

## **Our View: Information needs to be available online**

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For years, anyone has been able to get on the Internet and find out everything from the compensation package for a company's CEO to the phone number of a distant relative across the country.

In too many cases, government has moved a bit slow in embracing Internet technology. But, finally, more and more government agencies are giving people online access to information.

It's about time. The information, after all, belongs to the public.

Many counties, cities and state agencies have been out front in getting their information on-line and they should be commended.

The state judicial system, which holds some of the most sensitive and complicated information, has for years been building a strong Internet-based information system.

The state court system just launched a public access system that allows Web users to find basic information about court cases ([www.mncourts.gov/publicaccess](http://www.mncourts.gov/publicaccess)).

Blue Earth County has also been an early and aggressive participant in getting information on-line. Residents can find out information about property, courts, even who's in the local jail by starting at the main Web site ([www.co.blue-earth.mn.us](http://www.co.blue-earth.mn.us)).

The county's newest feature is GovDelivery, an e-mail subscription system that allows residents to choose what kind of information they'd like to receive via e-mail, from job postings to emergency alerts.

In spite of the strides, many counties and other governments are moving too slow on the information highway. Just 26 of the state's 87 counties are part of GovDelivery. Many counties have little in the way of Web-based information systems.

Part of the problem is money. Some local governments are reluctant to commit the funding needed to get systems up and running. Others, we suspect, simply don't like to give up the information they have so far been able to control.

Governments need to remember the information they collect and hold is not theirs, but the public's. Putting the resources into making that information easily available to everyone is an obligation to taxpayers.