Kable Research Suggests That UK Government Websites Fall Short of Supporting Key Life Events

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..Online transformational government maturity rating puts birth, death and placing a relative into care bottom of the list…

London, June 16 2008: Research released today has revealed that UK government websites tasked with supporting key life events for the nation's citizens are falling significantly short in their bid to deliver a transformed service across the Government's estimated 2,500 websites. The research was carried out by Kable, an independent technology research company, and was commissioned by EzGov Europe, the UK's market leader in enabling successful e-Government (www.ezgoveurope.com). The research investigated the maturity of the UK government's online capabilities and user interfaces for seven significant 'Life Events', in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review and Varney's report of building services around the citizen's day-to-day activities. It reveals that, in spite of the wealth of information now available across the government's websites, the Government's aim to transform service delivery for the 6.6 million people who move home every year, need to register a birth for one of the 649,000 babies born annually or cope with the death of a family member, still has 'ample room for improvement'.

The average citizen often accesses government websites for information and basic services but there are certain life events that typically have a bigger personal impact and where improved online services can be more than just a time-saver. These Life Events are significant in the frequency with which they occur nation-wide, the amount of required interaction with the government, the level of complexity involved and perhaps, most importantly, on the personal impact they have on individuals and families.

The Life Events Kable investigated were:
1. Having a baby
2. Starting a business
3. Moving home
4. Buying and selling a vehicle privately
5. Placing a relative into care
6. Booking a hospital appointment
7. Dealing with a death

Members of the public facing any of these Life Events are already both under high levels of stress and encountering unfamiliar tasks that place a legal responsibility upon them. However, the research revealed that the three Life Events that are likely to have the greatest emotional impact on citizens – namely dealing with a death, having a baby and placing a relative into care - rated at the bottom of the Transformational Government Maturity 'league table' devised by Kable.

In addition to this, of the 39 transactions needed to deal with all seven Life Events, only 33% could be completed entirely online. Cross-department functionality for online processes and electronic forms was virtually non-existent within the Life Events examined despite the fact that linked up data and services, both within and across departments, are an area where the most value can be created for the citizen and

for government. Overall, information accessibility received a higher rating than online functionality, and most Life Events offer few if any linked-up data forms. The higher performing Life Events tended to be either less complex or involved private sector components.

EzGov Director of Innovation, James Walker, said that: "The research clearly highlights the need for government to focus on improving 'customer' experience if it wants to drive take up of online services and improve efficient service delivery." He continued, "Given the clear benefits experienced by organisations such as HMRC in the delivery of online services (as compared to traditional channels), the complexity of a Life Event should not stop government from developing online services to assist citizens with that Event. More coherent online information & functionality would not only decrease the time and effort involved with finding, printing and posting multiple forms for the citizen, but would also increase effectiveness and reduce costs for government."

Walker suggests that the use of 'To do' lists which allow the user to track and save progress similar to that currently offered on the Businesslink website for the 'Starting a Business' Life Event would help the use to navigate their way through complex life event processes. Additionally, Interactive 'how to' guides linked up with electronic forms would help users to complete processes online and could reduce call-centre volume.

Further recommendations include:

• Online services should be adaptable to users' requirements. In many of the Life Events surveyed the number and type of processes to be completed depended very much on specific personal circumstances. Online services should aim to discover users' circumstances (automatically or through the use of directed questions) and adapt to them so as to support them as much as possible as they navigate a particular Life Event. Looking further ahead, the development of personal portals for government interactions which could be configured by users would help to tailor government services to the individual needs of the citizen.

• Online Services should be developed in conjunction with support from communities and trusted groups. The government is already working with trusted channels to distribute information such as 'Netmums' - a network of websites set around local communities - and this practice should be encouraged in all areas of government. Working with established experts that understand how citizens wish to use government services ensures that services deliver against those expectations.

Walker added that: "Whilst major changes will not happen overnight, much can be done to incrementally improve online transformation. Reducing the number of government websites will not simplify processes or create the efficiencies that government is looking for. The key to Transformational Government Maturity is better integration."

Frank Moyer, CEO of EzGov Europe, encourages governments to understand the changing shape of public expectation. "The number of technically adept citizens is growing at breakneck pace. So are their expectations. And while public services must continue via traditional channels for those without ready internet access, the accessibility needs of those not online shouldn't trump the needs of those who are. The 70% of UK households with internet access have a right to expect robust, intuitive online

services."

To see the summary of the report or the research findings in full, please contact Steve Smith, VP of Sales & Marketing (ssmith@ezgoveurope.com).

About the Research

Kable investigated the online capabilities for seven key Life Events in April 2008. It identified key sub-events and processes for each Life Event and then rated each sub-event by three key criteria – information accessibility, online functionality of key processes, and internal /cross-departmental links – to generate an overall Life Event transformational government maturity rating.

Life Event Transformational Government Maturity League Table:

1. Booking a hospital appointment   5.0
2. Starting a business   4.0
3. Moving home   3.25
4. Buying/selling a vehicle privately   3.00
5. Dealing with a death   2.87
6. Having a baby   2.60
7. Placing a relative into care   2.25

About EzGov Europe

Founded in 1999, EzGov Europe are specialists in the design and delivery of usable and intuitive online e-services. EzGov only work for the public sector, and over the last 10 years have delivered some of the most innovative and successful e-service applications in the UK.

About Kable

Founded in 1990, Kable is a London based private independent research and information company specialising in public sector information systems and e-government. In 2008, Kable became a part of Guardian Professional Services, a division of Guardian News and Media. Kable offerings include publishing, events and research and advisory services.

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