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How AI powered federal service delivery can take agencies from reactive to proactive, at scale

Introduction

Federal agencies face mounting pressure to deliver frictionless, personalized services to diverse populations while navigating limited budgets, legacy systems, and rising public expectations. For this reason, service delivery is often reactive – addressing citizen needs only after they arise, often too slowly and at a significant cost to both efficiency and effectiveness. Amid these challenges, a powerful opportunity is emerging. As artificial intelligence (AI) grows more sophisticated, it offers enormous promise to overcome challenges and transform federal customer experience (CX).

By integrating AI's predictive capabilities within a mission-centered approach, agencies can move from reactive service delivery to proactive engagement. AI allows agencies to anticipate needs, optimize resources, automate routine tasks and deliver services with greater speed and precision. More importantly, it lays the foundation for building trust through meaningful, user-focused experiences.

The Current State of Federal Service Delivery

Federal agencies continue to make significant progress toward modernizing – improving digital channels for greater accessibility and implementing automation for faster service times. Yet, gaps remain.

Silos are a persistent challenge, limiting how effectively data is shared and leveraged between agencies. Data fuels automation and AI, and siloed data results in isolated, incremental AI implementation rather than a cohesive, mission-driven strategy. And while agencies grapple with these internal challenges, public expectations for service delivery grow ever higher.

"Citizens expect government services to mirror those found in the commercial space," explains Lester Jones, an Experience Strategist Lead at Maximus. "Companies like Google, Apple, and Netflix have redefined service delivery by proactively anticipating user needs, offering personalized recommendations, seamless experiences and real-time support. Customer expectations are outpacing what the government is delivering at this time."

From Incremental to Proactive, Accelerated Enterprise Progress

Meeting growing expectations and bringing federal service delivery closer to commercial standards requires a shift to a more systemic approach, explains Sophie Hudgins, a Design

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"Small fixes don't scale. If agencies treat service improvements as isolated projects, we'll always be playing catchup," Hudgins states. By taking a systemic approach, agencies can better understand the entire service ecosystem – across people, process, technology, policy, and data – to move beyond transactional service delivery and leverage emerging technologies to proactively deliver meaningful outcomes.

"This approach can be transformative in processes like citizen eligibility and enrollment," Hudgins explains. "AI-driven intelligence can proactively identify, qualify, and enroll a citizen for benefits rather than waiting for them to make the request. This is how we proactively provide services to deliver mission outcomes, and how agencies can go beyond mere service delivery improvements."

Being proactive is just the beginning. AI's role extends beyond improving efficiency and effectiveness – it can unlock predictive insights that enable agencies to anticipate issues before they arise, allowing them to execute policies more intelligently for mission-wide adaptability. This allows agencies to dynamically respond to emerging national needs – from national disasters to health information distribution.

In many cases, having predictive insights to proactively deliver services can be lifesaving. Jones highlighted an example from the health space, fighting mosquito-borne diseases. Mosquitoes, called "the world's deadliest animal" by the Centers for Disease Control, are significant sources for deadly disease worldwide, spreading dengue, chikungunya, malaria, and more.

"We know exactly what conditions disease-bearing mosquitoes thrive in," Jones explains. "Imagine, rather than waiting for people to start to fill emergency rooms, we have access to real-time data insights that alert health officials of changing conditions, signaling the growth of mosquito populations, and then proactively act on that data – sending citizens notices, care packages, and instructions – to stop the infection cycle before it begins."

Transforming service delivery from responding to requests to anticipating needs is a fundamental paradigm shift. It also shifts responsibility from citizens having to figure out the services available to them, to government predicting and proactively responding to their needs, offering guidance, personalizing experiences, and removing barriers.

Aligning AI to Real-World Needs

Successfully navigating this service delivery transformation relies on continuously understanding customers' current and evolving needs through data insights.

"This ensures that as we integrate AI and automation, we don't lose sight of the human experience," Hudgins says. "This means services must meet the needs for real people and not just automate transactions. It's about understanding

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the full ecosystem of service delivery rather than optimizing individual touchpoints in isolation. It's a continuous thinking and learning process to vision the total experience from end to end."

It's essential that AI systems are designed, developed, and deployed in ways that prioritize human needs and behaviors. Without this focus, AI initiatives risk becoming ineffective, biased, and misaligned with real-world user requirements. By continuously collecting and analyzing user and stakeholder feedback – including unstructured data like chats, social posts, and call recordings – agencies can maintain a clear view of changing needs and expectations. This iterative process not only keeps AI systems aligned with user needs but also helps build trust – particularly crucial at a time when skepticism about AI and automation runs high.

"There's a reliability component with regard to integrating AI into federal service delivery," Jones says. "To ensure trust, agencies must adopt transparent AI governance models that provide explainability and ensure fairness, as well as security. Reliable AI requires constant checks for accurate, open decision-making, and strong human oversight. These safeguards help keep AI-focused on real-world needs and not just driven by data alone."

The cycle of gathering and incorporating data and feedback into service delivery outcomes creates the type of iterative process that is key to supporting successful AI and automation development. AI isn't just a point-in-time solution, it must evolve and be continuously refined and monitored while bringing insights into action.

"We need direct insights from users to continuously improve service models," Hudgins says, "based on how users interact with services, their pain points, and the bottlenecks they experience."

Putting people first doesn't stop with those using the service. It applies to the teams building and supporting AI systems as well. There must always be someone involved to check the AI's output, spot mistakes, and make sure the system stays reliable.

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Think Big, Start Small

Sweeping modernization is an intimidating prospect. But even as agencies begin to take a more integrated, enterprise-wide view of service delivery, progress can start small.

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Even these small steps can encourage collaboration and establish cross-agency digital approaches, enabling agencies to coordinate efforts. This allows departments and agencies to learn from each other, ensuring AI and automation solutions are scalable and mission aligned.

"Establish a shared vision and common goals," Hudgins says. "Agencies often have different priorities, but collaboration is easier when there's a unifying mission that benefits all stakeholders."

Jones also suggests bringing staff on board with a bit of friendly competition. Hold a summit, an AI Olympics, and offer prizes to the units with the most innovative approaches. Publish case studies based on summit outcomes to help shape projects across agencies.

"People want to be recognized for the good work they're doing," explains Jones. "Eventually that begins to break down barriers and you start to see organic sharing occur."

As agencies integrate service delivery improvements into their digital transformation or IT modernization plans and establish a more holistic, mission-centered approach, Maximus is poised to support their journeys. Building upon rapid response experiences for enterprise programs like helping the CDC stand up 20,000 customer service agents in a matter of six weeks that supported 1M interactions per hour during the COVID-19 pandemic, Maximus is applying successes and lessons learned to scaling AI-powered service delivery for agencies of all sizes.

"We are at a place where we can begin to leverage data to provide proactive approaches to delivering government services and be one of the first companies to deliver these solutions to governments at scale, on time, and in budget," Jones says.

Improvements include using AI to track customer service-related metrics and chatbots to mine knowledge bases for information, as well as creating dashboards for tracking assets to enhance mission-driven intelligence for key decision-makers, and much more. It's not about starting from scratch but building on the incremental progress that has already occurred.

"Leverage existing initiatives and funding," Hudgins suggests. "Agencies can align AI-driven service transformation with federal mandates such as the Government Service Delivery Improvement Act, and FedRAMP AI Security Standards. Aligning AI implementation with these frameworks accelerates scale, minimizes risk, and builds public trust, while transforming compliance into a catalyst for mission success."

Learn more about how Maximus is helping agencies unlock the power of AI-driven service delivery for proactive, personalized, and unified citizen experiences.