# How document digitization, process automation can help rebuild trust in government

**Michael "MJ" Jackson**
Vice President and Global Head of Industries, DocuSign

Seamless experiences delivered across the private sector — particularly through e-commerce and social media — have conditioned the service expectations of constituents and government employees as well.

Federal agencies are taking note and have started making significant strides toward digital transformation, driven in no small part by recent directives, including the president's executive order on customer experience. While competitive pressures often motivate private sector enterprises to invest in innovation, the government's greatest competition is usually the status quo. Agencies have been delivering services in the same way for so long that impacting change requires redirecting institutional inertia — to say nothing of overcoming budgetary obstacles.

One way for agencies to get started on this journey is to begin digitizing agreements.

"It's a pretty well circulated statistic that upward of 75% of all processes across government begin with some sort of a form or an agreement," said Michael "MJ" Jackson, vice president and global head of industries at DocuSign. "And in many cases, unfortunately, those forms are still paper-based. To process them, applicants are still faxing or scanning and emailing attachments, and then they have to print them out, sign them and scan them again. So, oftentimes, the lowest hanging fruit is digitizing what we call non-negotiated forms."

## Tackle non-negotiated forms first

Non-negotiated forms are agreements that are filled out, submitted and then either approved or denied. The form is standardized, and the content is not edited. That's in contrast to processing negotiated agreements, like contracts, which involve negotiating back and forth, redlining and editing items, before the parties ratify the content.

Both types of agreements can be digitized, but non-negotiated forms set the stage for automating processes and streamlining workflows downstream as well.

And digitizing isn't as simple as scanning a paper form. Although a scanned form technically becomes a digital document, factors like version or access control still must be addressed. Instead, agencies need to digitize the content and the

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signature, and enhance related completion and submission processes with guided questions and prepopulated fields whenever possible, Jackson said.

That way, constituents and employees only need to validate their documents' contents, and processes downstream can be easily automated further.

"One of the biggest components of that is extracting and integrating data from existing systems, allowing customers to leverage investments that they've already made and minimizing the need for manual data entry," Jackson said. "Because typically when there is a redundant manual process injected into the workflow, errors accumulate and cause costly delays within the workflow as well."

## Digitize and automate workflow

DocuSign has already helped a number of federal agencies accomplish this. For example, it recently launched a pilot with one of the administration's designated high impact service providers to streamline the application process for debt relief eligibility.

DocuSign helped another HISP, which supports more than 19,000 beneficiaries with compensation and medical benefit payments, by digitizing and integrating basic forms to accept electronic signatures and to be submitted from within the agency's web portal.

"By transforming the front-end process, we made it easy for claimants to submit their applications and reduce processing delays that were previously exacerbated by mailing in those paper applications," Jackson said. "By rolling out an electronic signature, the agency can now confirm the identity of the claimant and ensure the services are delivered to the appropriate beneficiaries."

And then there's the Health Resources and Services Administration in the Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, HRSA had received an authority to operate DocuSign's services to automate and simplify its human resources onboarding processes.

Then Congress, through the CARES Act and other legislation, directed HRSA to distribute funding for hospitals and healthcare providers to assist with their pandemic response and to help cover lost revenue attributable to the outbreak.

HRSA typically takes 90 to 120 days to distribute grants, but through modernized processes and technology, they reduced that time to as little as five days. That saved the agency thousands of hours thereby accelerating its ability to deliver critical assistance nationwide.

## Consider cost of maintaining the status quo

Jackson said the first thing agencies who want to pursue document digitization and process automation need to do is quantify the cost of doing nothing. That's the quickest way to secure buy-in at the executive level, he said. The improved outcomes will ultimately help begin to rebuild trust in federal agencies. Customers and employees alike notice the tangible results of seamlessly optimized processes, Jackson added.

Digitization also makes forms more easily accessible to more people. Constituents may not be able to physically make it to an office to apply for services. In many cases, smartphones may be their only means to determine eligibility and apply for critical services. Mobile experiences that are optimized for accessibility are the quickest way to increase reach and, thereby, engagement.

Next, agencies can begin to objectively measure the effectiveness of their efforts.

"Agencies need to understand almost in real time whether or not they're on track to create the value and deliver the return on investment that they intended when they first embarked on this journey," Jackson said. "When you're able to diagnose and troubleshoot your process, it helps enable accountability through an unprecedented level of transparency. That's how agencies can really address the trust issue."

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