Building Trust and Improving Efficiency with Integration and Automation

No constituent should have to enter the same information on a government website multiple times. No agency worker should have to spend hours scanning documents or swivel from one system to another because their technologies aren't integrated.

The cloud, process automation and software integration can help agencies eliminate these and other frustrations. Doing so can strengthen trust in government, increase employee productivity and satisfaction, and enable agencies to lay the foundation for advanced, intelligent technology applications.

In addition, powerful solutions from Laserfiche provide a centralized location to access everything needed for content management.

Part 1: Making it Simple

In the age of the smartphone, we expect sites, apps and software to be easy to learn and operate. Agency staff and the public expect the same from digital government services.

To meet these expectations, agencies must overcome three factors:

- **Confusion.** Convoluted processes leave people frustrated and impatient.

- **Distraction.** Repetitive, time-consuming tasks pull agency staff away from their primary interests and skills.

- **Fragmentation.** Data and decision-making are siloed because legacy technologies can't communicate with each other, even if they work well on their own.

Confusion

Russ Nichols, senior fellow with the Center for Digital Government, confronted user confusion repeatedly in his three-decade technology career in California. Nichols had leadership roles in corrections and rehabilitation, forestry and fire protection, employment development, and the State Controller's Office.

Nichols and his colleagues did their best to automate manual tasks and improve efficiency across generations of technology. But siloes inevitably formed because the needs of specific agencies or certain business functions drove the development of highly tailored technologies.

"The solutions may have been cutting edge when they were developed, and frankly they may be cutting edge now," Nichols says. But many were not built to integrate with other platforms or applications.

"As a constituent, when I work with a department or a state, I'll have to enter my same information two, three or four times in the window of a few days because systems aren't connected," Nichols says.

Distraction

Even in the digital era, government employees still spend hours finding, filing and organizing paper documents.

Considers city planners and engineers. There's so much for these busy professionals to do: Land plats, design drawings and demographic data with handwritten information must be scanned, classified and stored with security, accuracy and compliance in mind.

"It takes away from their actual jobs," says Kramer Sanders, IT applications analyst with the Department of Innovation and Technology in Rancho Cucamonga, California.

In 2020, Rancho Cucamonga's IT department started digitizing and automating manual processes with help from Laserfiche. For instance, the city's building and safety departments had years' worth of paper planning documents, permits and supplemental materials, Sanders says. Digitizing these documents has allowed city staff to focus on work that matches their training and experience.

Fragmentation

Sanders' department has plenty of experience with digitizing and automating everyday functions. The city deployed Accela's cloud-based automation platform 10 years ago to streamline permitting processes. It also has an on-premises document repository from Laserfiche that simplifies content management.

These applications complement each other. People applying for permits or signing up for city programs in Accela produce application documents and data — along with documents like driver's license images or birth certificates — that Laserfiche automatically manages.

Deploying these two platforms could not fix one nagging issue: Residents would still bring paper documents into the office when applying for permits, so office staff constantly juggled a mix of information digitally and on paper.

In 2020, the city resolved this problem by going all-digital and integrating Accela permit applications with Laserfiche document management.

"We went live with that, and the headache is gone," Sanders says.

Documents automatically arrive at their proper destinations, where they're easy to find with a digital search. Nobody loses hours sifting through file cabinets and hunting for misfiled materials.

Rancho Cucamonga has another critical technology partner: a startup called Velosimo, whose cloud-based software platform is designed specifically to help government agencies integrate disparate technologies, automate manual processes and clarify confusing government interactions (see sidebar, p. 5).

Integration technology can accelerate agencies' quest to improve trust and efficiency. Of course, integration is an intermediary step. Agencies need a few solid automations running before they can integrate them.

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In Focus: Laserfiche's Enterprise Content Management Platform

The Laserfiche platform consolidates your information onto a single platform. This makes sure everyone in your organization is looking at the same information — depending on the level of access they have.

Once your information is in a central location, you can make it more intelligent by applying process automation tools. These tools help you better organize your information, streamline processes and limit the amount of data entry — thus also decreasing human error.

Organizations can further enhance their work by integrating Laserfiche with other government platforms to ensure staff are accessing the most accurate data without bouncing between systems. Through Laserfiche's process automation tools and integration platforms, you can automate what happens to information as it enters your system. All this information is available on the Laserfiche platform or within other systems your organizations uses, allowing staff to get the information they need to make decisions and support constituents.

Part 2: Starting an Automation Journey

A well-planned journey starts with the destination and then works out the twists and turns to get there. This requires:

- **Vision.** Paint a picture of your automation goals.

- **Simplicity.** Select software that will simplify government experiences.

- **Convergence.** Integrate multiple applications to produce smooth, cohesive interactions.

Vision
What does a modern, automated government journey look like? Consider this hypothetical interaction:

Maria needs a building permit. She's the project manager for a local construction company that just won a contract to build a restaurant. She goes to her city's website, fills out a building permit application, adds a digital signature and pays a $25 application fee. It's a bit time consuming, but the data entry happens only once.

There are no pens, pencils or paper. Maria does everything on her smartphone. Later, she can access her application data from her office PC or a tablet she takes to work sites. The same benefits empower city staff who can automatically email her about the status of her application and keep her in the loop for all phases of the project.

An approval that once took weeks or months can happen in a few days. Maria has no idea the city's IT department has implemented a cloud-based system that's automating the workflows for her application. She just knows it works — and she's grateful.

The city employees handling Maria's application are thankful, too. Software takes over manual processes that were time intensive and error prone. Planners, inspectors and IT people devote more time to the work they enjoy. And little by little, Maria gains trust in her government.

"This might be an overly simple analogy, but if I go into a bakery to buy a loaf of bread, I want the loaf of bread," Nichols says. "I'm not thinking about the logistics of managing that." Just as a consumer doesn't fret over the intricacies of baking bread, government agencies must realize that residents and staff care about the quality of the experience, not the mechanisms that create it.

Simplicity
Achieving simplicity is anything but simple. Agencies must:
- Identify manual processes that are the most productive candidates for automation
- Choose trustworthy technology vendors that help implement automation
- Verify that vendor technologies can serve their precise needs with tailored solutions that are affordable and easy for staff and public to learn

Rancho Cucamonga's experience provides a good illustration. The city made great headway by implementing Accela with cloud-based services that:

- Speed up the reviewing and issuing of building permits
- Track plan reviews, zoning variance requests and code enforcement activities
- Simplify applications for business licenses
- Manage service requests from the public

Meanwhile, Laserfiche's on-premises enterprise content management platform helps the city:

- Classify and store documents in multiple formats
- Share documents across agencies
- Streamline collaboration among people using government documents
- Draw insights from data consumption patterns

Integration platforms bring such solutions together to accelerate interactions with staff and the public.

Convergence

Integrating modern applications sets the stage for adopting more advanced automations. For instance, most modern applications include massive data stores that lay the groundwork for the latest artificial intelligence/machine learning applications. Case in point: Large language models (LLMs) can be trained on government documents and used to give staff and the public rapid access to knowledge buried in document repositories.

In government, areas for advanced automation include payments, accounting, communications, collaborations, geospatial analysis, judicial processes — anywhere there's a practical digital alternative to repetitive, analog processes.

Agencies already automate some of these functions. For decades, integrating these functions into a seamless experience was almost impossible because there were too many protocols, formats, customizations and purpose-built applications with siloes built around them.

New integration platforms are helping agencies overcome these obstacles.

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In Focus: Velosimo's IPaaS Platform

Velosimo's integration-platform-as-a-service solution targets two user groups: government agencies that need to orchestrate multiple API integrations and private sector vendors that need to simplify connectivity to each other's platforms.

Software vendors like Accela and Laserfiche provide API connectivity to an immense array of features and data sources. Figuring out how to make these features communicate with each other is a significant upfront challenge, but Velosimo handles the hard part for their customers with prebuilt connectors that multiple agencies and vendors can quickly install. The platform's easy-to-use no-code interfaces make adoption even faster, helping agencies rapidly spin up new services.

Rancho Cucamonga, California, used Velosimo's prebuilt integrations for Accela and Laserfiche to quickly digitize and automate a long list of manual processes. "The Velosimo system simply works, and there's no worry about the system breaking," says Kramer Sanders, IT applications analyst with the city's Department of Innovation and Technology.

Velosimo's platform also provides prebuilt integrations for Cityworks' GIS-centered solutions and GovOS transaction and compliance software. While these integrations are pillars of the platform, Velosimo also provides endpoint connectors to a diverse swath of software providers, including Microsoft, Google, DocuSign and PayPal.

"Our focus is to make it really easy to set up integration connectors and to administer and run them," says Velosimo CEO Kris Trujillo.
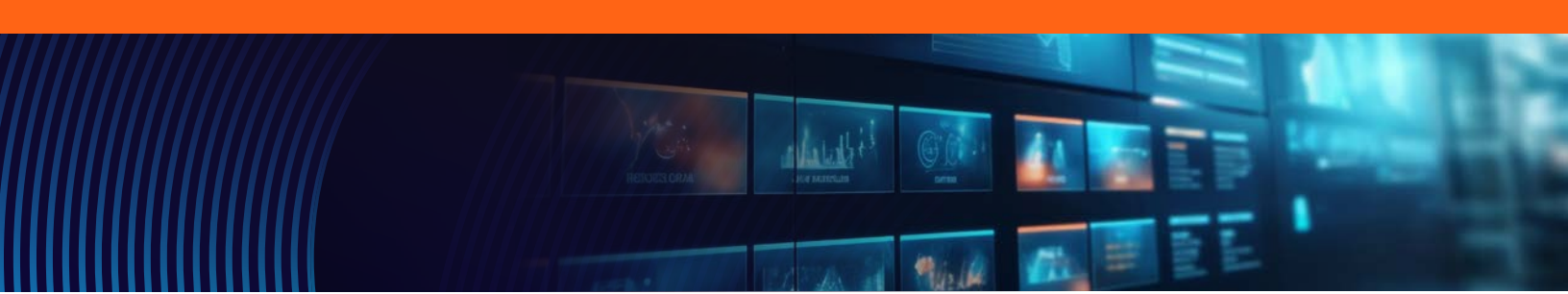
Part 3: Adopting an Integration Platform

A modern, highly automated government experience dovetails multiple technologies, data sources and applications into a cohesive whole based on three pillars:

- **SaaS.** Software-as-a-service applications simplify complicated business processes and enable frictionless government experiences.

- **APIs.** Application programming interfaces connect disparate apps and data sources, dramatically expanding functionality for public agencies.

- **IPaaS.** Integration-platform-as-a-service technologies help IT staff manage API integrations and software vendors make their apps work with other solutions (see sidebar on page 5).

IPaaS shares the familiar advantages of cloud-hosted software: The vendor handles security, updates and hardware, while the customer pays a predictable monthly fee. This structure can be particularly useful if the IPaaS has been designed specifically for government agencies and their constituents.

The SaaS and API Connection

For decades, governments implemented technologies that seemed to help everybody but the user. That has changed with SaaS technologies. APIs allow these apps to share data with one another and with on-premises legacy technologies. Configuring an API is far simpler than developing an application, so agencies can weave a fabric of APIs to create technology solutions for different users and use cases.

For all its convenience and connectivity, a single API could have dozens or even hundreds of configuration variables. Managing any significant number of APIs is a herculean task because somebody must support all of them — keeping them secure, effective and current with the latest versions of the software they connect to.

Agency IT professionals have been integrating APIs into their systems for years, creating all sorts of modernization headaches. "A lot of the issues plaguing the industry today are what I call point-in-time integrations built five years ago, and whoever built them is gone," says Kris Trujillo, CEO and founder of Velosimo.

Trujillo worked as a product leader and software engineer at Accela for 15 years before founding Velosimo six years ago. Trujillo's core insight was the need for technology built specifically for API management in government agencies. "It's challenging for IT departments within governments to keep up with their API integrations," Trujillo says. "It's also challenging for vendors to keep up with all the integration needs facing the market."

Making API Management Painless

Velosimo's IPaaS architecture creates a software layer to configure and manage APIs from a single interface. This allows agencies to make sense of their API ecosystems while also helping vendors simplify their connections to other vendor solutions.

With IPaaS, developers and IT staff can use low/no-code tools to easily build processes that interconnect software from multiple vendors. The standard cloud-based interface puts their software on any internet-connected device and streamlines operations and management.

IPaaS is a hub for keeping things going — quickly, easily and automatically. This has broad implications for constituent experiences. And it has specific impacts on basic use cases like access to public documents.

"Having tools that enable access to information can help strengthen trust with constituents because it no longer feels like, 'Well, why aren't you helping me?'" says Noel Loughrin, strategic solutions manager for government and education with Laserfiche. "Or it no longer feels like it's going to take days for something to happen. It now feels more collaborative, communicative and transparent."

Part 4: Communicating Value to Your Community

A simple and seamless automation goes nowhere if people don't adopt it. Follow these three steps to encourage adoption.

Manage change. Almost all modern technologies encounter resistance at first, even those that obviously improve things. Loughrin has seen this many times in nearly a decade of work with technology companies. "The most common thing I hear from our users is, 'How do I get other people to buy in or use this new system, app or technology?'" she says. Crafting a plan to deal with people's reluctance to change is a crucial first step.

Appoint champions. Every agency has early adopters and technology enthusiasts who enjoy diving into fresh challenges. These staff can share the benefits of new technology with coworkers. Get them involved in demos and training because they have the most hands-on experience with the issues your people face every day. "It's infectious when you have champions talking to people and communicating," Loughrin says.

Craft a messaging strategy. Agencies need a thoughtful plan to change. Rancho Cucamonga, for instance, created a marketing and promotion campaign to tell people what was coming and help them see the value of simpler, faster user experiences.

Creating Efficiency

IT professionals and the public they serve need solutions that build value now. This is where an integration platform can be a difference-maker by creating efficiency and trust and setting the stage for advanced automation.

Nichols recalled that eliminating manual tasks made life better for workers and the public in the agencies he worked for. "We saw employee retention, and frankly the morale of the workforce increased when we automated some of these systems," he says. "We firmly believe when employees are enjoying their work more, they're providing a better service."

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7

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