Just as businesses are tapping into technology to change the way customers interact with them, government is also finding new ways to serve and interact with citizens. As the world increases its use and dependence on digital technology, electronic forms of government offer a possibility of a “new environment for public communication which is interactive, relatively cheap to enter, unconstrained by time or distance, and inclusive” (Coleman and Gøtze 2001, 1).

Defining “electronic government” (e-Government) is somewhat elusive, but in basic terms it concerns “the use of digital technology in the management and delivery of public services, predominantly through the Internet” (Edmiston 2003, 20). There are many other terms that are used in reference to e-Government, terms such as “e-Democracy,” “e-Governance,” and “online citizenship.” These all have slightly different meanings.

### e-Government Maturity Models

E-government maturity models describe the stages of development for e-Government. There are many different models but they basically all present the same idea, which is e-Government progresses through various stages on its way to maturity: information, basic service delivery, integrated service delivery, and interactive democracy.

Most citizens are not experiencing the “interactive democracy” stage of e-Government (stage 4). However, Utah has successfully progressed through the maturity models to include some aspects of stage 4 and is beginning to think about what comes next. There are a lot of areas where advancements in technology are creating opportunities for government to give citizens control over future outcomes.

### Benefits of and Concerns about e-Government

There are several real and perceived benefits to e-Government. These include improved access to government services, increased efficiency, enhanced democracy, improved customer service and accuracy of data. All of these have very real examples in Utah. However, some policymakers are concerned about e-Government, particularly if it goes as far as opening up the policy-making process to greater public involvement. One of the biggest concerns is the so-called digital divide, which is a perceived gap in computer or Internet access across economic, demographic, or social lines (Edmiston 2003, 1). This has potential to leave large portions of citizens out of e-Government, leading them to lose touch while others become more involved. Some research suggests this may be more perceived than real, and in Utah, the rates for Internet use are higher than in most states, with 68.8% of households having some kind of Internet access at home.

### Utah as a Leader in e-Government

Utah has a long history of involvement in e-Government. The state is at the forefront of technology in many areas, and continues to win awards for use of the web in government. In 2008, the Center for Digital Government (the national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government) awarded the State of Utah the position of #1 in the “Top Tech-Savvy States in Nation” (Center for Digital Government 2008).

### Use of Technology in Different Branches of Utah State Government

The different branches of government have very different purposes, and, therefore, different needs and uses for technology, but they are all making strides to improve.

Utah’s executive branch primarily functions at a state level through the portal [Utah.gov](http://www.utah.gov). Utah.gov is primarily a service-based portal. This allows citizens to access a wide range of services such as license renewals, job searches, calendars, calculators, filing, and purchases.

In the judicial branch, many traditional court services are now offered over the Internet, with the ultimate...
The goal of one day being able to accept all court filings, documents, fees, and fine payments online. Creating an electronic courthouse that is open to the public 24 hours a day creates additional access to the courts and increases the court’s efficiency in doing business.

The Utah State Legislature is also very active online. Their website is one of the top legislative websites in the country and has been recognized as a leading legislative website by the National Council for State Legislatures. In addition, several of the Utah state legislators also have personal blogs.

The Department of Technology Services is currently developing its 2009-2011 Utah Strategic e-Government plan. This document includes some far-reaching goals such as:

- increase the use of Utah.gov to an average of 1.2 million unique visitors in 2009 and 1.3 million unique visitors in 2010,
- improve the citizen experience as measured by user surveys, ensure over 80% compliance with Utah.gov web standards,
- make the business of government more efficient by reducing need for print forms, sharing data to reduce effort and duplication, and allowing businesses to interface with government without manual intervention,
- increase the effectiveness of web based interaction between government and citizens such as online 24/7 chat and social networking.

With a committed team of e-Government experts and the demographics and expertise here in Utah, it is likely that the state will remain a leader in this field.

**Conclusion**
e-Government, if done effectively, can be a very efficient way for citizens to transact with government. It can save money, increase participation, and improve transparency through sharing information. Utah is an active participant in this experiment in creating new patterns of government interaction with citizens. It has developed web standards that are fluid and adjust as new tools and methods become available. The state is a leader in this field, and through the work of each branch of government, citizens are seeing improvements and ease of access.

Get the full in-depth report.

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Soon to be published State of Utah 2009-2011 Strategic eGov Plan