Comune di Milano

PROJECT:

DIGITAL CITIZEN FOLDER APP

Building data-based digital solutions to bring city government and residents closer together.

Keywords: Mobile First-One Click, Data-driven, data interoperability, administrative modernization, services digitization

ABSTRACT

The Digital Citizen Folder App is one of the latest tools launched by the Municipality of Milan to put services "in the pocket" of its citizens. The application was built to meet citizens where they are and how they want to do business – faster and on-the-go. The App allows direct, fast and customized communication between the administration and citizens. This project is a cornerstone of the mobile-first and user-centered approach Milan's digital agenda. Along with the City's "Interoperability Plan", connecting the city's many databases, the launch of the Digital Citizen Folder App solidified the City's new digital foundations, allowing other innovations like the "City Dashboard" to be fully exploited.

The app acts as a personal repository of citizens' documents, ranging from vital records to voter registration cards. In addition, it allows digital transactions like scheduling in-person appointments, the visualization of personal data for the individual and their family, downloading certificates, reporting complaints and requesting assistance. This two-way communication channel helps digitally savvy citizens save time and money and frees up traditional channels, like the City's helpline (020202) for those without the skills or access to digital services. It also allows citizens to share feedback and ideas with the municipality to further improve online services.

CONTEXT

The project began with the Municipality's desire to establish a one-on-one dialogue with individual citizens, opening a direct and secure communication channel. Enabling notifications gives citizens real-time updates to help them manage their time and lives - alerting them to renew ID cards, pay waste taxes and about the expiration of resident parking passes. The City's goal is to improve citizens' experience when requesting city services, and to take advantage of the ubiquity and accessibility of mobile devices.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Citizen participation and user centricity were essential in the creation of this application. The City's Analytics team assessed citizen's online requests to focus on the most demanded services. Over 100 citizens were enrolled in the beta-testing of the application and their feedback was integrated into the final release.

Internally, the Municipality engaged in a three-step process: first, assessing user experience needs and applying global best practices to create responsive online services; second, performing benchmarking against similar apps developed by other Municipalities and third, conducting an evaluation of citizens' use of the Digital Folder and public website.

Externally, one of the most valuable steps in the implementation of this project was the direct engagement with citizens. To reach out to citizens in a productive way, the Municipality first convened an internal design workshop and identified the main online services desired by citizens. Subsequently, a workshop was held with citizens: exchanging feedback, project plans and learning directly about citizens' needs, during the 2019 Milan Digital Week. Afterwards, a handful of citizen volunteers participated in prototype assessment, providing feedback on the user-experience. Rounding out the citizen collaboration was the closed-beta testing campaign with 100 volunteers from the public. Milan's Mayor also participated in this phase, increasing its visibility and demonstrating the Municipality's commitment to digital transformation and customer service.

STAKEHOLDERS
The project was developed by the Digital Lead Division of the Municipality of Milan that orchestrated a coordinated effort of several departments, including the Communication and the Analytics Division. This mix of competencies, ranging from technology to public communication, was one of the keys to a successful implementation. To build the system around the needs of users, a group of 100 volunteers participated in the beta-testing phase of the app in February 2020, along with 140 internal employees. Since then, the Municipality has continuously integrated opinions and feedback from users, private companies, and organizations to deliver the best version of this tool.

IMPLEMENTATION
From a technical perspective, the first major effort to create this application came during the implementation of the Interoperability and Data Lake plans enacting the design of a single point of access for citizen digital services.

The second step came in 2017 with the first online version of the Digital Folder on the Municipality's website. Enabling direct online access for each citizen to her/his personal data on a single gateway continues to be a huge point of pride for the City's Digital Transformation teams.

In 2019, a complete review and make-over of the Municipal website was finished. During this process, it was found that people were visiting the Municipal website mainly to obtain clear transactional information and services – i.e. how to pay a waste tax and access the related online payment system. This helped drive the development of the new website, focused more on direct access and clear information on City services, and less narrative-focused. The most requested services are monitored thorough internal KPIs and a dedicated dashboard, providing constantly updated data to the City's Analytics Department.

Lastly, thanks to the implementation of a secure digital citizen identification system, the City is now able to provide more services to citizens through the Digital Folder by seamlessly connecting the City's CRM on the backend. Multiple teams within the Municipality are constantly verifying and managing these citizen profiles.

LEARNINGS
The building of this application created a great learning opportunity for the Municipality and helped to instill a user centered focus to the digital transformation process. Improving communications and collaboration channels with citizens helped create a highly practical and personalized online experience.

FUTURE
The Information Systems and Digital Agenda Department is working on extracting usage data and categorizing the different types of certificates downloaded from the app to improve the application, and digital services in general.

Additional notifications for fines and other services are being planned and will be rolled out as they are completed.

The degree of replicability to other cities is high. However, other Municipalities need to consider that from a technical point of view, implementing a cloud computing CRM from scratch is better than adapting it when there is complex underlying infrastructure already in place.

DATA AND NUMBERS

At the end of 2020 there were more than 72.000 downloads of the application.