Day 1 – Paul Shetler

Teresa Corbin: Recently, we did a consultation with our members about what our priority issues should be over the next 12 months. To my great surprise, one issue that came up several times was the digital transformation office. Not necessarily something I thought that would be on the top of my list of things to be too concerned about, but I realise that there was actually quite a lot of concern out there about the accessibility and inclusive approach that the government would take with its digital-first strategy. So I'm really pleased that our next speaker is the new CEO of the digital transformation office. He's been in Australia all of, what, four weeks? Three weeks? Six weeks! So, um, I'm sure you'll show him a good, warm Australian welcome. Please welcome Paul Shetler.

(APPLAUSE)

Paul Shetler: Thank you. Thank you very much for allowing me to come speak to you today. I'm here to talk about what the DTO is about, and how we aim to be inclusive. I'd also like to just make a brief thanks to UTS. Last Thursday, we did a brief press event in the Chau Chak Wing Building announcing that DTO was going to be co-locating with UTS. So one of our teams will be here, co-located at the Sydney campus, to be close to the start-up community, academia and industry, so we can work together on providing digital solutions for the public. I'd really like to thank vice-chancellor Attila Brungs, and dean of the business school, Roy Green.

Getting back to the big questions - why are we here? What is the DTO about, and why am I on stage talking to you? The answer - let's see if this actually works - ah! Great. The answer is real simple. People are online. We just heard about somebody - your mother-in-law - 100 years old, has just gone online. My father, in his 90s, went online recently. Everybody is going online. This has been happening now for the last 20 years, - the Gopher was around in 1992. Worldwide web came around in about 1993. People have been progressively going further and further online to do more and more of the things that they do in their everyday life.

We used to talk about in "real life" versus digital life - online versus real. In fact, this dividing line is not how people live their lives. So we're here because uses of government services are also online. People talk about digital. They usually mean three things - that's why it's called digital, not IT. Firstly, that the internet is increasingly the channel not only for receiving channels or requesting services, but also for the actual delivery of services themselves. Goods and services are increasingly consumed directly on the internet - it's not a question of going to Amazon and asking for something to be sent to you via post.

Also, we're focused on user needs. We're focused on the actual user, rather than a marketing department or, in our case, a government agency. We're focusing on those needs. Thirdly, there's an emphasis on agility - understanding that, at the very beginning when we start something, we don't necessarily have, in our head, the perfect solution, and that's typically one of the reasons given why IT programs in government, and every other industry, have oftentimes been less than successful. So our users of government services right now - their expectations are being set increasingly by what they can do in the outside world. So people look at - the government doesn't operate in a market right now. It doesn't operate in a competitive market. People who want to get government services get them from government. But people who want to travel or people who want to book a cab or people who want to, um, do their banking - they'll do that online, and they'll do that in an increasingly competitive marketplace where the strength of the offering and the simplicity of the offering and the pleasurability of the offering are what provide a competitive advantage. If you can't actually keep up with that, then typically you'll have a problem.

People call that disintermediation all kinds of things. But basically what it means is the companies that can't keep up don't keep up. So the experience that people have online is typically very, very simple. If you look at apps or particular websites, there's really nothing standing in the way, or very few things that are standing in the way, of somebody consuming a good or a service in a very, very easy way. I guess the easiest way to describe this is that you don't need a lawyer to book a car on Uber, and you don't need to have a solicitor to figure out what button you press next on Amazon when you want to get a book. You don't need to do that because people have done the hard work to make things simple so that you can actually go ahead and do what you want to do.

So you could go ahead and book your trip via Expedia, but once you did, you might have some problems. Because figuring out things from the government once you're outside isn't nearly so easy. We didn't pick on any government department - we were just looking for an interesting use case. I think what you'll see is that - all of us are users of government services - that there's lots and lots of Australian websites, I think about 1,600 different websites at the federal level, maybe it's gone down to 1,400, which is still an awful lot - with information that's fragmented all across them. The only thing that they have in common, typically, is that they have nothing in common. They've got different design patterns, different ways of accessing information, different emphases. Learning one will not tell you how to use the next one. Unless you already know all the information you need to know, or perhaps have a PhD in constitutional law and can figure out what bits of government do what thing, it's not going to be very easy to know if you've got all the information that you actually need to know.

You've kind of got to have this map of all this stuff in your head to begin with, and then you can go check against all the different bits and pieces to see if everything has been alright, if anything has been superseded. This isn't the failing of a single agency or website. You could produce the best, most useful, most accessible quarantined information base in the world, but if they don't think about it, they're not going to go looking for it. It's not organised around what people need to do in their everyday life. Quite frequently, the way government websites work - this is true pretty much across the world, not just in Australia - is they're looking at what they want to get out. Problem is, if the user doesn't actually get that information, then whatever policy reason there was for getting that information out in the first place has been obviated, because they won't find it. Thinking about user needs and stepping back and looking at the whole picture of why somebody might be going there in the first place, asking where the user is coming from and what they need to know, is essential if we want to actually provide a decent-quality experience.

Some interesting stats. Over any 4-week period, more than 1 in 8 Australians is going to look at government information and services online. And over half of them will face a problem while using those services. Typically when people have a problem using a service, that means either that they aren't going to proceed further and they won't get the information or be able to do what it is that they want to do, or they could call a helpline, they could go to a storefront, they could do something else - perhaps they could enter the incorrect information into a web form, and then you sort of enter into this cascading scale of failure demands. Now, if Amazon or Uber or Airbnb or any of the companies mentioned earlier did that, they'd have a real problem competing and staying in the marketplace. Many of them would go under. So our view...There we go. Indeed we must get better!

(LAUGHTER)

For Amazon, Uber, Airbnb, that's just not good enough. There aren't other people offering government services, at least not today. But people's expectations are set in that competitive market. And a steady drip-drip-drip of poor services destroys public trust. It's not really a policy question at all - that is simply a delivery issue. That's what it comes down to. We must keep up. Public servants work real hard, but are also hamstrung by poor IT and forced to be human APIs.

Quite frequently, people are forced to read things off of one screen and re-key them into another, or receive information printed out from a website, get it on their desktop, then re-key the information. In government, it's reminiscent of what you used to see in financial services about 20 years ago. I know, because I used to work in that industry. And the emphasis on increasing straight-through processing and getting those kinds of efficiencies was really, really important. It was important for a couple of reasons. One was obviously people wanted to, um, people wanted to have a better profits.

They wanted to reduce costs. And much of the cost was in failure demand and failure waste. Also, they were under huge pressure from regulators and governments who were saying, "You need to be able to start actually settling a cheque in more than a week, settling a trade in less than three days." You need to have to start actually making it so that when people ask you to do something, you do it in something approaching real-time. And they did it because they didn't want to have really unhappy customers, because people were calling up the call centres and saying "How come...?" Hasn't worked. Poor front ends, failure waste, human rate, APIs, all leading to expensive and off-putting call centres are where you have an attempted triage that we began with. The people that request services from government - in many, many cases, it's a one-off. It's not like buying a book from Amazon, it's not like going to Uber, or going to a store or buying something, which you do day in, day out, every single day or very, very frequently. If you need to get a lasting power of attorney, for instance, that's something which will happen once in your life.

That's something which happens, typically, once in somebody's life. And they're not typically prepared for that. It's a relatively - it's not even relatively - it's an extremely, um, stressful situation. And that is all the reason why, when we provide our services, the services actually have to be humane and take that into consideration. I'm not going to talk about the money savings here. I alluded to that earlier. I guess the only thing I would say is that face-to-face interactions cost a lot more, and postal costs a lot more, than doing things digitally. If we could do things - the common things, the simple things, the things that should be done by machines - then we could actually spend this money on the edge cases, on more complex cases, on the more difficult things. Right now, everything is going through those channels. We think the opportunity we're facing right now is huge. Not just from a cost savings, but more importantly from a service standpoint. Compute and storage are dirt-cheap. That is the thing about cloud. It really costs close to nothing. The reason why you have so many start-ups is because people don't have to spend a fortune on capital, on servers, expensive software and everything else.

Really cheap IT means that we could actually start investing our effort in redesigning surfaces instead of paying for tin. We could think about services and designing them instead of dealing with them in different bits of practice, legislation and policy - we could start thinking about what the user experience is, what the user needs are, and redesigning the service around those. You could imagine what a great user experience would be like - we could then put our resources into actually designing that. We could also be looking across all tiers of government - not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local level, where people do an awful lot of their interactions. We could also look across all channels. Not only the digital channel, but also face to face and telephony. Because people, at the end of the day, do want things that only government can provide them, and they do want to do that without carrying a map of who does what around in their heads. Generally speaking, I could say, coming in here as a migrant, it can be very difficult.

Knowing what department, what agency, deals with this particular bit of the user journey isn't necessarily - it's not really an easy thing. In many cases, it can be quite maddening. Many of the worst problems that people have are not so much within a particular service, but the gaps between them. Those typically aren't mapped out on a digital estate. Because people go into a particular little silo, little departmental silos, little agency silos, to get a particular thing done without thinking how this thing all fits together. If I want to start a business, if I'm just leaving school, if I'm having a baby...

What are all the different things that happen? How do I actually put that together? That is what we're working on. We think Australia can be the best in the world at delivering services for everyone. So when I was at GDS, one of the slogans we had on the walls - GDS is very big on slogans - was "This is for everyone." It meant that - well, what it said - not only people who are in the digeratti will be able to access the service.

What would it be like if people in Australia were able to receive a service in this area, across all levels of government and across all different channels for everyone? Talking about being clear in the way that we speak, focusing on plain English, which also means that people can more easily use tools like translators and other machines, talking about services that are fully accessible in open formats and machine-readable code. We're talking about assist to digital - if you come to a shopfront, we can also help you to learn about our services and how to access them online, so maybe you don't need to come to that shopfront again. There's an example with this in myGov shopfronts. We're thinking of expanding that to the states.

Some people will always need assistance to go online to get started or sometimes on an ongoing basis. People can't get online for a variety of reasons - lack of access, lack of ability, complexity of the situation people are talking about - there may not be a digital service that may handle it. Video may be an option in some circumstances, and shopfronts will be able to provide information for complex needs. We're not focused on saving money - we're about equality, and a convenient user experience. How do we get there? First, focus on the needs of the users. Again, unlike any business, government doesn't have customers. Government has users. There is no situation where government says "Gee, I really want more customers. I really want more people claiming this particular service." It's not the case that users can say, "You know what, government? I want to go to this place instead and compete." Given the fact we don't have customers, we have an ethical obligation to deliver the best-quality service in the best amount of time. We have to focus on user needs, not governmental or agency needs. It means we have to think big, because the challenge is really huge, but we have to start small, service transformations - if we try to deliver a Big Bang service transformation, the type that typically takes years, typically ends in tears.

The way we worked at administrative justice was we did all of our exemplars and digital services - about 20, in our portfolio - we delivered those over the course of 20 weeks. That meant that basically the product manager had to have an idea of what it was he was going to be delivering, and make sure the capacity met the stage gauge within 20 week. Something that provides actual value, note total transformation. At the beginning of any of these kind of projects, we know that very first day when we start that we know the least about what the actual user needs are. We know the least about what's actually going to be happening with the state of our products. We have to start from a position of humility and empathy and admit we don't know everything. And then, deliver quickly. A 2-5-year transformation program - there's nothing very transformative about that. Once you've done that - whoa! Iterate wildly. Deliver your MVP, then continuously improve that thing very, very rapidly. That was the way we started getting cultural change inside the UK central service. It was an incredibly powerful organisation. People tended to like to think of things as building a submarine or a road or a bridge, when they were actually talking about a service made out of software which is highly disposable. Getting people to understand how we could actually focus on the user needs and get something done quickly - the only way we could do that was to make sure when we delivered something and there was an MVP, that we could continue to improve it and we wouldn't walk away - it wasn't going to be one of these change-control types of situations they got into.

By the end of that process, by the end of delivering several of these, we wound up having a number of senior civil servants describing agile and scrum and (inaudible) and how they had much more transparency and control and confidence than they ever had when they were dealing with standard IT projects. Finally, we're talking about products, not projects. We're talking about things which are

evolving over time. A product has a beginning date and end date. A project, once it's done and has been delivered - any changes that are considered a change request and the venders are usually very happy with that, that it's not actually what the citizens or users need. I was going to talk about how we actually did this in administrative justice and bring it down to something pretty concrete. What I will say is here you have a picture of a fairly complex user service as an exemplar my team delivered. It was for civil claims in the UK - where you take somebody to court not to get money or property out of them, but because you feel they've done you wrong. Our task was to transform this.

You can see all kinds of entry and exit points, and user flows a. Lot of stuff. If you did a user transformation on that, I don't know how you'd start, end, or measure your progress along the way. We decided the way to do that was to split it up into a series of different, very small, bite-sized chunks and say, "Yes, this particular piece over here is where a user is having a problem. This particular thing over here, we know we can deliver within a short time frame, and we know we're solving a real need, and once we've done that we can do another." When we did civil claims, we popped off the first one, then the second one, then the third one, then the fourth one, and continued to go through that map to find out the highest pain points we could relieve. I'm being told I have to get off. I have exactly zero minutes. I'll just say, um, we are two months old, and we are keen to work with the community, and we are looking for people to join us and to help us and to give us advice on how we can best serve. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: Anybody got a question they want to ask? I thought there'd be a few! Um, Chris Dodds.

Chris Dodds: I find it interesting at a conference about affordability - I recognise the challenges your office has, digitalising government services, but not once was affordability mentioned. We're talking about 20% of the population or thereabouts - we can debate that - who actually can't afford to access at the same level, at least, as other citizens can. So my question is, what responsibility does your office have to that 20% of the population that are excluded because of cost of telecommunications?

Paul Shetler: I think that gets back to what I said earlier - we have a responsibility for designing a service such that it can be used across all channels. That can be face to face, telephony, or digital. Service design is not just digital service design. Service design is design of the whole service. The service has multiple channels. So my answer is we have to provide better services across all channels. And we have to know that even in a digital-by-default service, assisted digital is also a pathway into that. We did that in the UK. I did that with 20 services. It worked right.

Roland Manderson: Hi. Roland Manderson from Anglicare Australia. We're involved in lots of different-ha on government reforms. Aged care is one of the areas at the moment - there's a lot of stuff going on about the MyAgeCare website and call centre - there's a way into the services - you're supposed to integrate through various referrals and things like that. It's of course proving to be really difficult and slow and alienating some of the providers for some of the older people trying to engage with it. The idea is something quite simple, and one door into whatever's needed - are you a part of - do they work with you, do you work with them? How do we make these things actually work?

Paul Shetler: I can see from your perspective what you're aiming for, but there's this other big thing going on at the moment which could do with some expertise. That is the first I've heard of that. I've been here for a few weeks, and I've been drinking from the fire hose. I'd be keen to talk with you about that afterwards.

Wayne Hawkins: Hi. I'm Wayne Hawkins from ACCAN. It's really good to hear your plans with the agency. I was particularly interested in "This is for everyone" and the accessibility that you talked about. I'm just really interested to know how that's going to be embedded throughout the agency. With the universal and inclusive design, we've just gone through here in Australia the National Transition Strategy, which is a strategy to get all Federal Government websites WCAG level 2 AA-compliant by the end of last year. The final report, as far as I'm aware, hasn't come out from that. But what we do know from the first milestone was it was particularly difficult - and, one might say, unsuccessful - in getting federal websites accessible to the level of single A. It's very easy to say "We're going to make it accessible for everybody" but I'm really keen to understand how you're going to implement that across the agency so that everybody who works there has a full understanding of what accessibility means and how to make things accessible.

Paul Shetler: OK. I just put up this over here - I apologise for putting up yet another slide, but this has a url to the service standard. All government services are required to pass through the service standard going forward. So part of the remit of the DTO is the development and the enforcement of a digital service standard. That includes, definitely, an awful lot of inclusive guidance. I think about 16 - excuse me, 9 of the criteria refer explicitly to issues around accessibility. With the National Transition Strategy, all federal agencies were supposed to have accessible websites, but there was no compliance or enforcement with that strategy. If they didn't make their websites accessible, there was no...We're saying all services have to pass this. We have whole over-government responsibility for that. Now we'll actually see if that happens.

Wayne Hawkins: That's what I'm asking - if it doesn't happen, what happens?

Paul Shetler: Well, look, I guess we'll just have to see what happens, won't we?

(LAUGHTER)

Paul Shetler: I can understand all the frustration that people have been having when it comes to user-centred design in the very first place. I can certainly see that because when I came here, I had to go through a lot of the websites myself as an immigrant, and it's not terribly easy. But this is what our remit is, and this is what we're doing. New services that want to go live have to go through a service assessment, and they're assessed against 16 different criteria. This is something we've been spreading throughout the Australian Government, and we're talking about it here today as something to focus on going forward.

If you look at the UK, and the GDS there, it has had a hugely transformative effect on the quality of the digital experience for everybody in the UK. I would highly recommend you check that out. We are basically emulating that here. OK. Thanks. One more question. Over there in the back.

Ben McAtamney: Hi, Ben McAtamney from Able Australia. Following on with what Wayne was mentioning and the comments you made about imagining what a good user experience is - in the accessibility or disability field, what provision is there within the DTO to test these user experiences with people with varied access needs to get a true picture of what that optimum user experience actually looks like for somebody with a disability?

Paul Shetler: We have just brought in a new head of user experience inside the DTO. Her name is Leisa Reichelt. She came in from GDS, where she headed up user research for the British Government across all of its websites and on its entire digital estate. She will be coming in to do the exact same thing here with a very strong focus on user needs. She lives, breathes and eats them, and so do we. Again, I'm afraid I'm saying this right now, but judge us in 3-6 months and see what we've done, is all I can really say. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: Thank you very much, Paul. We've now got a morning tea break. It's sponsored by the National Relay Service, so thank you very much for the National Relay Service. Before you duck out, I don't know if any of you here who don't tweet would like to learn how to tweet and have your own device or laptop with you, but if you would like to find out how to do it, we've got our digital communications officer Jessie, who is going to show people at morning tea break if they'd like to learn. That's Jessie just down the front here. He'll be around here or around the back there just to gather 'round. It doesn't take very long, and it can be a lot of fun. Yes, we do have access to wi-fi, and there are signs on either side of the room with the password. Sorry about not mentioning that earlier.

Alright. We will see you back here in a little while.