



# IT MODERNIZATION: CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

avtex 

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's ever-connected world, constituents have increasingly high expectations that their federal, state and local agencies will provide exceptional service. Many agencies struggle, however, with creating good citizen experiences – particularly in the correspondence management arena.

Challenges include siloed departments and disparate systems that complicate the process of answering requests, systems that don't support automation for signing actions and costly upgrades that require substantial maintenance. Additionally, government agencies are responsible for complying with legal regulations when communicating with citizens or other agencies, which can further prolong and complicate the process for managing and answering requests.

That's why more agencies are aligning their correspondence needs with new and innovative cloud technologies. A cloud-based correspondence management system (CMS) can help reduce IT overhead and streamline existing processes, while empowering government employees to provide exceptional service and adhere with compliance regulations like the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

To better understand what a good CMS can yield in government, GovLoop partnered with Avtex, a leading company in customer service and correspondence management. In this industry perspective, Sam Thepvongs, Vice President of Public Sector at Avtex, provides insight on what features an agency should seek in a CMS solution.

By reading this industry perspective, you'll gain a better idea of the challenges to achieving better correspondence management in government, the benefits of strengthened correspondence management and what is needed to provide the ideal CMS solution.



# CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING BETTER CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT

Government agencies process hundreds of requests per day. In fact, the federal government overall received [713,168 FOIA requests in 2015 alone](#). With all these inquiries and demands from citizens come a number of challenges to achieving better correspondence management.

Regardless of your level of government, you've probably encountered frustration in your communications systems. Boxes of mail piled high for an incoming administration, with no instructions as to how to respond; prolonged outages because old computer systems are down and email chains with too many attachments to keep track of the original requestor are common scenarios that make it difficult to handle constituent requests. Why?

First, many requests for government agencies must be approved and passed through multiple departments before being processed. "One request may prompt multiple requests throughout an organization," Thepvongs said. "The request goes across multiple approval chains and the challenge for agencies is that they may live in a single email system to manage that activity."

With so many siloed departments and different pairs of eyes on a single request, it becomes difficult to communicate in a timely manner and effectively respond to the constituent's request.

Second, many agencies have on-premises email systems and case file systems that are disparate and lack consistent platforms to help address requests. Hardware applications often need regular maintenance and don't integrate with third-party vendor systems. Information from such applications then has to be manually processed, but employees lack visibility on the entire lifecycle of the request, and therefore only have pieces of the picture. This ultimately contributes to unnecessary back and forth

between employees trying to figure out point persons on the request as well as status.

The number of low-level inquiries can then build up over time because there is no self-service mechanism or speedier way for employees to interact with such correspondence. A simple constituent inquiry, such as checking on the status of a passport, may get lost in the trenches because there is no single system that can organize and prioritize correspondence accordingly.

Additionally, this can result in serious security vulnerabilities as constituent personally identifiable information (PII) may be passed back and forth between disparate systems or end up sitting in a folder somewhere under piles of other paperwork.

Such security vulnerabilities present additional challenges for better correspondence management in government, including compliance with federal laws. Agencies need correspondence management systems that comply with federal regulations like the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP), which requires agencies to use low-risk and low-impact cloud solutions, or the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA), where agencies must be able to protect sensitive information, like PII. Not only are agencies legally required to comply with such regulations, but failure to do so can also result in serious consequences, such as data breaches or loss of trust from citizens for failing to protect sensitive information.

In order for government to overcome these challenges, agencies need a comprehensive CMS that can help streamline processes and protect sensitive information all while helping deliver better citizen services.

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**SAM THEPVONGS**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLIC SECTOR  
AVTEX

# BENEFITS OF A MODERN CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

A CMS solution can help your agency achieve high-quality correspondence management and citizen service delivery.

Picture your ideal correspondence scenario: A constituent makes a request. It is automatically processed and routed by a system to the right employee to address the request based on the employee's subject matter expertise. Users can find all the information they need right within the request rather than having to dig through a pile of paperwork or disparate computer systems to pull up the information.

Each request guides them through the correspondence process so that the agency employee knows where he left off and does not have to guess as to what steps come next. Document templates can then automatically generate content, which is saved to the cloud for use with collaboration tools across multiple departments. Groups can kickstart research and responses accordingly.

With a comprehensive CMS, team leads no longer have to toss assignments over a wall and wait for a response. Groups can collaborate and communicate in real time, gain insights from their team, ask questions, co-author documents and stay on top of deadlines.

Meanwhile, constituents aren't left wondering when they can expect a response. Using the correspondence request portal, they can opt in to receive notifications or proactively monitor the progress of their requests, ask questions and browse frequently requested documents.

Back at the agency, the documents are completed and ready for review. A CMS that uses automated intelligence knows exactly who to notify for review, approval and signatures. Once signed, the correspondence can be released to the requestor.

A comprehensive correspondence management system ultimately improves an agency's responsiveness, efficiency and level of service to constituents. With the right CMS solution, an agency can:

» **Reduce IT overhead and manage the complexity of requests.**

"An agency should have a CMS that can help manage the entire lifecycle of a request while keeping track of the approval process a request has to go through," Thepvongs said. Rather than having to go through a number of different on-premises applications and computer systems to retrieve a few documents or check who's on the team for a single request, a CMS can streamline everything and everyone connected to a request in one platform. Additionally, a CMS can automatically remind

teams working on a request about upcoming tasks so they can be done in a timelier fashion rather than having employees manually comb through information.

» **Provide exceptional service and user experience.** "You need a platform that is consistent across familiar systems, like the Microsoft Cloud," Thepvongs said. Modern CMS solutions offer integration with productivity and collaboration tools that the agency already has in place, allowing employees to easily get up to speed learning the technology.

» **Maintain accountability and transparency with more visibility on requests.** Citizens expect consistency with responses to their inquiries. Regardless of whether a request is made through a phone call, email or web portal, an efficient CMS can help agencies handle requests consistently by providing all employees with a view of where requests are in the correspondence process and what has been said on the topic at hand. Additionally, constituents have the ability to track progress made on their requests.


» **Comply with federal regulations.** "Government has to make security the forefront of what modern technology adheres to," Thepvongs said. A CMS solution offers the ability to integrate with systems familiar to agency employees while still leveraging advantages of the cloud. Additionally, a CMS can accomplish this all while maintaining compliance with governmentwide laws and regulations.

Agencies are already taking advantage of the benefits a CMS can yield. Recently, Avtex assisted a large government agency in deploying a CMS solution powered by Microsoft Dynamics 365.

The organization fields 100,000 research requests per year. Many of these requests start from a user access portal and are then turned into cases needing multicycle and multistage management. Avtex implemented a comprehensive CMS solution that provides the ability to track and manage cataloguing and requests with visibility for all employees through a single portal.

Ultimately, an efficient CMS can help streamline IT and work processes for handling requests, equip agencies to deliver timelier and more efficient responses, maintain accountability and visibility for teams involved on requests and adhere to important legal regulations. CMS provides government agencies with the tools to stay agile by delivering correspondence on time to meet and exceed constituent expectations.

# FEATURES AND BEST PRACTICES OF AN EFFECTIVE CMS



Providing positive citizen service experiences with no piles of paperwork and seamless communications is every agency's dream. A CMS solution can help make that dream a reality. But in order to make CMS work for your agency, you need to be sure it proactively unifies your agency's data while helping your agency deliver a positive citizen experience. More importantly, your CMS solution needs the right features to make it most optimal and efficient.

The first feature is data analytics, which is highly important for a strong CMS solution. "We live in a data-centric world, and having a data system that can intelligently understand and automate requests to the right person is very important," Thepvongs said.

Data analytics helps automate the correspondence process and allows agencies to be more proactive in communication rather than simply reactive. Additionally, data analytics can help with internal correspondence. Your agency can harness data and information from constituents' requests to better understand what citizens most care about and need from your services. That way, when a citizen interacts with your agency again, everyone already has an idea of what that citizen needs and can pull up previous information that will help speed the correspondence process instead of starting from scratch.

In order to make sure your agency has the right CMS solution, look for these features:

**1. Golden record:** This is a unified data set that maintains and tracks all information coming from correspondence. Internally, employees can also track entities and identify the original person who submitted the request. Additionally, a golden record maintains that there is only one source of data for all of this information.

**2. Digital presence:** This refers to a digital platform that, from the agency perspective, allows ongoing access to either the status or updates that need to be made for the requests or attachments that are sent back and forth. This translates to agencies getting more information expeditiously because they are getting it from one source of data.

**3. Individualized engagement:** This means an increasing amount of engagement per request through automation. A CMS solution should have tools that increase the level of engagement so as to offload effort from staff and other existing resources. To enhance citizen experiences, individualized engagement also helps personalize interactions with each correspondent.

In addition to these integral features that an agency needs for a proper CMS solution, Thepvongs recommended two best practices for the public sector to improve overall correspondence management:

» **Think differently.** Citizens' personal interactions with private companies form their expectations with government agencies. Agencies need to rethink the way they look at correspondence management and customer service. Citizens are looking for seamless experiences, which requires agencies to deliver information consistently and in a personalized manner. The more consistent and responsive agencies can be, the more effective they'll be in the eyes of citizens.

» **Treat technology as a way to support positive outcomes.** Government can sometimes shy away from new technologies because of fear of lack of security, user difficulty trying to learn new gadgets and applications, timely migration processes and high costs. Starting with the process and policies in your agency, however, can help make sense of what you're trying to achieve. Then you can choose technologies and programs accordingly.

In addition to implementing newer, updated technologies for better correspondence management, agencies also need to change their actual organizational management to support such changes. Doing something new, no matter how simple, takes time to manage. Agencies need to be able to help staffs adjust to using the new technologies, not only to deliver better services but also to ease workloads.

# CONCLUSION



“Correspondence management is about managing relationships and interactions between citizens and government agencies,” Thepvongs said. “It’s important that government provides information, answers questions and addresses requests in an efficient manner. This is a central part of public service.”

Avtex focuses on providing services and products that can help government make meaningful interactions with citizens. Avtex CMS solutions can help agencies address the challenges of the correspondence process by streamlining and automating communications and IT platforms, helping employees better keep track of requests and deliver timelier and individualized responses. Ultimately, a CMS solution can help government maintain accountability with its citizens and deliver high-quality services.





## ABOUT AVTEX

## ABOUT GOVLOOP

Avtex is a full-service Customer Experience consultancy focused on helping organizations build trust with their customers. Our breadth of knowledge uniquely positions us to assist in the identification, deployment and optimization of technology platforms that support the customer journey. As a peer-recognized consulting firm, we guide organizations through the process of identifying, implementing, and maintaining key strategies and technologies to drive effective Customer Experience.

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 250,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

For more information about this report, please reach out to [info@govloop.com](mailto:info@govloop.com)



1152 15th Street NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: (202) 407-7421 | Fax: (202) 407-7501  
[www.govloop.com](http://www.govloop.com)  
@GovLoop

