

## Oracle Puts an "i" in Government at OpenWorld

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### IN THIS PERSPECTIVE

This Government Insights Perspective discusses Oracle's recent OpenWorld 2008 event, where roughly 43,000 of Oracle's nearest and dearest users, partners, and those of us who follow them come together to share views and get caught up on the latest and greatest in information technology. Oracle also uses this event to make daily announcements on new products, solutions, and services and gives analysts alone time with their customers to discuss their experiences and partnerships with Oracle.

I met with several government customers from U.S. local, state, and federal government, as well as a representative from one European country. These discussions give good insight into the Oracle technologies, applications, and solutions they are employing. They also provide good candid conversations on the issues that users face on the business side of government — budgets, governance, cultural, and structural issues — an inherently different environment in which government information technology (IT) and program managers operate that makes successful outcomes a different proposition from their commercial counterparts.

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### What's Different About Government?

There are plenty of similarities between commercial and government implementations, but consider the following:

- Government customers don't typically get to choose whether or not they want to be customers. They will do business with government at some level, with varying frequency.
- Government isn't a particular business such as health, finance, retail, services, or transportation. It is all of those and more (think public safety and defense).
- Hand-in-hand with that, government agencies have historically acted as separate business units and made IT investments accordingly, leaving a legacy of functional multiplicity among disparate technologies, systems, and applications.

- The decision-making process in government is slow by design, agility is a challenge, and accountability mechanisms are fractured.

Mature IT companies such as Oracle have understood this for some time, which is why public sector solutions are a line of business. And while technology providers can typically draw upon other business units and technologies to translate particular solutions into the government environment, they do so at a certain amount of peril. They must understand the uniqueness of government structures, organizations, business and decision-making processes to be successful partners.

### **Oracle Says "i" Get It**

In an interesting move to bridge these two worlds, Oracle introduced "iGovernment," which, at first blush, might lead one to think "information" government. While basically true, the concept is Oracle's new construct for rationalizing information infrastructure, applications, and processes into a three-tiered grouping of solutions and outcomes designed to create "innovated, integrated, intelligent" government.

The foundation of this concept is a service-oriented architecture (SOA)-enabled platform of database, middleware, and applications built on open standards. The core technologies that form the Oracle iGovernment infrastructure include Web portals, SOA, business process execution language (BPEL), database security, identity management, content management, and business intelligence. While government organizations may not use the precise terminology (other than SOA), they are essentially focused on all of these activities and technologies. Open standards have long been a mantra, infrastructure consolidation is driving the move to virtualization, and security and identity management remain paramount.

Moving up to the next tier, Oracle iGovernment focuses on increased efficiency and transparency, again a fairly common goal for government organizations. The components of this layer include shared services, streamlined business processes, and governance, risk, and compliance controls. To support it, Oracle demonstrated a financials dashboard; planning and budgeting; talent management; employee and vendor self-service; procurement; and governance, risk and compliance solutions and new capabilities in the latest releases of its application suites.

At the top of the Oracle iGovernment pyramid lies the still fairly elusive transformation of government service delivery. This is rationalized on a base of a common service delivery platform, managed master data, enabled self-service, and embedded business intelligence and analytics. Oracle's demonstration included customer relationship management and case management software for front-

office applications, including call centers and constituent self-service, and how CRM works together with back-office ERP systems, master data management, GIS, business intelligence, and other applications and technologies to transform service delivery. The result is a logical, easy-to-use interface that provides significant flexibility to the user.

All in all, the Oracle iGovernment construct is impressive and on target. It logically presents a "how to get there" roadmap for achieving many common government goals in a way that shows that Oracle not only understands what it will take, but lays out its applications, solutions, and services in a way that demonstrates their contributing IT value to getting there. Now for the hard part.

### ***Can Government Get It?***

As well thought out and rational as Oracle iGovernment is, Oracle has its work cut out for it in translating the model's value inside its own organization and to government organizations because government is unique, or should I say every government is unique. Admittedly, there is an element of truth to that, but there are more similarities than differences across governments and government organizations, and it is time to get beyond "here's how WE do it" and get to "here's where we want to be." In the OpenWorld public sector general session — billed as "Customer Perspectives in Oracle iGovernment" — city, state, and federal representatives each talked about where they are in implementing Oracle solutions, many of which make up components of Oracle iGovernment. To derive the potential value that this framework offers its customers, Oracle will need to consistently reference it, assist clients in understanding where they are in implementing it, and broaden their view of how to fully achieve its vision.

Oracle has developed a valuable tool for painting the outcome goals and demonstrating how its applications, solutions, and services contribute to them. This should provide a good strategic boost to the many public sector offerings it has built through its multiyear acquisition and fusion strategies. The challenge will be for governments to "get it" and for Oracle to become a partner that can help them get there by sharing their experiences with governments in creating effective governance, overcoming cultural barriers, helping with budget issues (including innovative partnering arrangements) and managing all this within existing government organizational and accountability structures.

In short, it's not always the technology, but Oracle iGovernment offers technology in a well-thought-out strategy that should serve Oracle and its public sector clients well.

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### Related Research

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- *Federal IT Security Spending Benchmarks — How Does Your Agency Compare to Others?* (Government Insights GI#213071, August 2008)
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