

# Building a one-stop shop for government services in Australia

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Service New South Wales, a website for citizen services, was built like a start-up within the government, in a rapid, iterative process sharply focused on customer satisfaction.

**Citizens' expectations of governments are rising**, as they increasingly compare government services to customer-obsessed, digital-first services offered by the private sector. To meet these expectations, governments must go well beyond digitizing the services they offer and also put experience at the center of their missions. Service New South Wales is one example of a government agency that aimed to simplify citizen access to government services, with a shift to digital transactions and a one-stop-shop approach to improve customer experience.

In this interview, Rachna Gandhi, former CEO of Service New South Wales, talks about the process of building the agency like a start-up. The rapid, iterative process stressed going to market in six months and focused on making sure frontline employees and customers were central to the change taking place. The agency achieved a radical turnaround in customer-satisfaction rates, going from a baseline of under 60 percent to a sustained average of over 97 percent in the five years since its 2013 launch.

## Interview transcript

**McKinsey:** *This idea had been tried before and had failed. What made this case different?*

**Rachna Gandhi:** It was a start-up in government, brought together by the then premier, to bring to life a one-stop shop for government services. The idea had actually been tried twice before and failed. There was a lot of emphasis, this time around, on bringing in the people who could start to think about this differently than it had been before. So we had some really strong commitments in place, in terms of when we had to go live, what we had to have built, and by when.

## Rachna Gandhi biography

Rachna Gandhi is the former CEO of Service New South Wales, a website for citizen services in the Australian state. She was also a 2017 Public Sector and Academia Award finalist for the Telstra Business Women's Awards. Gandhi was in the private sector for her entire career before she started Service New South Wales in early 2013. She holds a PhD in behavioral sciences from Deakin University. She is currently serving as executive general manager of customer and digital at Suncorp.

One of the catalysts of getting us off to a good start was talent. We had a discussion very early on about how, yes, it had been tried twice before and failed. We had to get it up and running, and we had six months to go live.

We were very clear up front about the people we wanted to bring in to work in Service New South Wales. There were a few of us who had come from the private sector to run this start-up. We also had a few people from the public sector. That mix was really important, because we were trying to make sure that we brought the energy and the learnings from the private sector into the public sector but also leveraged what the public-sector subject-matter experts knew about the industry we were in and the kind of challenges we were going to face. We went to really great lengths of being very clear on talent—and that we were not going to compromise on it. And we made a very bold decision that no one would be hired based on tenure or skill set. We were only going to hire for talent and for behavior and attitude.

The other piece that was fundamental, I think, is that we spent quite a bit of time articulating our 'DNA,' as we called it. Which really was, what was our purpose? What were we going to stand for? And how could we, in a very, very compelling way, articulate this to our people? It had to be something that everyone in the organization would know, would buy into. Where this really came from was a realization that to pull something like this off, we needed to treat it a little bit like a movement and less like a transformation.

We wanted to create that feeling of unhappiness with the status quo that everyone felt energized to want to change. And then we wanted to put the power to change it into the hands of everyone who was working at Service New South Wales.

We didn't compromise on being very, very outcome oriented. While we were working on the culture, we were also investing in people. Really, really investing in that great sense of purpose of why we were here. We were very cutthroat on delivery. We just did not compromise on that. And we put in simple disciplines over time, probably not from month one, but over a time of six-week iterations. We had to have something to take out in six weeks, and then we could iterate. Language that everyone, from people in the front line to subject-matter experts doing complex stuff in technology, could understand.

**McKinsey:** *How did you measure the success of the program? What helped you achieve those goals?*

**Rachna Gandhi:** Of what I looked at as the biggest achievements at Service New South Wales, one was probably the satisfaction score we achieved with our customers. When we first opened, we were at 98 percent, but we sustained that at 97 percent by the time I'd left, which was five years into operations.

Staying at 97 percent satisfaction was something we frankly didn't expect would occur over a five-year period. We're talking about moving from around 3,000 transactions a week when we started to over a million interactions a week when I'd left. So that's massive scaling up of the organization. At some point, we didn't expect the satisfaction score to go back down to the levels before of 60 percent. But our target was 90-plus. I think what really helped came down to a couple of things in our DNA. One is, we subscribed to the service-profit chain, in terms of sensibility at Service New South Wales, where happy employees, to put it simply, make for happy customers.

The other thing I would say is, we were very accountable as an organization, and we really celebrated our successes. And this wasn't just talking about what good looks like. The importance of celebrating successes, in my view, is that you showcase people who are doing good things. And that creates a culture of not only celebrating those individuals but also trying to emulate those behaviors or those delivery patterns.

We were very bifocal in our thinking. Service New South Wales would never have got up if we had taken the approach of "let's get everything right" or "let's get the customer experience to be so radical and all the back-end systems to be perfect." It would have been two-and-a-half years before we opened doors. And we were very, very committed to that six-month deadline to go live. We were very deliberate in making sure that we were looking at near and far.

We iterated that prototype at least three or four times. But we had no project manager involved in that piece of work. No formal trainer involved. It was completely front line led. But why that was critical is because it wasn't something happening to them. We weren't going out to our front line and saying that we really want to drive digital adoption, and they weren't feeling a threat, wondering, "Does this mean we have no jobs?" We went and said, "Customers want more digital; we've got to train them on this. How will we go about it?" And, "This was one of the ideas. And why don't you lead it? And you control it. And you shape and form it."

Even though the transactions they were doing might have been exactly the same that they had done for 15 years, I think the mental shift that process caused was phenomenal. Because you had 70 percent of our employees being exactly the people who were delivering the experience inside those glass partitions and not getting anywhere close to the 97 percent satisfaction we had. But that process of rethinking about what we were signing up for changed the mind-set. Also, how you know the culture is working is, when we got the recruitment wrong, it really showed. The person would stick out like a sore thumb. □

**Rachna Gandhi** is the former CEO of Service New South Wales.