

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- To determine whether we were successful in building an operational publishing application, we tested it with the 'end user' government staff in their departments, using their standard IT and compared directly against their existing content management software (CMS).
- The aim was to assess the performance and usability of the beta publishing app, and determine where users found it to be better, lesser or equivalent quality compared with their current provision.
- We were satisfied by the results of the tasks. Fundamentally, we succeeded in building a publishing app that was capable of performing routine functions. In some instances the Gov.uk app was faster and simpler, while in some others it was less successful because it was unfamiliar or underdeveloped.
- Taking into consideration all the tasks they were asked to complete during the tests, the test participants made positive comments about their overall experience of the Gov.uk publishing app. For most it was easier to use, better laid out and faster than their current content management system because it was cut down and customised to their specific professional needs.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Government Digital Service is setting out with Gov.uk to revolutionise the way in which government thinks and does digital.

We want to provide users of government digital services with the best possible experience, which requires us to develop world-class products that make the supply task simple, efficient and cost effective. In some instances this requires optimisation of what already exists, while in others it needs entirely new ways of working.

'Inside government' is one of these innovations. We released it as a beta on February 28th 2012, following 24 weeks of iterative development. The beta ran for six weeks in the public domain and involved 10 pilot departments (BIS, Cabinet Office, DCLG, Defra, DFID, DH, FCO, MOD and MOJ)

The purpose of Inside government is to provide a comprehensive source where

people (who are personally or professionally) interested in the business of government are able to find out what it is doing and why. This site will include all government organisations, and content from all of them will be provided in a consistent manner. Such a service does not currently exist and instead people are required to have an existing understanding of the machinery of government and they need to visit over 400 separate websites, each with its own unique way of presenting content. Our approach is to do away with the requirement for separate sites and domains, and provide a consistent user experience across the platform.

To manage the improved frontend experience, we were required to develop a shared publishing platform that would be used by the government staff responsible for producing and publishing the content. In doing so, we wanted to tackle one of the most common complaints government digital teams have about their digital operations, which is cumbersome, convoluted and costly content management systems. So the CMS we built had to be cheap to develop and support, include only functionality to manage the Inside government site, perform smoothly and be easy to use, even by the most inexperienced government staff.

At the end of the beta we pressed pause, gathered our evaluation data and this is a report of what learned about the performance of the publishing app.

### **3. TEST RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Quicker to create pages**

Five users were tasked with creating a new news article.

The average time taken to complete the task in existing software was 1 minute 44 seconds; the shortest was 52 seconds, the longest was 2 minutes and 46 seconds.

The average time taken to complete the task in Gov.uk was 45 seconds; the shortest was 22 seconds, the longest was 1 minute and 13 seconds.

Users took less time to complete the task on Gov.uk, primarily, because they were able to 'copy and paste' their source copy directly from Microsoft Word into the app, which then stripped out the code and formatting. Whereas, with their existing system, the publishers had to first copy and paste into a plain text editor (either on their desktop or in their CMS) and then import this into the CMS editor. In every instance, the publishers received or drafted the original source copy in a Word document.

Users also commented positively on the reduction of steps required to create a new page in Gov.uk and the reduction in the number of fields in view when creating a new page. Both these measures was welcomed as a means of saving time and reducing effort.

### **3.2 Simpler to add an image**

Six users were tasked with adding an image into a page, and giving it alternative text and a caption.

The average time taken to complete the task in existing software was 3 minutes; the shortest time was 25 seconds, the longest was 10 minutes.

The average time taken to complete the task in Gov.uk was 86 seconds; the shortest time was 35 seconds, the longest time was 1 minute 32 seconds.

Users completed the task in less time on Gov.uk because when the image was located on a user's machine it could be added directly into the page. On existing systems, however, the image had to be uploaded to a specific folder away from the page being worked on and then find it again in order to add it to the page. This added a great deal of time to the tasks because most of the CMSs used faceted folder searches. In their comments users said they preferred the Gov.uk approach as it cut the time and effort required.

### **3.3 Comparable login times**

Login times were recorded in 6 tests.

The average login time for existing CMSs was 26 seconds; the shortest was 10 seconds, the longest was 50 seconds.

The average login time for Gov.uk was 27 seconds; the shortest was 19 seconds, the longest was 43 seconds.

### **3.4 Comparable publication loading**

Two users were tasked with uploading a publication (PDF) to make it available for download.

On their existing CMSs, it took an average of 2 minutes 8 seconds. On Gov.uk it took an average of 1 minute 50 seconds.

### **3.5 Comparable unpublishing times**

Three users were tasked with unpublishing a content page from their live site.

On their existing CMSs, it took an average of 56 seconds. On Gov.uk it took an average of 57 seconds.

### **3.6 Comparable telephone number**

Two users were tasked with changing their department's main contact number.

On their existing CMSs, it took an average of 45 seconds. On Gov.uk it took an average of 31 seconds.

### **3.7 Slower to create lists**

Two users were tasked with creating an unordered (bulleted) list in the article they had created.

On their existing CMSs, it took an average of 30 seconds. On Gov.uk it took an average of 51 seconds.

All the users format content in their existing CMS using a WYSIWYG editor, whereas Gov.uk uses markdown. Most routine formatting - such as use of bold or adding links - did not pose problems to the users, while others such as creating bulleted lists or tables did.

Users commented that the problem was that they were unfamiliar with the combination of characters used in markdown; they were also unclear on some of the instructions provided in the app.

## **4. SURVEY RESULTS**

Each user was asked three questions once they had completed their tasks.

Firstly they were asked if they had been able to complete all the tasks they were set in the test. Three users said they were able to complete all the tasks, four said they were able to complete some of the tasks, no one failed to complete any of the tasks.

Next they were asked to rate their satisfaction with the Gov.uk app. Five users said that the Gov.uk met their expectations, two said it exceeded their expectations, while no one said that it fell below their expectations.

Next they were asked whether they would prefer to use their current publishing tool or the Gov.uk app in their everyday work. Five users said that they preferred the Gov.uk app, two said that they preferred their current CMS.

Finally, users were asked for any additional comments relating to the experience of using Gov.uk. These were consistent across the board. The Gov.uk app had its bugs and shortcomings that were symptomatic of the beta status of the build. As a new product, they were also unfamiliar with some of its layout and functions, which made it difficult to use in some places. Otherwise they appreciated the design of the interface, the quality of the functionality and, although it was stripped back, they said that they were impressed by the direction in which it was being developed.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

Seven tests were conducted in week three of the beta in six of the participating departments. Users were from the digital teams of the departments and were self-

selecting following a general call for volunteers. Two users had never used the Gov.uk app prior to the test session, three were regular users (who used it at least twice a week) and two used the app frequently (at least once a day).

Each publisher was given 4 - 5 tasks to complete (out of a possible 15), each was timed and the departmental publisher was invited to make any comments during or after each task. The tests involved routine 'everyday' publishing tasks carried out on both systems.

A GDS facilitator was also present to conduct the tests and record observations. Tasks were selected by the GDS facilitator and explained to the user; the user could then accept the task on the basis that it was representative of their customary publishing responsibilities, or decline it on the basis that it was not, in which case another was selected. As far as possible the tester tried to maintain a consistency of tasks across the test sessions.

After completion of all tasks, the users were invited to respond to three closed questions exploring the efficacy of the Gov.uk publishing app, selecting from three response options. These were followed by an open invitation to make any comments about the app, about the comparison between the software or the test method.

Tests were run using the equipment and internet connection available to the users as standard at their desks in their department. Four users use an 'open' connection provided by the department, three use a secure (GSi) connection; one user uses wifi. Two use laptops, the others use desktop PCs. All use Windows (XP or 7), while there was more diversity in the browsers used with three using Internet Explorer (v7, 8 and 9), three using Firefox (v6 and 10) and one using Chrome (v17).

The content management systems that Gov.uk 'Whitehall' Publisher was compared with were Alterian, MCMS, Squiz Matrix, Stellent and Wordpress.