

Citizens as customers in Tel Aviv

Local governments can and should play an integral role in the development and growth of a smart city. A key component of this success is the positioning of residents as central to the city government's function and design. Hyperconnected cities like Tel Aviv are using smart new strategies for engaging and building trust among residents.

We spoke with Zohar Sharon, Tel Aviv's Chief Knowledge Officer, to understand the story of smart technology within Tel Aviv's City Hall and its impact on resident satisfaction overall. We identified three major elements of Tel Aviv's success as a smart city: a citizen-centric focus, knowledge management, and data-driven digital pushes.



Moving from silos to citizen-centricity

More than a decade ago, Tel Aviv started thinking about information management and inefficiencies in its organizational structure. The city's governmental departments were siloed, with each department responsible for its own knowledge, data management, and public information. As Tel Aviv's Chief Knowledge Officer, Zohar Sharon, described, "when you are managing a public organization, you have so many silos, so many departments, so many units, so many managers, so many workers, and when you want to talk about and provide a citizen-centric approach, you have a problem. Because each one of these departments is working with its own staff, its own target audience."

One primary challenge that the city identified was the design of its website. Similar to the departments themselves, the city's website was segregated by department, making it clunky and difficult for residents to navigate.

With a shift in perspective, the city was able to build an entirely new website, this time with the focus on the customer, or citizen. A crucial piece of this transition was getting City Hall employees to think like citizens again. Working across departments to identify necessary information from the perspective of the citizen, the city was able to create a citizen-centric, integrated website able to anticipate all of its customers' needs.



One of the phrases that is very popular in Tel Aviv is 'What is the customer's story?'

Think about it. We are a public organization. We are talking about our citizens as customers. [...] You have to teach the workers, the people who are giving service, that this person who is sitting here is not a citizen, he's a customer.

- Zohar Sharon, Chief Knowledge Officer, Tel Aviv

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Knowledge management

Another element of getting the right information to the right customer in Tel Aviv involves knowledge management. Similar to the city's website, the city's information call center, like 311 in the United States, was managed by individual departments, making responses individualized rather than standardized, increasing confusion for the citizen caller.

The city, with its new citizen-centric focus, built a series of code scripts in order to automate the call center responses and institutionalize knowledge within the departments.

This public knowledge is maintained by a group of volunteer knowledge champions within city government. "The knowledge champions are

workers from all of the departments. They are putting information into the knowledge management system and for digital and for the website, from their department. But they are doing it in addition to their job," says Sharon.

The knowledge champions are essential to the management and dissemination of accurate, timely, and standardized public information in Tel Aviv.

Digital push not pull

With all of these improvements to city communications, city officials were shocked to find, in a series of public focus groups, that residents were still dissatisfied with City Hall. They identified a major driver of this dissatisfaction coming from pull communications (i.e., residents

needing to seek out information on their own). As a result of these findings, the city established DigiTel, or the Digital Residents' Club—a loyalty club for the residents of Tel Aviv.

A resident registered with DigiTel now gets push notifications personalized to their specific needs by sharing limited personal data. The city uses residents' geographic and demographic information to send tailored push alerts to the public, for anything from street construction to daycare registration information.

These city-wide shifts to smart technology and data-driven public outreach have engaged Tel Aviv's residents and have strengthened trust in City Hall.



[Digital pushes are] a huge benefit for [citizens]. They're saying 'wow, City Hall is thinking about me and my family. Not just getting taxes from me. But my taxes now are giving me something huge, and I understand why I am paying.'

- Zohar Sharon, Chief Knowledge Officer, Tel Aviv

DigiTel Users by the Numbers in Tel Aviv

200K
registered
DigiTel users

300-400
knowledge
champions

4,000
311 call
scripts

>70%
of citizens
using DigiTel



The ROI is in the satisfaction level of the residents. Our model is built on building a better life in the city and increasing the satisfaction level of the residents.

- Liora Shechter, Chief Information Officer, Tel Aviv