e-Government services in Qatar

e-Government for All.

e-Government for Qatar means a focus on the people. The new secure infrastructure delivers real benefits for citizens creating more transactions available online, easier to use websites, and unprecedented new applications that improve people’s lives. For Qatari administration, it means closer interactions with public and private organizations. It is also giving government employees the tools they need to build a world-class civil service that is more efficient, open and innovative.
Qatar, a Middle East state with a fast-growing population of nearly 2m people, is one of a number of pioneering countries embracing e-government to create a modern and efficient public sector. Though small in size, Qatar has big ambitions. Back in 2004, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) began to develop a national ICT program with the aim of capitalizing on technology to better serve citizens and drive economic and social transformation.

Objectives of egovernment
> Interlink government agencies
> Improve internal working of public sector
> Migrate paper-based processes to online services
> Reduce financial costs
> Make service delivery faster and more efficient
> Facilitate interactions between citizens, business and government
> Broaden access to and uptake of new technologies

Central to Qatar’s remodeling of government services has been Hukoomi – an online portal providing information and e-services at the fingertips of those who live and work in Qatar. It integrates all government ministries and agencies to make it simpler, easier and quicker for people to connect and carry out a range of administrative procedures.

A secure solution for egovernment services
Since its creation, trust is a crucial element for the Hukoomi portal - to encourage usage and reassure online users that they are securely connected to services like applying for visas or paying bills. When Qatar began to replace its plastic ID cards with national eID cards in 2005, it had already decided to exploit the capability of these smart cards to identify and authenticate citizens on its egovernment portal.

Key characteristics of the Qatari national eID card
> New secure biometric identity document
> Match-on-card technology to store and verify fingerprints
> PKI-enabled secure identification and strong authentication
> Issued to Qatari citizens as well as foreign residents
> Used with a smart card reader for secure access to Hukoomi portal

The initial solution required users to download a middleware and install it on their computer and was not compatible with all PC operating systems. While the eIDs were successfully being used to identify users to perform transactions online, the digital signing was coupled with the authentication system.

Gemalto and Qatar’s Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) began work on bringing additional simplicity and security to Hukoomi users. Gemalto’s Coesys eGov 2.0 was chosen to provide a more citizen-centric approach to boost uptake and enhance access security.
Simplifying security and building trust

Recognizing that not everyone has the same level of technical proficiency, the solution aimed to make the user interface as simple as possible with Coesys eGov 2.0.

Coesys eGov 2.0 provides plug-and-play connectivity from any computer, compatible with all of the world’s most widely used browsers. It requires a simple mouse click at connection to activate the secure identification process.

Because Coesys eGov 2.0 requires no additional software, users simply use their eID card as their secure credential and input a personal code to identify themselves. The solution adds a layer of strong authentication for online transactions. Users can now digitally sign documents or application forms before submitting them, by using their eID with a 6 digit PIN code. It also offers a single sign-on to all the services in the Hukoomi portal, so that once a user has logged on to the platform, s/he can access any of the various online services.

The keys to success

A number of elements have been key to the success of Hukoomi – not least security and simplicity. It delivers a trusted environment through a robust, secure and reliable platform. Now with the Coesys eGov 2.0 solution, user-friendly authentication will help boost usage while reassuring citizens on the security of online services.

Since its launch in 2003, the Hukoomi portal has continually increased its scope of services to citizens. Between January and August 2013, more than 2 million transactions were processed. That’s nearly as many as were processed in the whole of 2012 – proving the popularity of the platform for reducing bureaucracy and speeding interactions.

To promote awareness and educate potential users still further, ictQATAR is planning to place kiosks in government agencies, shopping malls and other public places so people can explore the range of services on offer. With a 75% smart phone penetration rate in Qatar 2013, next steps may include extending the program with the use of mobile PKI where citizens log on to the Hukoomi portal using either their eID or mobile phone.

HUKOOMI BENEFITS

Benefits for users
> Simple and secure way to do administrative procedures online
> Reduced bureaucracy with all government services in one place
> Saving time and effort versus face-to-face services

Benefits for government agencies
> Safe and reliable platform integrating all egovernment services
> Secure identification and authentication of users
> Providing convenient services anytime, anywhere for citizens and businesses
> Reducing costs by migrating public services to digital channels including mobile devices
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Transformation through technology
Hukoomi is the centerpiece of ictQATAR’s ongoing ambition to transform governmental, economic and social activity in the State. Being a small country with fewer governmental agencies and a comparatively small population, Qatar has demonstrated its ability to develop technology solutions quickly and flexibly. In the UN’s egovernment survey of 2012, Qatar is one of a few small countries that have demonstrated real progress in the delivery of online services. Qatar was ranked 27th – up 63 places from the 2010 survey which provides an index of how national administrations are using ICT to deliver public services and create egovernment systems.

For citizens, businesses, visitors alike, Hukoomi will be a key platform for a more modern and efficient delivery of public services.

“The initial solution required users to download a middleware and was not compatible with all PC operating systems. It also lacked a digital signature service clearly separated from authentication. Early 2014, we introduced Gemalto’s infrastructure for eGovernment services: Coesys eGov 2.0. Users can now digitally sign documents or application forms before submitting them, by using their eID with a 6 digit PIN code. The solution also makes the user interface as simple as possible. A simple mouse click at connection activates the secure authentication process. Once connected, the user can access any of the various online services thanks to Single Sign on. Citizens have rapidly adopted this new tool and calls to our help desk have visibly dropped.”

Said Mahdi Hussain
e-Government Application Section Manager
Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ictQatar)