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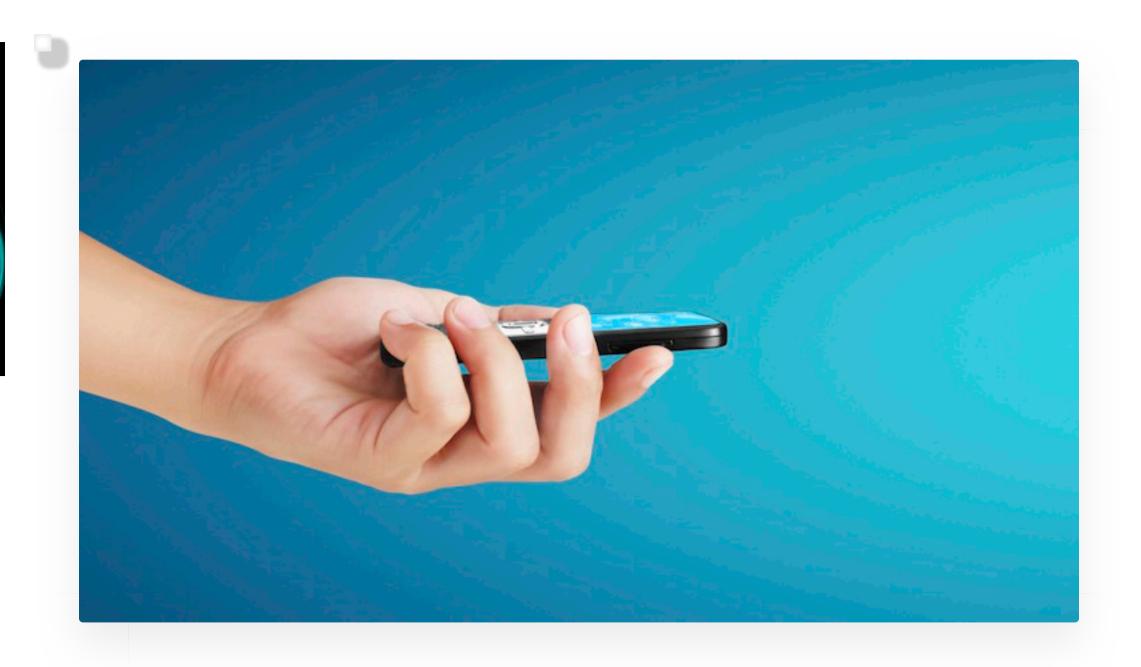
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Kenya and the digital service revolution we're waiting for



Australians send billions of text messages every year; it's one of those seamless interactions now taken for granted. What if a Sydney resident could pay a parking fine on the spot, with just a text, and save the State Debt Recovery Office from sending reminders?

That type of virtually effortless efficiency is becoming the norm in developing countries like Kenya, Tanzania and India. And has been for years.

Many of the technology-based innovations that are being enabled by governments aren't limited to just public services. M-Pesa, the SMS-based payment and money transfer service started in Kenya, was initially to enable micro-financing using mobile network airtime resellers.

Australian businesses are also looking at what government services (or obligations) they can improve with a digital approach — preferably in co-operation with government.

"The whole strategy around SBR has not been fully appreciated."

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Marie Johnson, the former chief technology architect at the Department of Human Services, says the development of <u>Standard Business Reporting in 2010</u> has been an unsung example of the potential of digital service delivery that doesn't even have a front end. In this case, the advantage is reducing reporting burdens on businesses.

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"The whole strategy around SBR has not been fully appreciated," Johnson told *The Mandarin*. "The absolute beauty of SBR needs to be understood for how transformative it is."

With nothing more than a set of standardised taxonomies and an open door for software developers, it has negated the traditional system of agencies having forms on their website and businesses filling out those forms to provide reports back to different agencies in all three tiers of government and at different times. "Enormous overhead," Johnson said.

Trusting that Australian governments will keep the same definitions for business reporting, developers of accounting software like MYOB or Quicken can take those into account in the development of their products. Now businesses can report to the state revenue office, or any other agency that wants a report, but it's the software doing that reporting directly and authenticated via VANguard.

"It's a value proposition for them," Johnson explained. "The developer can say this is SBR compliant."



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A digital identity crisis?

For government agencies, authenticating online identity has been a stumbling block for digital service delivery. Are you who you say you are? State governments will get some help from the Commonwealth on solving this, if they (and their residents) are willing to sign up to Human Service's myGov service.

Recommendations in last December's <u>Murray report into Australia's financial system</u> called for a new wave of innovative thinking, greater consultation and collaboration with the private sector, and a digital identity strategy under a cabinet minister. The latter is now underway with Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull's new Digital Transformation Office — tasked initially to push myGov to state government services — but new innovation and consultation is still paper-thin.

The inquiry chair, David Murray, didn't seem convinced myGov was the only identity solution, pointing to the "fragmented and largely unco-ordinated network" of 20-odd current systems (estimated by the <u>Attorney General's Department guidelines on National Identity Proofing</u>) used by agencies. VANguard, myGov and AUSkey are among the many verification frameworks currently used in the federal system alone. As Murray reported:

"The system has developed organically, driven by different standards, policies and legislative requirements. Australia has no clear strategic vision for digital identity management and, consequently, little coordination and limited ability to attain potential network benefits that would lower costs and reduce duplicative processes. Many public sector stakeholders have interests in digital identity management and, although Government has some existing governance mechanisms, the lack of clear ownership of identity policy is impeding progress."

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Despite often redundant and repetitious authentication requirements, consumers have a clear preference for accessing services online, he argued, but identity theft and false identities were also key enablers of superannuation fraud, and serious and organised crime. However, the legacy of the Australia Card initiative, rejected in 1987, or the Access Card, terminated in 2007, loomed over the debate:

"Developing a national identity strategy based on a federated-style model, with a framework and common standards, would support the growth of a competitive market in identity services that enables best use of technology and promotes innovation. A federated-style model suits the Australian context as Australia has not had a history of government-issued identity cards and has a strong privacy ethos compared to other jurisdictions. This model has the potential to provide consumers with choice and convenience while enhancing privacy. Australia already has in place many foundational elements for a federated-style system, and this model seeks to leverage and build on these existing effective elements."

How the Digital Transformation Office takes on this challenge is yet to be seen, or what will happen to the legacy systems that haven't received Turnbull's stamp of approval. Johnson warns quick wins are often superficial. "For it's not a worry that there's detail yet to come, that's probably a good thing," she said.

Pointing to the transformative impact that M-Pesa had in Kenya, Johnson says it's an example of how when there's an urgent need or call to action, and you don't have legacy environments, amazing things can be done.

About the author



By Harley Dennett

Harley Dennett is editor at *The Mandarin* based in Canberra. He's held communications roles in the New South Wales public sector and Defence, and been a staff reporter for newspapers in Sydney and Washington DC.

Tags: Department of Human ServicesDigital Transformation OfficeM-PesaOpen governmentStandard Business ReportingState Debt Recovery Office

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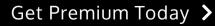
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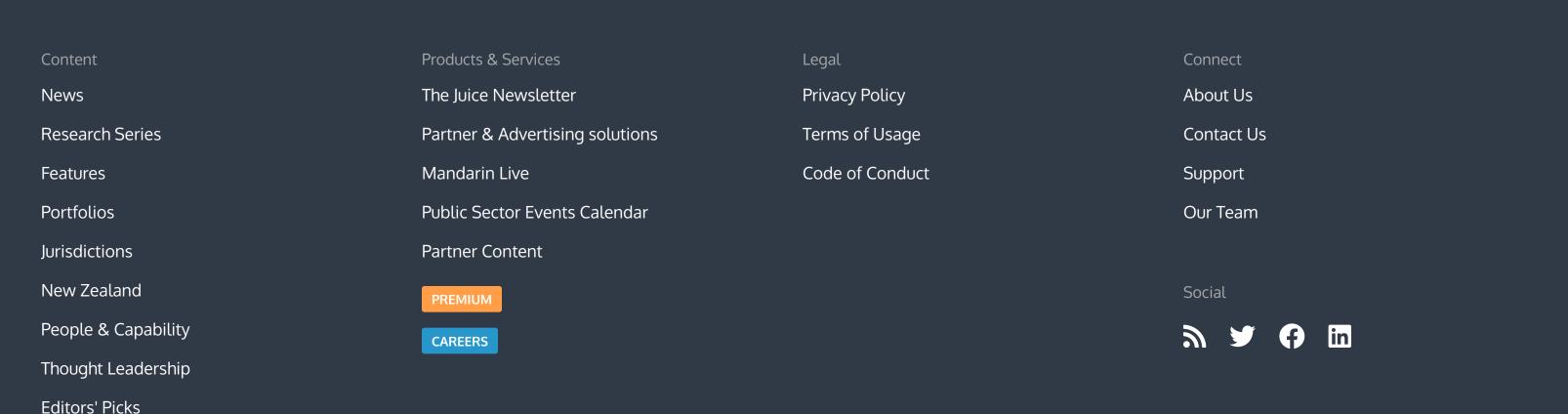
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