

United Kingdom

A vision for modern services becomes real

Challenge

In 2010, the UK's newly-elected administration faced challenges after the 2007/8 global financial crisis. Incoming Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne prepared a significant cut to public spending. Separately, the UK's Digital Champion, Martha Lane Fox, reviewed the government's main website. What happened next illustrates how digital transformation can impact more than the way in which a website performs, as well as the elements that lie behind measurable public-sector improvements.

In 2010, the UK's Digital Champion, Martha Lane Fox, calls for "revolution not evolution" after reviewing the government's main website

Lane Fox to become UK's first digital champion



Martha Lane Fox. Photograph: Martin Godwin

The government has chosen one of the country's least-excluded individuals to lead its drive to get all Britons online. Dotcom pioneer Martha Lane Fox will next week take up a two-year assignment as "champion for digital inclusion".

In 2010, Martha Lane Fox was appointed UK Digital Champion by Prime Minister David Cameron

Lane Fox and her team had experience in private-sector, digital retail enterprise. Her published letter to the minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, at the end of the review called for more than a better website. She asked for "revolution not evolution" and identified the opportunity for government to use the internet to "communicate and interact better with citizens and to deliver significant efficiency savings from channel shift". Maude embraced the proposal and created a new executive director for the digital and information role and a ministerial working group reporting to the Cabinet Office to begin work on the vision.

Solution

In 2011 the team, soon known as the Government Digital Service (GDS) team, produced a minimum viable product of the website for a reported £261k in 12 weeks. By mid-2011, the team had grown to more than 100 roles. The range of skills also expanded to include user experience and content design specialists. The group had an open ethos and so it provided comprehensive updates about the project on a public blog. In July 2011, it created its first service with an [Agile](#) approach: the [petitions service](#). It considered security (the identity assurance project, later known as GOV.UK Verify) and capability. Procurement transformation (later known as GOV.UK Digital Marketplace) opened up government's ability to access the best technology. In one year, the UK had assembled the ingredients for digital transformation: a big vision with top-level support; a small starter team with digital skills and an open ethos; access to modern technology; data security; and a focus on service design that put the user first. As 2012 dawned, the beta version of GOV.UK was ready to launch.

Result

By the end of the first year (2013), GDS was able to announce that it had contributed [£500 million](#) savings as part of the UK government's [£10bn](#) reported efficiencies. Procurement of IT through G-Cloud (Digital Marketplace) was [£53 million in one year](#). GOV.UK has had more than [half a billion unique visits](#). The concept of [government as a platform](#) that can deliver better services for less was established.

The achievements behind the headline numbers were:

- 1 A government-wide network of digital leaders to embed the transformation mission
- 2 Fine-tuned design principles
- 3 The first chief technology officer had delivered spend controls to support radical reform of IT governance
- 4 All 24 government departments and services such as revenue collection were on GOV.UK
- 5 The Exemplar programme to improve 25 services including welfare payments and student loans and admissions was underway
- 6 The UK had begun exporting its products, with [New Zealand's government](#) being an early adopter

Digital transformation had become a continuous movement. Each of the measures above had grown (savings, procurement of SME technology and services, government services on GOV.UK and GDS itself). The UK took an open source approach to share its innovations and other governments, from New Zealand to Canada via Estonia and Singapore, rapidly implemented solutions that took months or even years to deliver fully in the UK.

Acknowledgement: [A GDS Story](#)

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