MeriTalk
Improving the Outcomes of Government IT

maximus

Digital Modernization for Federal Agencies Combines Automation, Total Experience

As Federal agencies work through their digital modernization roadmaps, officials are embracing a user-centric approach to building IT infrastructures that will dramatically improve the total experience with government – for citizens and employees alike. MeriTalk recently sat down with Joe Jeter, senior vice president for Federal technology at Maximus, to discuss how agencies are utilizing automation and emerging technologies to transform service delivery and improve efficiencies.

MeriTalk: The largest share of IT budgets in government go to operations and maintenance – that means continued reliance on legacy systems. Yet across the Federal government, agencies are seeing an increasing demand for modern service delivery – faster, more convenient, and more efficient, which usually requires modern technologies. Federal strategy is driving digital modernization forward, but the budget dollars don't always follow – how are modernization roadmaps changing? Where can agencies make incremental improvements?

Jeter: Yes, that's correct – 80 percent of Federal budgets go to operations and maintenance versus modernization. The good news is that agencies can modernize incrementally in ways that create budget efficiencies and ease the transition from legacy systems.

I recommend that agencies focus on their data architecture first. A good place to start is to look at how data is being generated and find effective ways to create data lakes. Those data lakes will drive the reporting infrastructure and the integration of emerging technologies – artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and robotics process automation. In the process, the agency may create an effective transition off legacy technology.

MeriTalk: Gartner estimates that 75 percent of governments will have at least three enterprise-wide hyper-automation initiatives launched or underway by 2024. This involves using multiple tools – AI, RPA, and low-code/no-code software to automate as many business and IT processes as possible. Where are Federal agencies doing hyper-automation successfully today?

Jeter: Hyper-automation is a key pivot point in transforming a legacy system into a new architecture. Many agencies are utilizing some type of low-code automation today, or they're starting down that path. In addition, more software factories are using rapid development methodologies and agile principles to speed up the shift from legacy architecture to modern application delivery methods.

As Federal agencies continue to implement hyper-automation, it's essential to engage subject matter experts who understand the business process, including what end users need and how they work, and give them the power to shape the application. Leveraging subject matter knowledge will create a better, more seamless, and compliant experience for employees and citizens.

MeriTalk: What advice can you offer agencies that are working to identify opportunities for automation?

Jeter: Consider the future of work as it relates to your agency, how you want citizens to interact with the agency, and your desired outcomes.

> It starts with human-centered design. When you start with the broad picture, it becomes easier to narrow it down to the applications or application sets.

This is the roadmap on which you can apply hyper-automation to drive better outcomes, increase satisfaction, and achieve greater impact.

MeriTalk: Emerging technology, fundamentally, is about tying things together. For example: collecting cyber data in a data lake, applying AI to analyze it, and connecting that analysis to cybersecurity decision making. Do you see some parallels with total experience – the combination of user experience, customer experience, and employee experience in one holistic approach to service design and delivery?

Jeter: Definitely, I see many parallels. Total experience is the modern way to think about systems, processes, and outcomes. Take the creation of the iPhone. It came out of a vision of customer experience, and now it is commonplace. We have connected with this vision across the world: understanding the use of apps and the user interface and aligning them in a total experience.

> It's thinking about the outcome first, then how you want the user to experience that outcome, and finally, how to drive productivity around that desired outcome.

MeriTalk: Emerging technologies generate a lot of data. That data can help government better understand the needs of employees and citizens and create even better experiences. How does data management and technology infrastructure need to evolve to take advantage of this data?

Jeter: How we view data is evolving rapidly. We have new tools that allow us to take advantage of many different data structures. These tools have matured, and we can now create data lakes, enabling us to combine data in new ways to deliver innovative outcomes. On top of that, there is a whole new set of tools to interact with the data, and those tools are evolving very rapidly. All of this raises the important question: How do I keep my data set clean, traceable, and secure?

MeriTalk: Maximus has worked with governments for more than 40 years. How does this experience influence its work with Federal agencies as they pursue digital modernization and an improved total experience today?

Jeter: We work with government in its most sensitive areas – the areas where citizens interact with the government. We have built a tremendous knowledge base alongside a portfolio of tools and best practices, and we leverage that knowledge to improve the total experience.

> We understand the collection of experiences around the customer and the employee, and how those experiences come together to deliver better outcomes.

We know how to rapidly deploy new capabilities on behalf of the government to address a critical need – and how to do it securely. We apply our expertise and experience to automate solutions using emerging technologies, including AI, ML, and chatbots. Our team of subject matter experts understands the security and data management tools that are required to reduce modernization costs and risks, drive effective outcomes, and support our Federal customers as they build the future of government services.