have started a relationship with you. Follow up soon after they join a list with a triggered welcome message. A great welcome message provides a personal note, additional resources, and should set the expectation around what types of information the subscriber will receive from you.

GovDelivery provides automated triggered welcome messages along with templates that contain information specific to your organization.
RESPECT THE RELATIONSHIP. Government needs to communicate a continuous stream of critical information to the public at a massive scale and inform them about the issues that affect their lives. However, frequency is everything. Offer different frequency options by bundling messages so that a subscriber can receive multiple messages on a particular topic in just one email. Or, allow them the opportunity to select how frequently they should be contacted (real-time, daily and weekly are industry-standard options).

Note: Transits or transportation agencies often need to send real-time travel alerts and may not want to use digesting options.

VALUE

GovDelivery provides automated options to bundle similar messages, as well as contact frequency preferences that can be captured during the subscription process.

UNSUBSCRIBE PROCESS. When people sign up for your content, they may make multiple selections (crime alerts, city council agendas, tax information, parks and recreation scheduling, and more). If they decide that they no longer want to hear from the city council and unsubscribe, it doesn't necessarily mean they don't want other types of information from your organization. Make sure your subscribers can opt out of just one or two lists and that you aren't using a process that unsubscribes them from everything.

VALUE

GovDelivery provides personalized unsubscribe links that can remove subscribers from a specific topic as opposed to all topics from an organization.
**ASK FOR FEEDBACK.** Even if your organization employs all of these subscriber growth tactics, keeps things relevant, and respects the relationship, the fact is people may still unsubscribe. In order to keep improving your messaging strategy, it is essential to collect data around what triggered someone to opt out of your communications. People love to give their opinion, so try asking! In the email that confirms their subscription removal, link to a short questionnaire to gather information on why the person unsubscribed.

GovDelivery provides triggered unsubscribe confirmation emails that can be configured to include a survey.
**REVIEW AND ANALYZE RESULTS.** You can't keep improving if you can't measure the impact of what you're doing. Metrics allow you to say, “Our communications are effective and here's why.” And for those who need to prove the worth and ROI of their digital communications, the reasons are in the analytics. Monitor subscriber growth and attrition over time. Look at which campaigns drive unsubscribes, or if there are times of year when you receive more subscribers. You should also be discussing and sharing these metrics with others at your organization.

GovDelivery provides in depth analytics on subscriber growth that can be shared with anyone at your organization through an email report.

A great communications program is born from a large audience. Now that your organization has completed the first and crucial step towards having a successful program, continue to build and expand your digital communications strategy with more tactics from GovDelivery.
OUR EXPERTS, EXPANDING YOUR REACH

We believe that even your best digital communications could perform better, while reaching more people, and getting those people to act. But implementing the right tools and strategies to achieve that can be a challenge – especially when your team is spread thin, and you’re up against tight timelines.

THE TEAM. No one understands better than our professional services team how to leverage the right tools to accelerate your organization’s results. We’ve worked with government agencies and departments of all sizes, types, and missions, to provide services that scale easily and deliver everything from targeted tactics to complete campaigns.

Whatever your digital communications goals are, we’ll create a team to help you get there. Our business intelligence analysts, designers, campaign specialists, communication specialists, programmers, project managers, and systems experts are at the ready.

GROW YOUR REACH WITH TARGETED SERVICES. We’ll help you reach more people and identify and connect with them in a targeted way to deliver more relevant communications. Our one-time, Targeted Services let you pick the focus and put our experts to work.

Want to increase your audience? GovDelivery’s Audience Acceleration builds on the success of the GovDelivery Network and takes subscriber growth to the next level by promoting priority campaigns, programs, and events in the GovDelivery Featured Network. For more information go to govdelivery.com/services or or email us at info@govdelivery.com.

COMMUNITY. Want more tips on engaging people in your community? To sign up for ongoing updates from GovDelivery, visit govdelivery.com/blog. You can also join GovLoop – the knowledge network for government and online community serving more than 100,000 members.

CONTACT US

For current GovDelivery clients, contact your Client Success Consultant or any member of the GovDelivery staff for more information on how organizations just like yours are growing their audiences and seeing tangible results. You can also visit our client support site at support.govdelivery.com.

If your organization isn’t currently partnering with GovDelivery, and you want to see any of the benefits listed above, email us at info@govdelivery.com or head to our website at govdelivery.com, to get in touch.