CIVICA
Transforming the way you work

Changing Landscapes:
Digital Transformation

What do local councils
need in the digital age?

Contents

Introduction

In this, our third report prepared in collaboration with the Institute for Public Policy and Governance at the University of Technology Sydney, we were interested to discover the latest insights and perspective from local government professionals about their IT systems.

The research is focussed on answers to these areas of enquiry:

How are councils responding to the changing landscape caused by digital transformation?

What is local government looking for when it comes to technology and digital solutions?

Key findings

Specifically in relation to digital and software solutions, the overwhelming majority of respondents (81%) preferred a system that could integrate business applications from third-party providers according to their needs and preferences.

81%

81% of respondents preferred integrated business applications from third-party providers
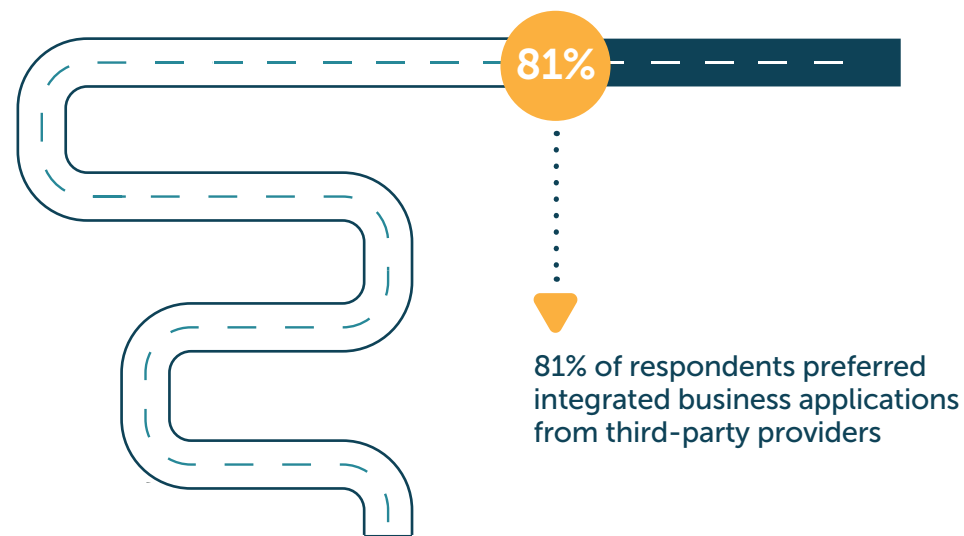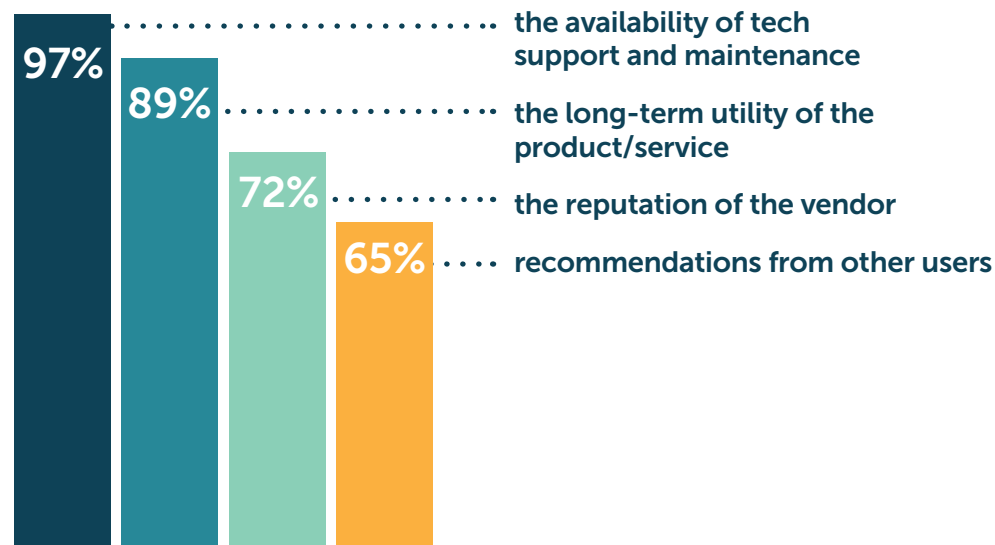
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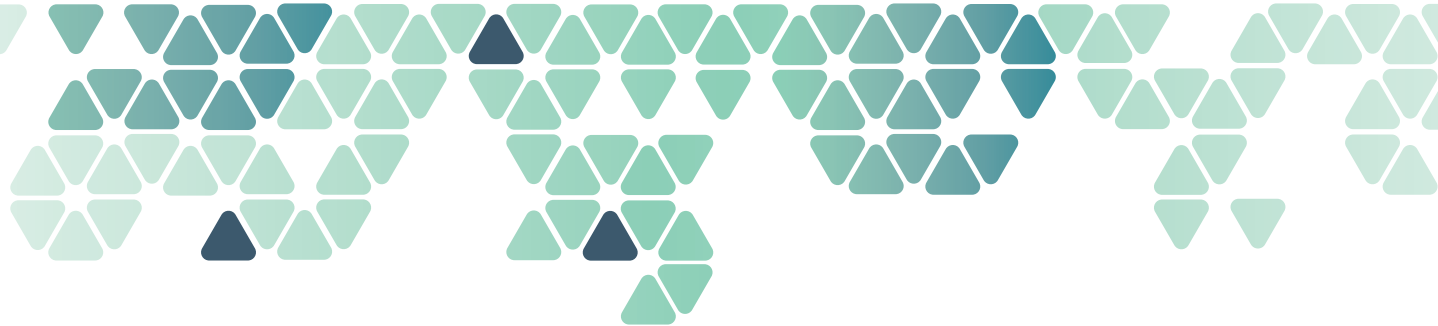
Local government has unique requirements and challenges, making it a sector that responds to IT vendors who understand the business requirements of councils and can improve the way work is done at both the back end and customer-facing end.

Councils are highly dependent on their systems to deliver ratepayer services. Having confidence in the quality of the product and service is an important initial step in the vendor relationship, but feedback from councils shows that it is responsive technical support and ongoing investment in maintenance and system upgrades that is more highly valued.

Key findings

In terms of factors respondents felt were either very or extremely important considerations when purchasing software or IT services, these were all significant rankings:

97% .... **the availability of tech support and maintenance**

89% .... **the long-term utility of the product/service**

72% .... **the reputation of the vendor**

65% ..... **recommendations from other users**

User interface

User interface (UI) is growing in importance as digital transformation revolutionises the way business is done. Internal procedures and processes are being streamlined to achieve efficiencies that enable councils to do more with less.

UI is simplifying access to databases and web forms, opening systems to more staff members to participate, including via mobile while they are working in the field. Councils are experiencing the benefits of better UI through greater workforce flexibility and reduced complexity.

The engagement of users with online services in other domains like banking and shopping continues to raise the bar on UI. While the applications and purposes are varied, they all contribute to rising expectations for usability, speed, ease and satisfaction.

Key findings

In terms of factors respondents felt were either very or extremely important, 75% felt that the look of the user interface was a consideration when purchasing software or IT services.

75% felt that the look of the user interface was very important

Business Intelligence

The continued drive for efficiency in local government is an imperative of budgets as well as rising expectations of customers driven by the digital revolution.

The ability to mine data for analysis is increasing transparency across organisations, from front line field workers to C-suite leadership. Query and reporting tools are becoming indispensable as business intelligence rapidly transforms the way organisations work.

Growing populations mean increasing demands on local councils for diverse services, from rubbish collection to infrastructure, sporting fields, parks, recycling, car parking, social services, cultural and environmental programs and many more areas. The more tools councils have at their disposal for transforming information into action plans, the better the council is able to serve their community.

Key findings

In terms of IT service features respondents felt would be either useful or extremely useful to their organisation, 88% nominated business intelligence.

88%

88% of respondents felt business intelligence extremely useful in IT service.
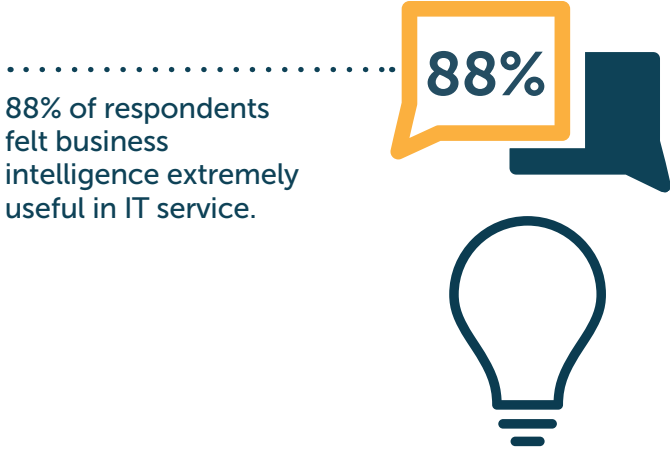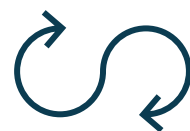
Automation

The digital revolution continues to drive innovation in the automating of tasks. Councils are increasingly dependent on automation for services from the watering of parks and gardens to the issuing of rates. Very few areas in local government have not been affected.

Cost is always an important factor and councils continually seek ways to reduce overheads and create greater budget efficiencies. Although many of the benefits of automation are enjoyed by ratepayers, councils also benefit from reduced transaction times, faster feedback on programs and projects, and importantly, freeing up employees from mundane and repetitive tasks to allow more effective use of their resources.

Key findings

90% of respondents felt that automation would be either useful or extremely useful to their organisation.

90% of respondents felt automation would be extremely useful

75% of respondents felt that cost would be either very or extremely important to their organisation.

75% of respondents felt cost and greater efficiencies would be very important to their organisation

Data Security

As the digital revolution continues, data security remains a topical issue for both individuals and organisations. Local governments store much sensitive information on databases in order to provide their services.

This makes them an attractive target for cybercriminals, and research has shown that government IT systems are twice as likely to be infected with malware as the general community.

There is no escaping the structural tension between sharing data for the public good and protecting information for personal privacy. Councils are squarely in the firing line on this issue. Since the responsibilities for councils to their ratepayers are so acute, it is perhaps not surprising that this survey topic returned an overwhelming response.

Key findings

96% of respondents felt that data security would be either useful or extremely useful to their organisation.

▶96%

of respondents felt data security would be useful to their organisation.

Web-enabled systems

One has only to imagine pre-Internet days in local government to appreciate how much more connected modern councils are, not just to each other but to the world wide web and all it offers.

Local government's diverse operations and dynamic demands are probably too complex today to be effectively implemented without the resources the digital revolution has created. Having web-enabled systems is a highly desirable factor for the majority of councils.

That said, every council is unique, and while most want web access, the preference for hosting is more evenly split between their premises and the cloud.

Key findings

87% of respondents felt that web-enabled service would be either useful or extremely useful to their organisation.

87% of respondents preferred web-enabled service

45% of respondents preferred hosting on premises with web access, while 34% preferred hosting in the cloud.

45% of respondents preferred hosting on premises with web access

34% preferred hosting in the cloud

Mobile

Smartphones are a visible symbol of the digital revolution – a computer in every pocket and purse. Where once the desktop ruled, today more Google searches are made on mobile devices than on PCs. As a result of this rapid transformation, councils who fail to make their digital resources, databases and websites mobile-friendly, risk becoming obsolete.

There are many internal benefits to councils from mobile compatibility, from increased productivity and efficiency for employees, to improved accountability from digital trails on transactions, to reduced costs for IT infrastructure for mobile workers. Ratepayers, too, benefit from increased participation, ease of information access, faster response time and greater engagement.

Key findings

93% of respondents felt that mobile compatibility would be either useful or extremely useful to their organisation.

▶ **93%**

of respondents felt mobile compatibility would reduce risk.
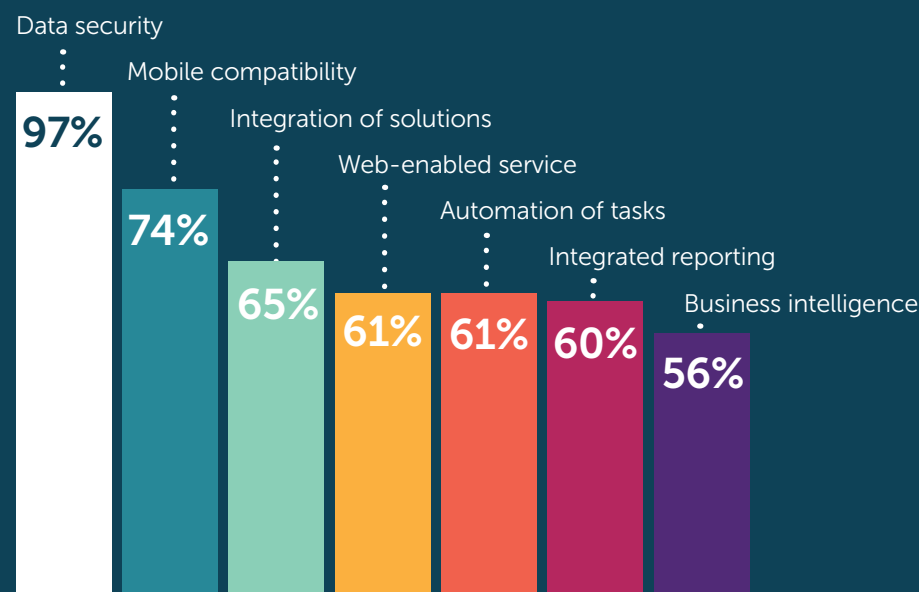
Conclusion

This report reveals quite clearly the current state of play for IT professionals working in local government. While the digital revolution remains a dynamic force that needs to be addressed, according to the respondents, it seems to be doing so in ways that are surprisingly uniform across local government.

The majority of councils are looking to achieve efficiency through a flexible IT system that allows them to utilise preferred 3rd party solutions. These solutions should ideally include mobility and web-enablement, automation, reporting and business intelligence – while maintaining security of data.

Key findings

These percentages of respondents felt the following IT features would be either useful or extremely useful to their organisation:

Data security
97%

Mobile compatibility
74%

Integration of solutions
65%

Web-enabled service
61%

Automation of tasks
61%

Integrated reporting
60%

Business intelligence
56%

Start the conversation and get in touch with Civica

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