Ep. 27 Using Technology to Build Trust in the Federal Government

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

government, citizen, genesis, experience, executive order, brian, services, people, leveraging, roi, cloud, customers, technology, fast, organization, pandemic, irs, drive, question, trust

My name is John Gilroy. And I'll be your moderator today and unusual topic, customer experiences and experience in the federal government. No one talks about this. This is kind of a hot, real, no one's to talk about. But today, we have the world famous expert on that. And I'm going to introduce him right now. His name is Ryan chittister. He's the Vice President for wide sector for Genesis. He's got a long experience with working with federal clients, all kinds of different agencies trying to improve their experience in providing services for their customers. So Brian, tell us about your background about your company. Genesis, please.

01:28

John, thanks so much for having me on. This is that absolute pleasure. Little bit of my background. So I got a Genesis back in December of 2021. And I like to say the timing was was really well placed because my start date was the 13th of December, which to people out there listening probably remember that date as the day the executive order dropped on citizen experience. So

01:53

you're like Forrest Gump, the you can't make day exactly where it comes out and just experience you started at Genesis. By the way, if you're listening, it's g e, n d s, y s.com. Keep talking. And this is a good one,

02:06

I'd like to say that I had some, some preparation around that. But I as we all know, I did not. But I was excited to focus on citizen experience. More directly, my I came from open text. And really, our portfolio was really broad it open text. And this allowed me to narrow my scope into an area that we all know, government's hyper focusing on. And that was really the straw that broke the camel's back, if you want to call it that, that I could join on that on that very day. So I was excited. I also host the government huddle podcast, as I know, you know, John, where I get to bring government leaders on industry leaders on and we talked about citizen experience all the time. It's a passion of mine. It's a passion, a lot of people out there and it's so interrelated with everything going on within government on both in the employee and the customer side. So I'm really excited to talk about this, this topic. And hopefully, we have some listeners out there that are excited to listen,

03:02

the way I like the government huddle podcast, because it's easy to find, it's easy to spell, you can find it. And by the way, it's highly rated one of the top 10% of all podcasts in that category. So you should listen to that. Okay. So we're looking at customer experience. Now, I've done this for many, many years. 10 years ago, no one ever talked about CES and experience the website. They're lucky they had a website. even five years ago, there was maybe maybe some people were talking about, you know, sir, maybe the IRS and maybe something like that. But I think the big motivator I think everyone knows has been COVID. So COVID has been this big elephant in the room has pushed people to say, look, you know, we have people from Los Angeles who are trying to get in and information about different aspects of maybe the anti virus vaccine and everything. And so that's been the push, do you see that the big picture of what's this big push is now because of COVID?

03:52

Yeah, I think COVID was obviously a big driver, to to get some type of baseline around what citizens can expect. I think consistency is a big piece of what they're trying to drive. It's a big piece of what the the executive order is driving, but that actually that's just the federal it goes down to state and local government. But I also think another aspect of it, too, that doesn't get talked about nearly as much is equitable delivery of services. So the ability for it no matter where you live in cities, Rural areas, whatever your economic situation is that everyone has access to services. So it's not just around digital experience, but it's really around. It's really around holistic service delivery, that government is really starting to focus on I like to say, meet the citizen where they are and having things available for them. No matter what your situation is.

04:45

Now my wife has a brother who's in the VA hospital in Oklahoma. And there are a lot of veterans in rural areas of the United States. Oh yeah, just are and so rather than driving literally 70 or 80 miles, they can take advantage of telemedicine all of a sudden that force To the people at VA all of a sudden to improve speed services, identity analysis. And so it really forces people to increase service to their citizens, our customers,

05:09

the VA is a really good example too, because what the executive orders really trying to do is very similar to what we're doing at Genesis from a strategy perspective, and a foundational perspective, it's to put the citizen at the center of what you're doing and not go just based on mission outcomes. But really, what is the citizen trying to achieve? Now, the V, the reason why I said the VA is a good example is citizens come in, in many different forms. And when a veteran walks into a VA hospital, they're not just a citizen, but they're a patient and the type of experience that they're going to expect crosses over beyond just a public sector, generalize experience, but it's it's a healthcare experience. And really, that's a Genesis, what we're really foundationally getting to the heart of is, what does patient experience look like? And how can we incorporate that into leveraging human centered design, incorporate that into what that next generation citizen experience looks like? Because we all wear different hats, right? When we go to a bank, we're getting a financial experience when we're going to target a Walmart, it's a retail experience, but we're still citizens at the same time. And because we enjoy we engage with all these entities. So frequently, we don't expect that to change when we engage with government so that I think that generational driver has really been another impetus that has driven government to focus on it. But I think it's important to note that, especially when we talk about Veteran experience, their patients, it's not just a generalized experience that that you can broadly lay down for

06:54

them. Because I'm a compulsive radio guy, I have to say the name GNESY s.com People may be running and listening to this, they can be working in their yard and I have to reinforce that because because that was how I was trained. Okay, let's say we got Brian's donuts, okay? And he sells donuts online. Okay, he wants to sell a lot of donuts. So he's going to make sure that when someone like Marielle comes to get some donuts, it's going to be fast. It's going to be effective to get those good the type of doughnuts that she chocolate Johnson she wants.

07:27

Oh, it's gonna be the month of February. Strawberry sprinkled doughnuts. Yes. My daughter won't show up.

07:31

Yeah, okay. Okay. Now, what about the IRS? I mean, there's no way to measure return on investment. There are what about FEMA? What's the ROI on FEMA? What's the ROI and Social Security? What's the ROI is good on the list? There's student loans. I mean, this is a hot topic. I'm sure if we graph this, the number of student loan questions that came in the last three months, we'd be we'd have call centers flooded.

07:53

Correct. So I mean, it's funny. I have my own thoughts on this. And there's research on it. But this is a question I posed to customer experience or citizen experience officers all over government is, what's the big driver, right. But when you take a look at something like the IRS, there's a couple of things that come into play, right? One, there's a predictable season, let's call it a season, that IRS needs to staff up, right between January and April, or whenever they want to do that they staff up and they can scale their their services during that period of time. But they can also predict what type of questions they're going to get right on the front end of things that they can use data. And that's that's another big piece of what what government's doing around around CX, you can leverage data to be more insightful. Now. Now, why is that important? Because you can scale up and scale down on staffing. So you're saving money, you don't have to have the same size staff that you do in March, in November or October, right, because your the number of inquiries you're going to ingest is going to be very different. And at the same time, you can predict the questions you're going to get between a January and an April versus in October and November. Right. So leveraging different technologies. And this is where that human centered design kind of comes together. With technology. You can leverage AI to automate chatbots to know certain questions that are going to be coming to save time, then we get to that time tax aspect of it, but you're also saving operational dollars within the IRS. I think that's that's another aspect. So you mentioned ROI. There's an absolute tangible ROI on both the both the government side from a financial perspective and from a time tax perspective on the citizen side. And then another piece that research also speaks to is when you can drive a better citizen experience. A friendlier experience more delightful looks experience a a more optimize experience, you're going to drive up civic partition participation and trust. And at a time when trusting government is is very hard to get, we're so polarized, this is a great, great first step into being able to regain some of that trust some of that transparency that that we as citizens are looking for.

THE OAKMONT GROUP

10:21

In the commercial world. I'm very familiar with commercial websites. And what Google tells us is that if you look at a commercial website on your phone, it takes more than three seconds to load people bounce out, 53% of people bounce out. So it's got to be fast, I think fast is it's not a four letter word fast is what people want. They want to go security. They want to get their information fast. If you can work at the IRS and predict what questions going to come up, guess what that answers the question fast. Correct. If if, if let's say your neighbor has a student loan and wants information on it, they don't want to sit and wait 40 minutes on a telephone line, wait for information, maybe they can get it faster text message, maybe they get faster website. And so speed is really, really important to think. And the ROI may be just fast, the ROI may be in just having less desperation and aggravation with federal sites,

11:12

it's fast in a number of different ways. One that one way that I think people don't think about when it comes to leveraging artificial intelligence in let's say, a contact center environment. There is such an issue with with staffing, especially in contact centers. So when you do it, and it's high turnover, so when you do hire somebody to join, you have to enable them. So there's kind of a ramp up period of time. So if you're the IRS, and you're hiring, and you need to ramp these people up, one way to also get them into the mix faster, is by having some type of artificial intelligence support them during it. So as as there's a bot listening to the conversation, it might hear certain key phrases, and it might predict a question that's coming, and dial up and answer for you immediately. So now, now you're being supported by technology throughout this process. I think that's that's one aspect of speed. When we look from a workforce perspective, that's important. And the other is, and I get this question all the time, I should get this internally, too, because we when I enable working with our sales teams, and also working with some of our partners, we talk so much around driving empathetic experiences. And at the same time, how do you drive empathetic experiences through technology? It seems like a it seems like a kind of a catch 22 in that regard. But to me, it's all based on outcomes. You are you are being empathetic if you're saving me time, if you're getting me to a resolution faster. And if you can do it, even without getting a human intervening, that is best case scenario. So now I'm getting a delightful experience. And you're saving overhead. Because on average, whenever you get someone a human intervention, it's about six to $8 per interaction. So if you scale that, the savings and we going back to your question before on ROI, the savings is massive. I'll give you a great example. And I use this example all the time. So anybody who's who's heard me speak is probably going to it's probably going to remember this back in January. My wife's birthday is at the end of January. And I ordered her flowers through one 800 flowers. And January 31 came my wife's birthday, and got to like 345 and I'm thinking these flowers still haven't shown up. And I called when 100 flowers, they immediately recognized because this the systems are interoperable. They immediately recognize my phone number. They asked if I was inquiring about a recent order, they read out the order and asked me what the problem was. I was able to press a button to tell them it wasn't delivered, which navigated to the next next prompt, which is what resolution do I want? Do I want a refund? Or do I want the flower the flowers to be redelivered? I could press a button. And it was done. No human intervention. And I'll ask you, John, what number you want, what button do you think I pressed on the resolution? Absolutely getting them re delivered. So but I was on the phone for about 40 seconds. And I got that quick of a resolution and exactly what I wanted. So I think that's a great example, for what we're trying to do. What Genesis is trying to do within the public sector is get those quick resolutions. And we want to make sure that all the systems are talking so one of the

phrases we haven't brought up we've we've talked about context center, but creating that experience as a service. That's the whole idea having the systems speak to one another. So we all hear heard, you're able to leverage data to predict and anticipate what's needed, and you get to that resolution faster. That's kind of where we're moving towards.

15:04

I mentioned Oklahoma earlier, spend a lot of time in rural Oklahoma, there's a word that you may not be familiar with the word is die lemma. Let me put it in federal perspective here. Brian, you got you a die lemma. On the one hand, we want to improve customer service, and make sure people get customers off quickly, right. On the other hand, there's this thing called zero trust. So we know there's an executive order for improving customer service. Well, there's also an executive order for managing data safely. And so we get Brian here. He's like, you know, he's at the donut shop getting pushed and pulled between the chocolate customers and strawberry customers like, oh, it has to be real fast and quick and easy. Oh, but we have to be secure. We got to be fast, we got to be secure. Gotta be fast, be secure. So so we've got a dilemma here we have a solution, Brian?

15:51

I think the intentionality that the government is taking in thinking about it is is really important. I wish it was as simple as which don't do we want that would make that would make life easier. But I think this is where we can kind of look at where technology has kind of brought us up to that point, right? It used to be that everything had to get locked down. Right. And that made it more challenging that put more friction in between, let's say the the government organization and the citizen trying to get their get their service delivered. Now, you can provide contextualized access to services through identity access management. And I think that's really the next step into it. The incorporation of where we're going and citizen experiences is incorporating identity access management, for contextualized access for citizens, you see it right now with with irs.gov, and id.me, where you can provide high levels of security, but also access to all the information that you need. Right. So I think that's ultimately where we're getting towards where everything is very simple. And it's very secure. But it's all contextualized, based on based on who's showing up. It's one of the things and for those that have gone through the executive order, will will recognize this, that single front door aspect of what the federal government is trying to get to and what does that mean? It means you can show up to one website and navigate to whatever service you're looking to get to you don't have to guess what website it is. But you can identify yourself through that single door, and then access your other services across it makes it a lot simpler. But it also makes it very secure for for the citizens information. And for the government side of things as well.

17:37

I'm sure if you're listening to this interview, and there's snow on the ground, or whatever, maybe it's next summer and you're going to the beach, you can go to Google and find this executive order. And by the way, this is a pretty thorough list of recommendations. This is a very, very Hey, Brian, if you get time next week, sure. Interiors easy. No, no. It talks about consistency, self service, service, customer information, secure identification, perhaps that should be on top of list navigation, responsive assistance. I mean, it might as well be someone selling donuts in LA. I mean, that's that's almost their most thinking like a consumer company type relationship, aren't they?

18:16

Yeah, and one of the things I've used citizen experience so much through our conversation, but really, the best way to describe what the executive order is doing is really changing it into customer experience. It's really government, looking at citizens as their customers and trying to drive those delightful experiences. And that is a complete Mind Mind. Set shift for government. One of the I mentioned earlier, I talked to CXOs all the time. And I think it's it's a common misconception that the biggest challenges that some of these organizations are facing is technology, that they don't have the budget, they don't have access to the technology to be able to drive this. And that's not true. But the biggest challenge that these experienced leaders are facing is institutionalizing the CX concept within their organization. It's foundationally. Getting the people at that agency at that department, to walk in alignment to believe that our ultimate goal is to drive that that better experience for whoever their stakeholder is. And technology can be folded into that. But I think laying that baseline getting that mindset shift is really what government is is needing to do.

19:39

Genesis je e n e s Ys heavily involved in call centers, and I know a little bit about call centers and 15 years ago, and the call center world they introduced a phrase called predictive analytics. Whoa 15 years ago, that was a big deal. Today analytics is everywhere. But that was pretty pretty much so back In the day, Brian would call about the NFL football he ordered, and they would read the phone number and direct it to the correct person to help with the refund. Mm hmm. And your illustration with the flowers is read exactly what he used to do 15 years ago. Now, I mean, this is like, Back to the Future leaping 30 years in the future. Now they can use machine learning and artificial intelligence to really take that system experience and go Oh, so this person is from Wyoming and, and they're calling from this number. And this happens to be their unification. So we can give them this level of permission to go there all comes down real quickly, to make it frictionless. So it's, it really takes what started off 15 years ago as an impressive phrase predictive analytics, and really puts it on steroids, doesn't it?

20:44

It it actually is even a step beyond that. So so what you just described there really talks about the intersection of that concept and technology. But even taking it from a strategy perspective, what government is really looking to do, by leveraging data is saying, what type of let's use like life milestones, for example, and another organization we haven't brought up is Social Security Administration. We know On average, when people can file for Social Security, that is a major life milestone. So because Because government understands that they're able to provide guidance ahead of time, they're able to anticipate that you're going to need the service, and they're able to make it a smoother, more delightful experience. In theory, it's the same with other life milestones that we have. Very, I mean, when we look at health, health is another example, if you're a male, and you're in your late 30s, early 40s, like I am, there are certain certain things that you need to go through from a preventative health perspective. So your health care provider can engage you proactively to say, Hey, we should get you scheduled for a checkup for this. And this same thing applies for government, you're going to be turning 65, you should be engaged by your government organization, in this case, SSA. And say, you're about to turn 65, this is an opportunity for you to take advantage of social security. These are the this is the paperwork that you need. If you need any information, this is this is the contact you can reach out to now

you're being engaged instead of having to go out and search yourself. And ultimately, that's all by design. That's all leveraging data, you could also look and say, and we can use Wyoming as an example. Perhaps there is a higher usage of a certain and we could go into state and local, maybe there's a higher usage of utility, in a certain area of Wyoming during a certain period of time, will now they can leverage that data to know whether they need more, whether they need more support. More if they're going to get more contact center increase, they can staff up in that regard. They can use data to design whatever these services are looking for, and then lay lay those those technology assets on top of it to streamline the whole process. So it's completely completely A to Z strategy all the way to technology into driving that outcome for the citizen proactively and anticipatory service, not reactively.

23:19

You know, Brian, human beings have unexpected things happen to them, they just have, you know, first week in COVID, my daughter moved back home with her baby husband, father, lawn dog. It was quite an interesting quarantine. Now, let's look at the federal government. All of a sudden, there was another thing dumped on an agency due within the last two months was the student loan thing? I mean, all of a sudden, things have to ramp up. I mean, I don't know if you could have predicted that. I mean, it just goes your predictive analytics might have been I mean, there are agencies now that I'm sure they found out about that, the same time I found out about it, and all of a sudden, they have to ramp up the call center to get a ramp up this ramp up that I mean, does your company allow for people to have these unexpected events to to happen,

24:03

not only not it doesn't allow for it? We've been we've been working with our customers to make sure they're anticipating it. So across during the pandemic and Pandemic was an impetus for a lot of things like we talked about at the top of the show, cloud based contact center is is becoming so vital for organizations just like cloud based anything is becoming so vital to organizations. What the pandemic really did was allow technology leaders to kind of rip the band aid off for those that hadn't really jumped all the way into Cloud, to really test the waters in a situation where they had to. And I think what a lot of them found was not only is the security just as secure, or even better, or than than most of their on prem solutions, but the agility in the scale that it gave them during this period of time. And the flexibility that it gave them during that period of time was priceless. So when we look at contact center Being able to pivot that to people that are working from home, and still need to be able to. And I would argue probably one of the one of the situations where people needed information the most, you're still able to provide that information to them. So to me, what we're looking at as yes, we're we are going through a pandemic, I think, I think it's safe to say we're kind of on the tail end of that pandemic, things are kind of normalizing. But there's always going to be something that pops up that whether it's a mass situation like the pandemic, or if it's a more acute situation, like student loan, student loan situation, there's always going to be something that happens that you're going to need to scale up and down for, or have the agility to react to. And I think you want to prepare for that, that the CO pandemic taught us that I think, in a more draconian way, and we're now looking to support agencies provide them with that flexibility and agility, but the resilience that it also offers at the same time,

26:05

my favorite linguist is Dr. John McWhorter up in Colombia, I don't know if you know, will or not, but he's a really interesting guy. He talks about word usage and word study and different foreign languages. And if you just take a look at the term cloud, and you go back 30 years, 35 years, 40 years, that term was used exclusively in the telephony area. That's where they started using the cloud. And then what's happened the last 15 years, people like Vivec, Kandra, have drag that kind of appropriated that terminology. And now we're all shot by the cloud? Well, I'm sure you get some retired phone guys go no, no, no, no, we're the first ones with a cloud. So it really is kind of interesting how the system that you provide really has solid long roots of reliability and consistency. It's, it's, it's not something that Brian dropped up in his garage last week, you know, this is a long established solid tradition of all kinds of standards involved in reliability. And we're not going to get involved in all the different standards. But there there have been there a while and they're very solid, aren't they?

27:01

They are. And I think this is one of the situations where to be able to keep up with the compliance that that government necessitates, you really have to make that investment into government, especially from a security standpoint, to gain that trust of the leadership. That's what, that's what Genesis is doing, especially in the form of FedRAMP. And you also mentioned when you when you introduce the that I am the worldwide Vice President for Public Sector strategy. And this is these are other investments we're making other countries to, including Canada with protected be Australia and Iraq, etc. The list goes on. And being able to invest in these security measures is really us investing into into the public sector into government, because we know we have a breast best to breed a technology. But that doesn't do anything for government if they can't trust the security behind it. And we understand that. So that's, that's an investment that we're making right now with AWS and FedRAMP. And I think it's an important an important evolution for us, we already had, we already had a FedRAMP solution with, with Maximus that that we had for our Genesis bolt like Cloud. And this is the next evolution of what we're doing kind of a reinvestment into our Genesis CX cloud, which is offering even more scale even more flexibility for our customers with the same security. So I'm excited about what this evolution looks like what we can bring to government at all levels. I think that that next that next next aspect of cloud, even beyond contact center, and again, the experience leaders are in full agreement here is the interoperability that cloud provides, we're at a period of time where experiences are a lot more complex, whether you see that on the outside, outside in or not there, there's a lot more steps to these experiences, they're a lot more complex, which means there's systems that need to be speaking to each other from all over the organization. And to seamlessly do that at scale. You're going to require a cloud in that in that environment. And that's where Genesis is looking to go is to orchestrate these experiences from A to Z for citizens make the complex, simple. And by leveraging cloud, we're able to do that for our customers.

29:15

So Brian, g e n e sy s, did I see a press release for maybe partnering with the government in Brazil? Is that right? Is that an announcement?

29:23

We are I mean, we're regularly partnering with governments all over the world. Brazil is one of the more recent ones. But another thing we're also doing, especially on the research side, and I don't know if I can name names right now, but we have a couple pilots in place as we're creating our experience index bespoke to

government. So we take a look at holistic or empirically designed indexes like an MPLS, which are very standardized. What we're looking to do is really give government a hyper focus on the experiences that they're driving from their citizens perspective. From the stakeholders perspective, so across whatever that citizen journey looks like, from anywhere between public guidance into into citizen engagement, we're able to tell them exactly how they're doing from citizens and show them some of their blind spots, right? So they can, so they can take a look and see, okay, we need to focus on this area, we need to, we need to either get more resources or invest in this area to raise our scores up, because citizens are saying we're not doing a very good job. So we're, we're working with governments actually all over the world, to to validate our methodology, and and to drive this experience forward. So we can deploy this at scale for not only our customers, but anyone deploying experience, experienced software, whether it's Genesis or anything else. So you can get a good a good look at at where you need to invest your resources. So I'm really excited about this. This is a to me, this is a big differentiator and what Genesis is doing, versus versus other companies is really trying to raise that level, and give government a magnifying glass into what they're what they're driving.

31:06
So if you ever lucky enough to get in a plane, go down to Rio and talk to one of your customers down there. When you get off the plane, you got to say, Come on, give it to the bank. That's your lesson for the day. forward looking, let's wrap this up here. Where do you see the whole idea of contact call center citizen experience ROI? where's that going to evolve in the next five years?

31:24
I think so we talked a little bit about anticipatory services, I think that's going to become a lot more mainstream, the proactive engagement for government, especially from the strategy side of things is really going to is really going to hit a more mainstream level. So I think that's, that's one thing that I'm seeing, I think, I think the other and we mentioned experience as a service, I think we're gonna get to a point where everything is going to be very seamlessly orchestrated, especially with the especially with the strategy that I mentioned, being able to put the citizen at the center of it, institutionalizing this at at organizations, we're going to really be able to orchestrate things in a more simple than a more simpler, streamlined way. And I think when you reduce that complexity on the outside, it's going to improve civic trust. So I'm, what I'm hoping is this investment into, into CX is going to is going to help and I tend to be I tend to be a glass half full guy, but it's going to it's going to, I think, bring us bring us a little closer together, get that trust back in government again. And I think that's ultimately what we all want. So I'm excited that technology is found the hitting, hitting strategy, and we're at a point where it can really make a difference.

32:38
Let's face it, we're gonna have to wrap up here. We started off talking about trust. So we ended up talking about trust. It's been a good chat here. You've been listening to the federal tech podcast with John Gilroy. I'd like to thank my guest, Brian Chidester. Vice President worldwide sector at Genesis