## Part 1: Government e-Services – More than just ICTs

Launched in 2007, **ttconnect** is the name given to the multi-channel government service delivery structure of the Trinidad and Tobago government which has as its motto, "*Government at your Service*". At its inception, **ttconnect** was intended to be the "common counter" initiative of the Government – the single face of Government to the citizen. The initiative was developed with a number of objectives including:

- To deliver services to the citizens in an efficient, transparent and accountable manner;
- To facilitate electronic transactions in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; and
- To avoid fragmentation or duplication of government services as they become available electronically and to build the co-operative "back office" arrangements that are necessary to provide "Connected Government", and present a "One Government" service to citizens.

The **ttconnect** channels include:

- **ttconnect online** – ([www.ttconnect.gov.tt](www.ttconnect.gov.tt) ) reputedly gives on-line access to information on over four hundred (400) Government services and is the official website of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.
- **ttconnect self-serve** - five (5) Self-Serve Kiosks,  similar to ATM machines, inclusive of an application drop box
- **ttconnect Express –** A Bus service which travels to rural areas retails offerings from different Ministries
- **ttconnect service centres** – physical centres where citizens access over-the-counter service and in-person attention
- **ttconnect Mobile** – the mobile rendered version of the **ttconnect** online portal
- **ttconnect hotline** was also launched through which the public was provided with a single number - (800) TTCN (8826)

While ttconnect has the potential to revolutionize the way in which Government services and information are delivered to all of Trinidad and Tobago, a deeper analysis of the initiative which has been in operation now for

some 13 years reveals some of the key issues and challenges which militate against the initiative attaining its full potential.

## Need for "True" e-Services

The term "e-Services" is generally used to describe the provision of services via the Internet. Indeed the term Government e-Services usually conjures up the image of fast, on-line processing of submitted requests, wherein the back-end service processing is automated and seamlessly routes the required information across Ministries or Government Agencies as needed, to give the user a semi-immediate and transparent experience.

Such Service initiatives are normally touted to enable the separation of the citizen-user from the poor customer service or bureaucratic manual procedures that have been traditionally associated with Government operations. Finally, many government e-services, though not considered commercial services, do contain a payment component.

## About this Series

*This is **Part 1** of a <u>five-part</u> series in which we investigate the national e-services infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically **ttconnect**, to draw out the pros and cons, successes, and areas for greater attention.*

*Future editions in the series will dive deeper into the analysis, and draw out conclusions and recommendations relevant for any emerging economy-state seeking to build-out a national /citizen e-services framework.*

Using this standard, the vast majority of the Services which are offered via ttconnect do not qualify as full e-services. This is because there is:

- No common backend databases or datasets [e.g. population registry, or land registry] which citizen requests are queried against
- No Automated back-end processing of requests [in many cases the on-line generated requests are entered into the traditional manual queue after submission. This is known as 'e-pretend' services]
- Inter-Ministry collaboration and request routing at the data and services level does not exist
- Work-flows are not optimized or configured specifically for the on-line / internet channel

*It should be noted that there is a related system managed by the Ministry of Trade [called TTBizLink], which leverages the ttconnect ID for authentication. Within this system [which can be accessed via ttconnect], some services do qualify as e-services as per the definition / context above.*

Based on the information available it would seem that true end–to-end <u>e-services</u>, where the citizen can go all the way through the process and receive a [real-time] e-notification of approval or denial of a benefit, based on set criteria are very limited. In many cases the citizen must still follow up by visiting the respective Ministry with regard to the Government benefit which was applied for on-line or on the **ttconnect** Express Bus. This is a key area in which ttconnect is underperforming its potential.

### Need for Improved Payment Arrangements

Even though the technical ability to send and receive payments on-line has been implemented in recent years, ***ttconnect*** is constrained regarding the new services that it can on-board due to inadequate legislation and institutional arrangements, which renders ***ttconnect*** unable to receive monies on behalf of Government Ministries and agencies as a default matter.

Many popularly demanded services, for example payment (beyond filing) of taxes, cannot be currently facilitated through the ***ttconnect*** infrastructure. This is likely a key contributor to the reported decline in demand for the Government services offered through ***ttconnect's*** channels over time (the uptick in enquiries during the recent months of the pandemic notwithstanding).

## Inter-Ministry Collaboration

While the ttconnect Portal (www.ttconnect.gov.tt) is reputed to have information on over four hundred (400) different Government services, only about 46 services are available through the ttconnect Service Centres and Express.

***ttconnect*** can only offer services based on collaborative MOUs which it signs with the Ministries from which the Service originates. However there is no ***mandate*** for collaboration.

Unwillingness on the part of certain Ministries / Agencies to leverage the ***ttconnect*** multiple channel infrastructure continues to undermine the effectiveness of this venture - which was intended to be the single face of Government to the citizen.

Further, due to its status as a State Enterprise, the CEO / Board of iGovTT has no compelling authority over Ministries to ensure that they put the relevant measures to support this "one government" approach to the delivery of citizen services.

### About the Author

*Atiba Phillips is a seasoned ICT for Development practitioner with over 20 years' experience. He has led national ICT efforts and advised several Governments, IDAs and Regional bodies on issues relating to technology and development. More of his work can be found at* http://ict.co.tt/perspectives/. *He can be contacted at* atibaphillips@ict.co.tt ; http://ict.co.tt

## Lessons to be Learnt

***ttconnect*** has been one of Government's umbrella initiatives for facilitating citizen access to public services in a way that is significantly more convenient than what has traditionally obtained. The successes and limitations of this venture should be well studied as the new Government signals its intention to push once again a national digital transformation agenda.