

# 2017

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## **PUBLIC SECTOR**

### Digital Communications Trends Report



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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- 1 **INTRODUCTION**
- 2 **METHODOLOGY**
- 3 **GOALS AND PRIORITIES**
- 4 **DIGITAL TACTICS**
- 5 **CHALLENGES**
- 6 **OPPORTUNITIES**



# INTRODUCTION

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*Every year, digital communications in the public sector evolves with new strategies to help government better connect with citizens.*

Today's government organizations have access to more digital tools than ever before, and it's important to monitor how they're being used to help inform the upcoming year's strategies. From video streaming at town hall meetings to text messaging surveys, we set out to capture the latest trends in digital communications in government and what to expect in 2017.

In 2016, the public sector became increasingly strategic in how it was connecting with citizens. With the No.

1 priority being to improve the citizen experience, government organizations set out to understand the citizen journey, better align digital strategies, reach more citizens and measure citizen satisfaction.

While the upcoming year can expect this same strategic approach to digital communications, we set out to answer a specific question in this year's trends report: What will successful digital communications look like for the public sector in 2017?



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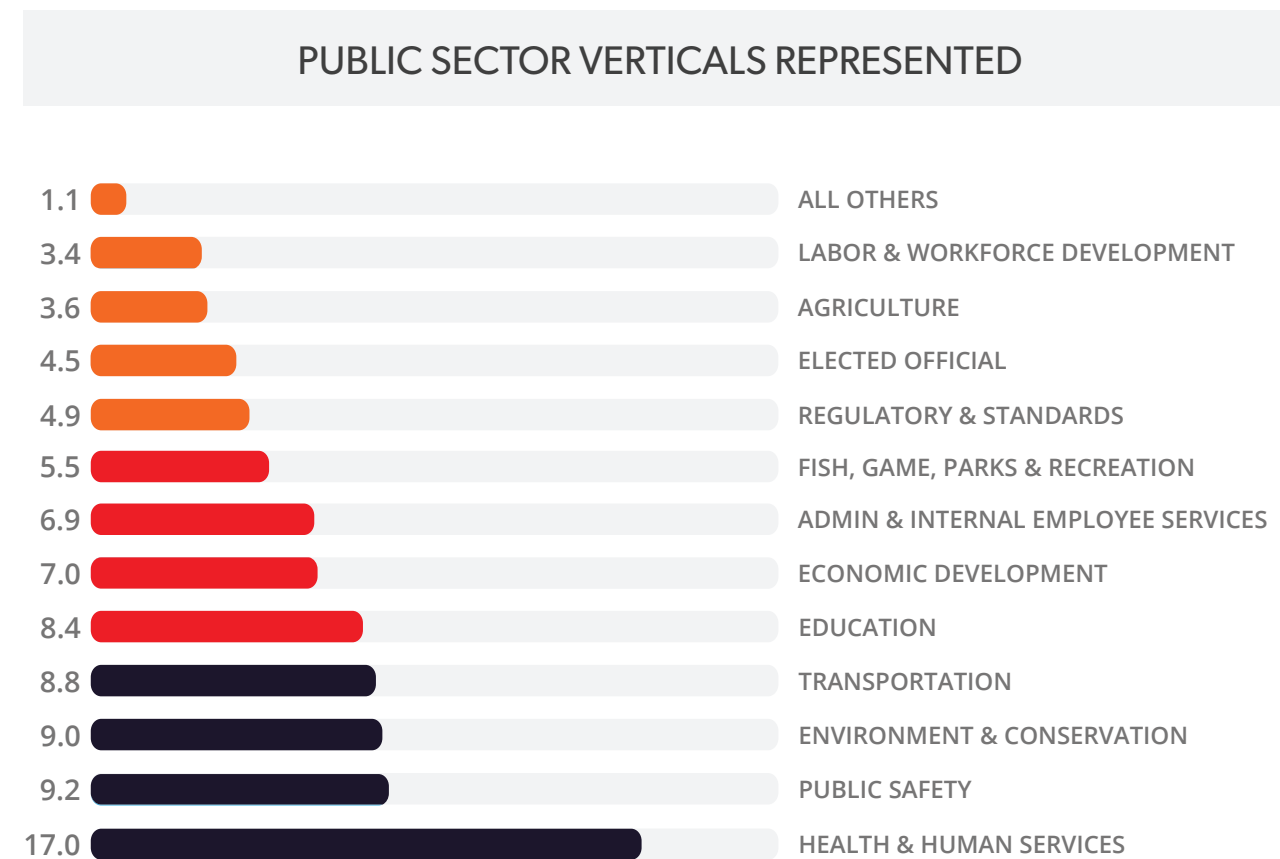


# METHODOLOGY

In order to answer this question, we gathered data from over 1,200 government employees in our recent survey.

Of the respondents in the U.S., 19 percent identified as working in the federal government, 37 percent in state government and 32 percent in local government; 11.5 percent identified as "other."

The 1,200 communicators who responded were from many different verticals. See the chart below for the breakdown.



## TOP INSIGHTS



### Government communicators are content marketers.

Over 50 percent of responses indicated that the No. 1 digital communications priority for the public sector in 2017 will be to increase engagement with content.



### Open data is mostly used to promote transparency, but there is still some uncertainty.

While 55 percent of respondents identified that open data is most effective when it's used to externally promote transparency, 26 percent said they didn't know.



### Web, email and social are the priorities for 2017.

Responses indicated that governments are connecting externally with information on their websites (93 percent), and via email (80 percent) and social media (79 percent), and plan for continued focus on those channels in 2017.



### Government still believes it's behind the private sector in adapting to the changing needs of citizens.

One-third of survey respondents said they believe the private sector is doing well at adapting, whereas half of survey respondents said they believe the public sector is doing below average.



### Facebook and Twitter reign as the most used forms of social media.

Over 80 percent of responses indicated that they use Facebook and Twitter as primary social media platforms.



### By far, a lack of resources or staff continues to be the greatest outreach challenge facing the public sector.

Nearly 40 percent of respondents said their greatest challenge for the upcoming year is lack of resources or staff.



### Most organizations intake citizen feedback with phone calls.

Respondents identified phone calls as the No. 1 way they intake feedback from citizens.



### Success in 2017 will be measured by digital engagement metrics.

Forty percent of respondents said they will track the success of their communications by measuring metrics.



# GOALS AND PRIORITIES

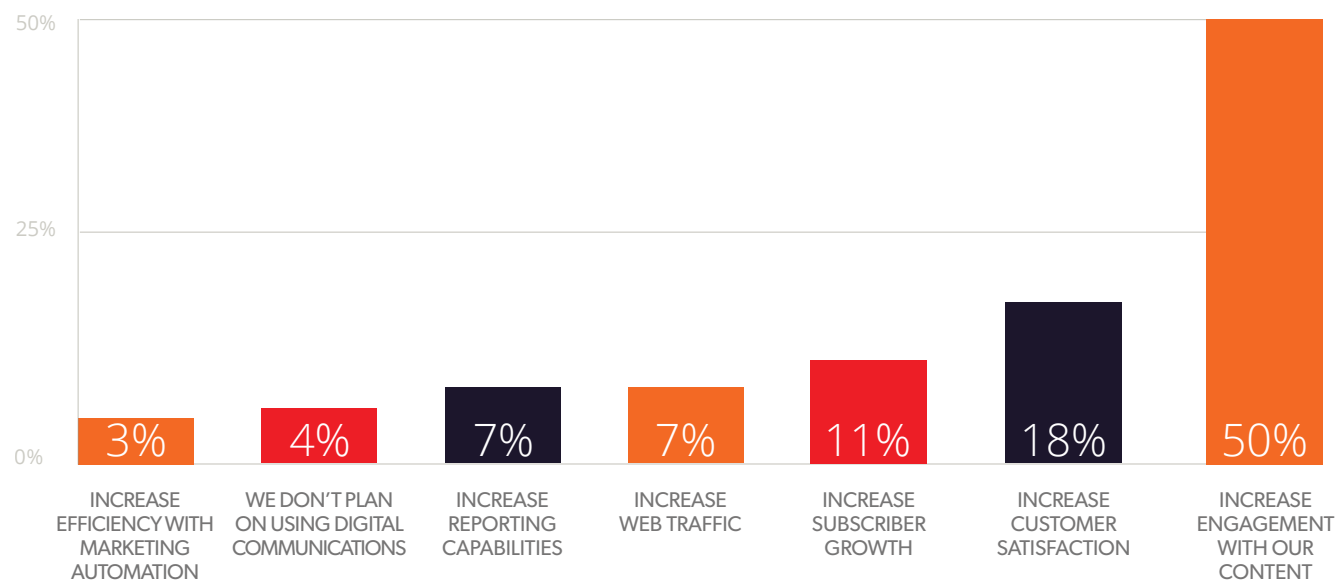
## FOR PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATIONS

*In order to set a benchmark where the public sector is focusing in 2017, we asked the following question: What is your primary digital communications goal in 2017?*

Nearly half of respondents said that their primary goal for 2017 is to increase engagement with their content, indicating that public sector

communicators are going to be primarily driven by content marketing in the coming year.

### GOALS AND PRIORITIES OVERVIEW



## TIPS FOR INCREASING ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR CONTENT

### 01 Increase the Reach of Your Audience

How many people are currently listening to your message? Whether you measure subscribers, event participants, website traffic or social media impressions, it's important to identify where your benchmark is in terms of your audience. Then, grow your lists to expand your reach. Here are 10 easy steps to increase your subscriber base in our latest [checklist](#).

### 02 Use Strong Calls to Action

The best way to increase engagement with your content is to use strong calls to action. Compare the impact of a hyperlink labeled "Click here to learn more" to "Protect your family with these toy safety tips." Try [A/B testing](#) to see what has the greatest impact, and continue building on what works.

### 03 Try Different Communications Channels

While 80 percent or more of organizations identified sharing information externally on their website, via email and on social media, only 23 percent of organizations identified text messaging as a platform they use and even fewer (21 percent of organizations) identified a blog as a platform they use to connect with citizens. For organizations missing key audience members in their current reach, it is important to explore different channels. See the recent [Text Messaging Quick Start](#) for more information.





## TIPS FOR INCREASING SATISFACTION WITH CUSTOMERS

### 01 Use Plain Language

In the public sector, we are charged with providing clear information, updates and directions to our constituents—they make up our roadmaps for navigating our programs and services. And when our citizens get muddled information or poor directions due to unclear language, their satisfaction as a customer is likely to be lower. Download the [Plain Language Playbook](#) to make sure your audience understands your message the first time.

### 02 Provide Options for Connecting

In a digital world, there are countless ways to connect. But what works best for your audience? Just having a phone number for people to call may not be enough.

### 03 Listen

Having multiple ways to intake feedback is an important component to the citizen experience. Ask for feedback, then really listen to what you're hearing from citizens. Let them know they are being heard, and what action steps you are taking to help improve their experience.



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## TIPS FOR INCREASING SUBSCRIBER GROWTH

### 01 Implement a Website Overlay

Overlays are highly effective. According to the recent [Benchmark Report: Improving the Metrics That Matter](#), overlays increased subscribers by a median rate of 174 percent for GovDelivery users who implemented them.

### 02 Take Better Advantage of Our Network

Part of the cross-promotion functionality on the [Granicus Network](#) is the ability to highlight a small group of topics or featured content. If you're always highlighting the same 4-5 topics (likely your newsletter and press release topics), it's time to start rotating topics in and out of those coveted spots.

### 03 Re-Engage With Sleepy Customers

Subscriber engagement can decrease for a variety of reasons: email frequency, relevance of email content or even a time factor on the receivers' end. Re-engage these subscribers with a "we miss you" message, offer up new topics for them to subscribe to or consider automating with a re-engagement campaign using the [Advanced Package for Communications Cloud](#).

## TOP BULLETIN TAGS OF 2016

In 2016, public sector organizations sent 1 billion messages per month with the Granicus Communications Cloud. The top bulletin tags represent the most popular topics in the past year.

 TAILOR-MADE SUPPORT	 HOUSEHOLD WASTE	 UPLOADING AND DOWNLOADING
 FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT	 EDUCATION YEARS	 INTERMITTENT LANE CLOSURE
 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS	 WINTER STORM WARNING	 MOBILE PHONE

# DIGITAL TACTICS

## FOR PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATIONS

*For public sector organizations, websites are the primary communications medium for connecting with the public.*

With 93 percent of organizations identifying their website as a current platform they use to communicate externally, it was also the highest prioritized channel among respondents for 2017.

When asked which digital communication tactic organizations are prioritizing in 2017, 80 percent identified their website.

Social media was in second place for

prioritization in 2017 with 66 percent, and email communication came in third with 55 percent. Less than 20 percent of respondents identified all other digital channels, including their blog, online learning platforms, text messaging or online learning.

Within social media, Facebook (85 percent) and Twitter (71 percent) are the top two prioritized platforms in the coming year. Instagram came in a

### FEEDBACK AND INPUT OVERVIEW



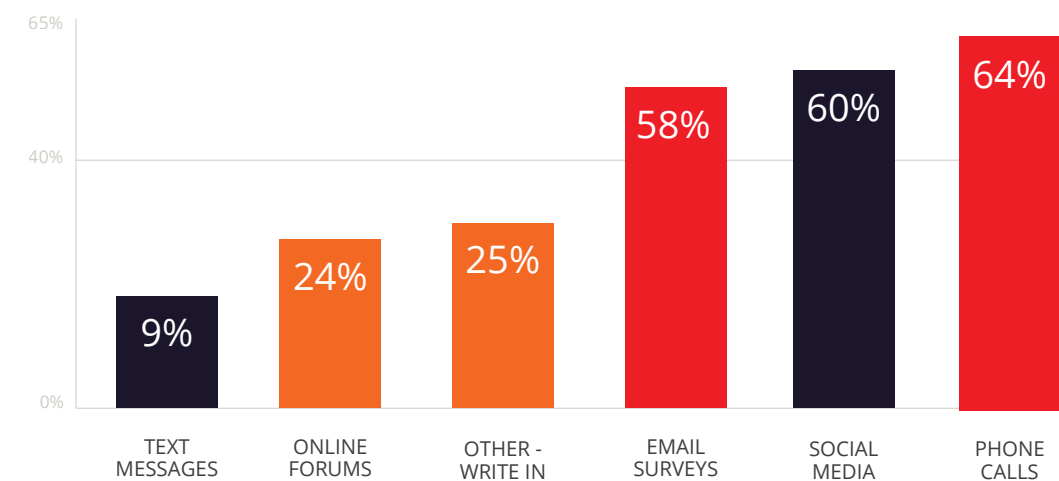
distant third at 26 percent and LinkedIn at 21 percent.

When asked about ways that public sector organizations offer to provide feedback or input from citizens, phone calls was the top answer with 64 percent. Social media and email surveys came in closely behind phone calls, see Feedback and Input Overview Chart on Page 14.

### PHONE CALLS

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### TOP TACTICS FOR INTAKING FEEDBACK







## OPEN DATA

When asked when open data is most effectively used – for internal or external purposes – a majority of respondents said that open data is most effective when it’s published for external purposes to promote transparency and citizen access to information. While this

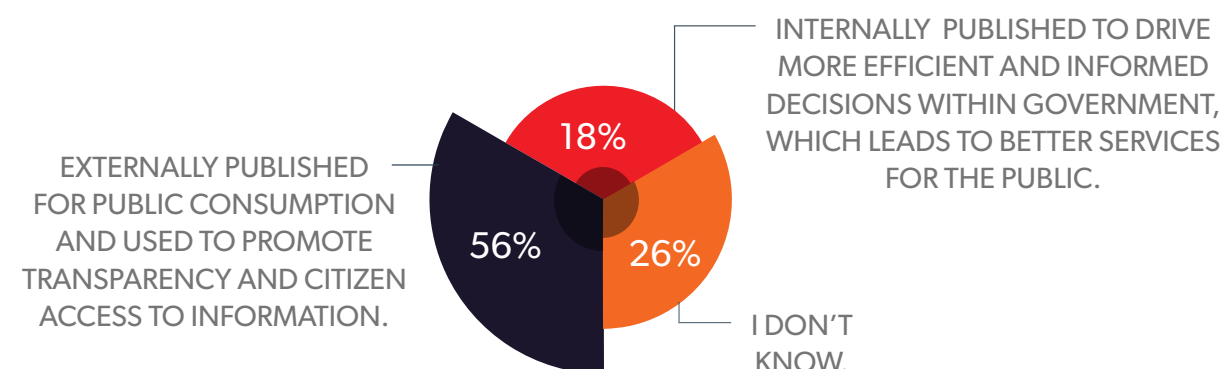
was the clear choice of survey takers over open data being used for internal purposes to drive more efficient and informed decisions by government, there was also a significant portion of survey takers who said they didn’t know (26 percent).

## EMAIL

In a digital world, there is one digital channel that has stood the test of time: email. In the public sector, we use external promotion to drive outcomes like increasing grant applications, intaking feedback or addressing

children’s literacy – and email continues to be a strong ally in those endeavors. For top tips on maximizing the power of your emails and increasing citizen engagement, see Page 18.

### OPEN DATA OVERVIEW



Email marketing continues to have the highest ROI of any digital platform, with every \$1 spent on email marketing generating \$38 in return.

source: campaignmonitor.com





# TIPS TO MAXIMIZE THE POWER OF YOUR EMAILS

## 01 Define Your Audience

For many public sector organizations, the goal is to speak to as many people as possible – especially in high-profile and important situations. But you also need the ability to target specific sections of your audience with messages that are relevant to them. Segment your audience to drive specific actions, and begin by focusing on the interests or needs of who you are trying to reach.

## 02 Leverage Compelling Content

The average person’s attention span is less than 10 seconds – so you have to really make it count. Get the basics down – clean formatting, no typos and clear calls to action. You can even automate valuable content your organization is already creating for your website, to add benefit to your community.

## 03 Reach Your Audience


With historical deliverability rates of 99 percent, public sector-focused digital outreach tools only send on behalf of government, meaning your email will be seen by more people.

## 04 Drive Human Action

Once citizens receive your message, they can engage with your content and take action in a way that matches your organization’s mission. Make it easy with call to action buttons, or bring your main message up to the top of your email.

## 05 Learn From Analytics

Learning from what works and what doesn’t is invaluable data, and it can help drive notable increases in engagement with your message content. It’s also important to look at how your communications are impacting other analytics, like website traffic, customer service metrics and more.

 **LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION?**  
Check out the latest guide [12 Awesome Examples of Public Sector Emails](#) that highlights real emails that work by category.



# CHALLENGES

## FOR PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATIONS

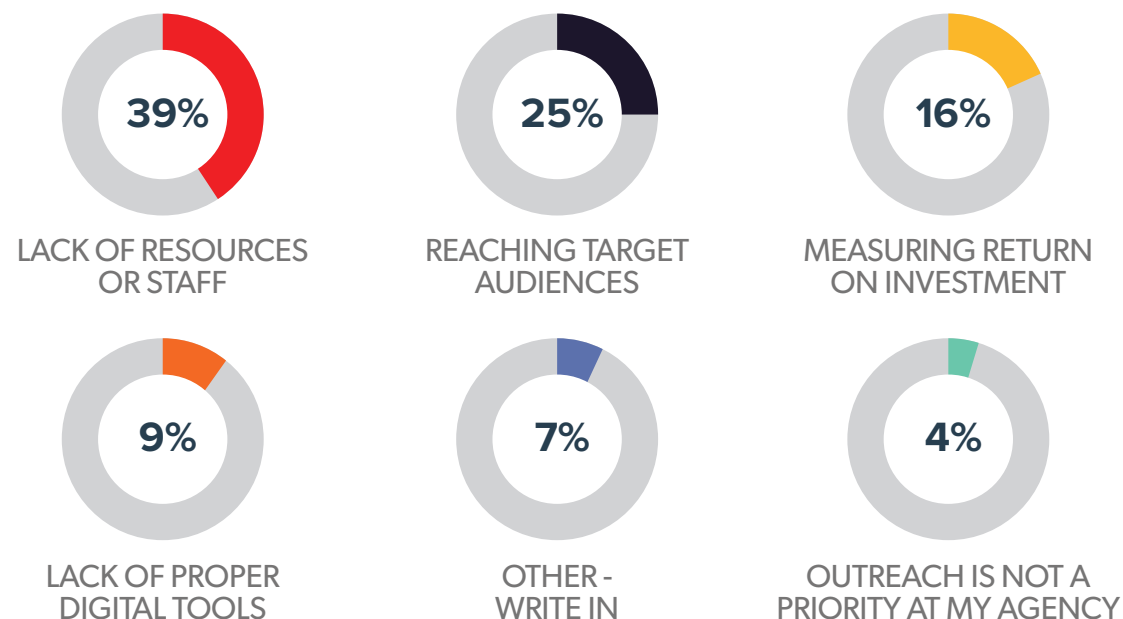
When asked about the greatest challenges ahead, a majority of organizations identified lack of resources or staff as the top outreach challenge for 2017.

With nearly 40 percent of respondents identifying lack of resources or staff, this trend is in line with last year's top response as well. Limited resources are constantly top of mind for public sector workers, and it likely won't be a trend we see completely diminish anytime soon.

Notably, the second highest response was "reaching target audiences,"

which was identified by 25 percent of respondents. It is crucial that we reach our audiences in the public sector, as the role of government is to connect with as many citizens as possible with important information on flu shots, traffic updates or foster parent information.

### CHALLENGES OVERVIEW



## TIPS FOR ADDRESSING LACK OF RESOURCES OR STAFF

### 01 Automate Your Messaging

Automation is becoming more common in private sector marketing, as software is becoming increasingly sophisticated in its ability to handle segmentation and marketing campaigns. [GovDelivery's Advanced Package](#) has this type of capability, which allows organizations like Wrexham County in Wales to reduce one full day formally dedicated to sending emails to two hours of work with automation.

### 02 Use Pre-Built Campaigns

Pre-built campaigns allow you to share your organization's brand story, mission, programs and resources in an efficient manner, with scale and agility. They're user-friendly and intuitive to communicators at any level. The benefits of [pre-built campaigns](#) with Granicus include the ability to onboard new audiences, cross-promote programs and services with similar organizations around the country and re-engage inactive audiences.



For us, it's a combination of lack of resources or staff coupled with an understanding of modern tools which should/could be used to facilitate communication.

- Survey Response





## TIPS FOR REACHING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

### 01 Identify Audiences and Create Personas

Segmenting your audience can be a great first step to refining your communications for maximum impact across various audiences. First, narrow down your audiences using a list of defining characteristics based off of the behavior of your current endeavors like age, gender, cultural background and geographical information.

### 02 Ask the Right Questions

Communication channels vary in impact based on different cultural and age groups. Some groups prefer being emailed information, while others prefer communication through social media, for example. To gain an understanding of how different audiences like being communicated with, it's important to research and ask questions: Who are you speaking to? Where do they live and where do they go? What are the realities of their daily lives?

### 03 Test What Works Best

There are multiple ways to ensure that your marketing channels resonate with audiences. Try various methods like email, text messaging, social media, and in-person meetings to see what has the greatest impact. Remember to also test subject lines and content to optimize even further.

### 04 Use the Method That Best Connects

There are multiple ways to ensure that your marketing channels resonate with audiences. Try various methods like email, text messaging, social media, and in-person meetings to see what has the greatest impact. Remember to also test subject lines and content to optimize even further.

### 05 Master Multilingual Content

Mastering multilingual content is more than just using a simple translation tool. Your content must take into account that word-for-word translations aren't always capturing the message you want to send – it can change with subtext, content, tone and figures of speech. Consult a language expert to assist you in creating messaging for various audiences.



Do you need more tips on increasing your reach and connecting with your audience? Download the checklist [10 Steps to Increase Your Subscribers](#).



# OPPORTUNITIES

## FOR PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATIONS

*When asked to compare how private sector digital marketing is adapting to meet modern customer needs with how government is adapting to meet citizens' needs, public sector communicators made it clear that they believe the public sector is still far behind the private sector.*

The new reality is that in order to continue to accomplish real-world outcomes, the public sector must adapt to communications practices of world-class marketers.

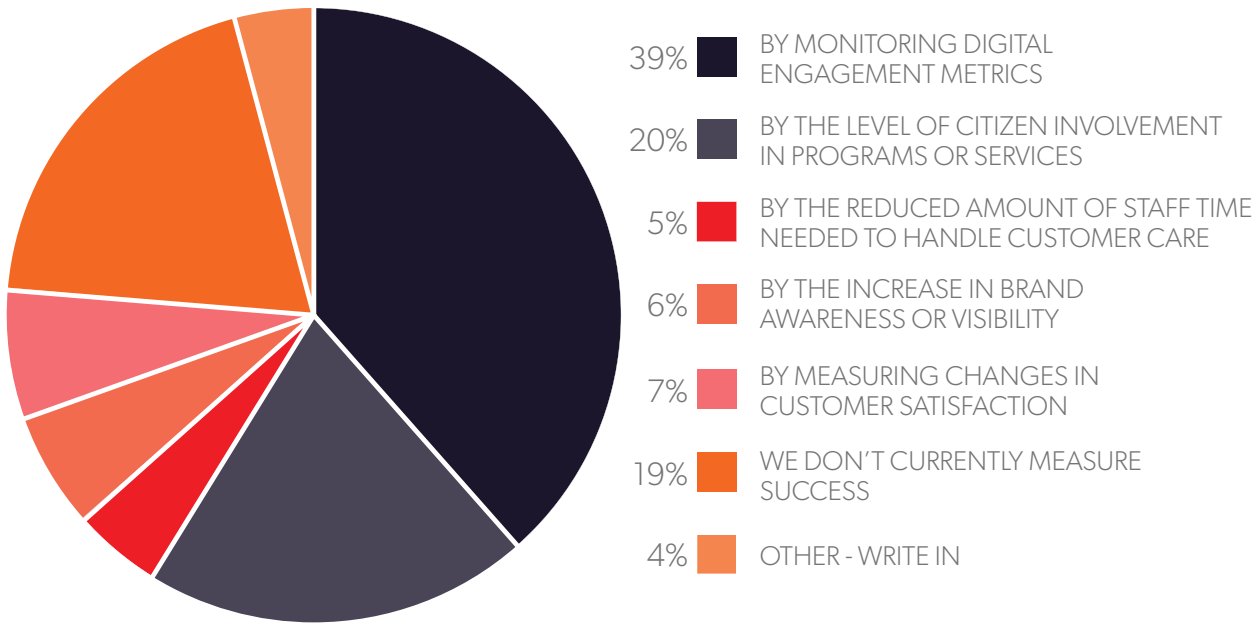
Marketing used to be the act of getting advertisements into someone's mailbox. Now, it is about using informed and

measured analytics to drive behaviors.

Across the 1,200 public sector communicators who responded in the 2017 survey, nearly 40 percent noted that success in the upcoming year will be measured by digital engagement metrics.



### PUBLIC SECTOR COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW



This is a transformational approach to digital communications in the public sector, as it can only lead to better informed and tested communications tactics to engage an audience.

Not sure where to start? As outlined in GovDelivery's latest [Benchmark Report: Improving the Metrics That Matter](#), which measured metrics from

over 3,000 public sector organizations, there are five metrics that are crucial to monitoring the success of digital communications. Start by comparing your metrics against these benchmarks, and monitor them in 2017 while trying new tactics.

### KEY METRICS TO MEASURE

GRANICUS BENCHMARKS	MEDIAN	TOP 20 PERCENT
OPEN RATE	21.47%	31.33%
ENGAGEMENT RATE	53.3%	64.7%
CLICK RATE	2.92%	6.8%
OVERLAY IMPACT	174%	584%
SUBSCRIPTIONS PER SUBSCRIBER	2.48%	4.86%





As we start the new year, an opportunity for the public sector to adapt to the practices of private sector marketers would be to move from a “make it perfect and launch” approach that requires

expensive and time-consuming pre-work to a “launch and iterate” approach that requires action, testing, analytics, continuous learning and agility in digital communications.

The impact of the new approach was transformation in the private sector, and will only mean positive things for the public sector:



RECORD EVENT ATTENDANCE



AWARENESS AND USE OF BENEFITS



BROAD PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE TRAININGS



HEALTHIER INDIVIDUALS



MASSIVE UPTAKE OF ONLINE TRANSACTIONS



SAFER COMMUNITIES



#### WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONNECT?

Would you like to connect with Granicus on ways to leverage best practices to enhance your digital communications? Contact us at [info@granicus.com](mailto:info@granicus.com).





[granicus.com](http://granicus.com)