Digital Small Business Concierge

Increasing the accessibility of government services via a digital small business chatbot

BACKGROUND

As part of their 10-week technology policy training program, the leaders of the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative spent 6 weeks working on real-world government challenges. Three teams tackled how cities can deliver better relief to small businesses that have suffered during COVID-19, tailoring their recommendations to a fictional "City of Foggyton." Each team narrowed its focus to a specific part of the problem, conducted research, and developed solutions. Below is an overview of one team's solution: a centralized data-enabled form for small business relief.

FOCUS

The difficulties of navigating government websites, materials, and applications hinder cities' efforts to effectively help small businesses. To access public services online, businesses must navigate a complex array of government websites and forms, fostering dissatisfaction and frustration. These challenges are particularly problematic for small businesses, which already spend disproportionate time on administrative tasks. Without support for people of color, women, and immigrant business owners, the process also exacerbates broader equity and access issues. City governments need to offer a trusted user-friendly entry point to small business resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This project recommends that the City of Foggyton deploy a small business-focused chatbot, the Small Business Concierge, to improve user experiences and service delivery. A chatbot (as shown in the attached demo) would improve the experience of accessing government services through public sector portals for several reasons:

1. Chatbots offer a more tailored constituent experience to ease common frictions while accessing online government services and enhancing customer satisfaction;
2. Government compliance and service-delivery tasks are ripe for automation and better interactive design; and
3. Chatbot functionality can be optimized over time, allowing for cost-effective staged roll-outs and continuous improvement.

The city should consider integrating chatbots into its digital service design process and offer interfaces for mobile, web-app, and social media platforms. Chatbots can also facilitate customer service by streamlining navigation, personalizing user experience, offering support in multiple languages, and enabling help through mobile and social networking platforms. As chatbots become a cost-effective substitute for some tasks, they can also free up government employees to take on higher-value tasks.
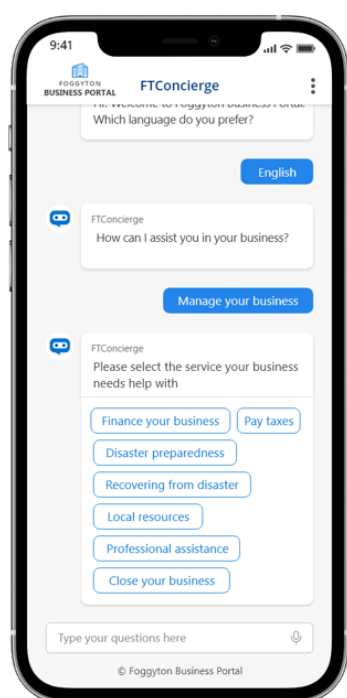
An example of the Small Business Concierge integrated into a mobile platform