

Mobile apps help government connect with citizens, enhance service delivery

 By [Lionel Moyal](#)

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Smart cities are fast becoming a reality across the globe, driven by the interconnectedness of devices that communicate and provide information that leads to intelligent automation, decision and actions. However, smart cities without smart, engaged and connected citizens will be unable to fulfil service delivery objectives.

The success of any smart city initiative relies on the participation of the people, and as a result citizen reporting has emerged as an integral component of the smart city. Utilising the growing mobility trend, citizen reporting harnesses the power of mobile apps to create intuitive, interactive and real-time platforms for citizens to provide information on, and for governments to track, report on and provide feedback around service delivery issues. This creates a win-win situation, engaging citizens and enabling governments to improve service delivery and efficiency.

The smart city sphere

The crux of the smart city is information, however governments cannot rely on information and data delivered by devices alone. Success in the smart city sphere requires the participation of the citizens. One of the major challenges in this regard has traditionally been the channels of communication available to the citizens. Call centres often create an unpleasant experience for the citizen, involving long waiting times, multiple redirects, dropped calls and endless frustration. The net result is that the process of reporting an issue is so cumbersome that citizens simply do not bother to report problems.

In addition, from the perspective of government, accountability and process reporting can be difficult, data is often inconsistent in formatting or missing key fields, and the ability to automate the prioritisation of issues and find correlations between problems is all but impossible. Furthermore, serious issues can cause an unplanned explosion of calls, overloading the call-centre, and the public is unable to track the status of their reported issues, resulting in repeated call backs to an already burdened contact centre.

The contact centre has become an out-dated mode of communication when it comes to smart cities and the delivery of effective, efficient services. In order to create engaged citizens, who are vital for a thriving and successful city, it is essential to provide easy, intuitive methods of issue reporting. Mobile apps are the ideal platform for delivering this service - smartphones have become increasingly affordable and ubiquitous, and mobile is fast becoming the standard way for many people to access technology.

In addition, because so many people have access to smartphones, and have them with them at all times, there is an immediacy to mobile solutions. With built in Internet, GPS, camera and accelerometer that can simplify high-quality data

capture, and the ability to report issues immediately, at the scene, with a wealth of additional information, the possibilities are practically limitless.

One highly successful example of the potential of citizen reporting is the recently launched 'Find & Fix' app that allows citizens to report problems such as potholes to the Johannesburg Road Agency (JRA). The app utilises geotagging to identify the location of the pothole, which initiates a series of processes that results in the pothole being repaired far more quickly than a call to the contact centre.

For citizens, reporting issues suddenly becomes easy, and takes just a few taps of the screen with no waiting time, as opposed to the often frustrating queues and inconvenience of a contact centre. This app has, over the past months since its launch, reduced the average time to resolve issues like potholes from up to a month to just two or three days, as all of the necessary information is captured as the issue is reported and immediately, automatically directed to the correct channels. In addition, the citizen can obtain a real-time view of the issue and the progress of repair or remedy.

The Find & Fix app is just one example of the potential of citizen reporting, and because the underlying technology for this platform has already been developed, rolling it out to other areas becomes feasible. From reporting problems with utilities, such as power failures, water issues including burst pipes to community protection, reporting of suspicious or illegal behaviour, licensing and registration to tourism and recreation, the possibilities are endless.

In addition, apps can create a platform for government to reach and communicate with citizens. As more and more of the population gains access to a smartphone, apps increasingly become the quickest and easiest way to connect with local residents when it comes to anything from crime alerts to voting reminders.

Improving service delivery requires the participation of all stakeholders. If government is unaware of issues, they cannot be remedied, but citizens often do not report issues because it is time consuming, frustrating and inconvenient. Apps can reduce the cost and improve the quality of service delivery, bridging the existing disconnect between citizens and government and creating engaged citizens who can become a valuable force for accelerating transformative social change.

ABOUT LIONEL MOYAL

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