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2023 Government & Public Services Marketing Trends

Accelerating public-sector impact by building trust and adopting new innovations

Staying on the cutting edge of innovation and leveraging marketing tools to engage and influence audiences is crucial as the government evolves its approach to reaching residents and building deeper trust.

As the government seeks to influence and shape resident behavior, and as residents demand more from their interactions with the government, we are witnessing a strong shift toward people-centric marketing and communication strategies. This has led to the adoption of new and innovative strategies that are rooted in data and creativity. Using dynamic, digital channels, the government can reach residents to inform and educate them on the ever-changing public-sector landscape, where they are and with relevant content.

It all starts with putting people first. Understanding what drives and influences audiences allows for more meaningful, people-centric communications. By communicating transparently, delivering reliable results, addressing the human nature of residents, and prioritizing the resident experience, government agencies can create the conditions for more informed and empowered residents. Here we will explore four government marketing trends to help government agencies rethink how they can build trust and confidence through innovation.

Trend 1:
Answering instability with
tactics that build trust

Strong political participation, greater compliance with public policies, and enhanced social cohesion are all vital pieces of the government ecosystem. At the crux of this delicate system is the trust residents have in their government; it is the very basis of connection. To gain resident trust, government agencies are focusing on communication and transparency, by leveraging people-centric marketing and communication strategies.

Getting started

Take a people-centric communication approach: Private corporations have operated with a customer-first approach for years, and residents have come to expect a similar experience when it comes to interacting with government services. According to Forrester's Customer Experience Index, the federal average for customer experience is nearly 11 percentage points behind the private-sector average and lower than any other industry or sector surveyed.[1] To help minimize the bureaucratic hurdles, the Biden-Harris administration issued an executive order in December 2021 instructing the federal government to design and deliver services in a simplified and modernized way highlighting the value of its residents' time, minimizing the time lost in seeking and navigating services. This time was dubbed as the "time tax." Every government interaction is a moment to build on the trust of the resident: Making the interaction efficient reduces the "time tax" and begins to build goodwill toward future interactions with the government.[2] Clear and concise messaging not only reduces the time spent understanding complex government programs, but also further drives a focus around residents, with prioritizing their needs being at the center of the strategy.

Drive empathetic and transparent government interactions: Social media is changing the environment in which residents and their government interact with each other, bringing a new level of transparency, engagement, and accessibility. When communicating about sensitive topics, it is imperative to recognize others' needs and build sensitivity into communications. Prioritizing strategic goals and tactics that humanize messaging to residents can result in more impactful responses to government calls to action.

Meet residents where they are: Many government programs and services are still paper-first, and government entities must expand their overall digital footprint to connect with residents where they are. Opening the channels of government communication helps put a face to the government agency, creating more approachable and humanized interactions. Distributing messages across a variety of channels and platforms that residents already use helps build community and connectivity. Critical information around prevention, mitigation, and preparedness must be proactive and clearly delivered to continue building mutual trust between communities and the government.

Trend in action

State of Arkansas: Through the Arkansas Rent Relief Program, Deloitte worked with the state to distribute millions of dollars in federal funding to support tenants unable to pay their rents due to loss of income, heavily influenced by the economic shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge became how can the government quickly act to keep impacted residents aware of this funding and trust the messenger of this important information? Through research, it was determined that residents trusted their community organizations, which led to the team equipping 600 community-based organizations with toolkits containing clear and simple messaging, training, collateral, and social media content to use across their channels. Leveraging these organizations as champions of the program

helped the state gain residents' trust in government messaging and led to residents enrolling in the program. An omnichannel approach of targeting impacted residents, not only through grassroots efforts, but also with a marketing campaign across earned, owned, and paid media channels like TV, radio, and print, reiterated and reminded residents that there are resources available. The campaign reached more than 12 million people across online media, generating 2.9 million application portal views and 57,800 application submissions. Through a people-centric approach, grounded in clear messaging and meeting residents where they were, more than $100 million in rent and utility relief was distributed to support housing stability in less than a year.

Trend 2:
Spurring action in communities
using social marketing

Social marketing, also referred to as behavior change marketing, is a process that applies marketing tactics that deliver value to influence audience behaviors for the betterment of the individual or community as a whole. It's marketing used to influence an audience to change their behavior for social benefits such as improving public health, prevention, safety, environmental protection, etc. As the government strives to create greater value for residents through long-term programs and efforts, government agencies are leaning into their responsibilities by integrating social marketing concepts to drive behavioral change on a more personal level. With increasing equity, social, and environmental concerns, government agencies are focused on driving behavioral change to capture specific audiences to have an impact on these crucial topics. It is imperative that the government tunes in to unique ways to reach its residents with messaging that resonates for the betterment of society and the communities we live in.

Throughout the years, we have seen residents stand for causes and spur movements to drive change and impact their communities in positive ways. While these movements are often organic, the government can take a much more formal and strategic approach to drive change by launching social marketing campaigns. As the government seeks to drive reform across various initiatives such as climate change, equity, and others, these campaigns will be integral to influencing behaviors to help meet their goals and objectives. Residents are focused on how the government is addressing and making changes to impact these crucial topics, and it will be imperative that the government is tuned in to the needs and desires of the residents, reaching them with messages that inspire change.

Getting started

Embrace social marketing campaigns through content: As the country faces climate reform, unprecedented public health and safety challenges, social dilemmas, economic instability, and geopolitical change, government agencies need to think about how to make their messaging memorable for their services to remain top of mind. This starts with knowing what channels their residents engage with and the behavioral patterns that move them. Rather than forcing advertisements and placements that might not engage the intended audience, government agencies can shift audience sentiment through people-centric content that moves them. This helps residents engage in important initiatives that directly affect them and, in turn, drives them to act.

Create a marketing mix to reach your audience: The human connection, even in a digital world, should never be sacrificed. Reaching the desired audience can be accomplished by leveraging a variety of channels to push social marketing campaigns. The right technologies and strategies to create and deliver messages that influence behavioral change, not only help shift audience perception but also can play a pivotal role in solving social issues. Identifying the right channels and incorporating a strategy to influence behavior is critical to successful social marketing campaigns.

Engage residents through multiple touchpoints: Telling a story and providing valuable content with strategic posting makes an impact that drives change. Finding multiple ways to leverage different platforms can help government agencies reach and interact with a wider audience and, in turn, establish more moments to influence behavior. Reaching residents with relevant content at various stages of their customer journeys will raise awareness, inspire, and ideally spur problem-solving action.

Trend in action

USAID: Deloitte provides USAID's Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) with strategic communications, creative design, social content, and surge capacity support for its Feed the Future program. The team supports RFS's overall goal to strengthen resilience, food and water security, sanitation, and hygiene to sustainably reduce global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition through impactful storytelling of Feed the Future and USAID's global work. The team works to elevate RFS and Feed the Future's key communication products, including the initiative's bimonthly newsletter, annual progress report, social media, and website content. The team has drafted compelling narratives highlighting the stories of Feed the Future beneficiaries for these channels and has delivered more than eight social campaigns with more than 50 creative assets to supplement these stories and other initiatives.

Georgia's Office of Commissioner of Insurance and Safety Fire: Social marketing can be especially impactful when applied in fields that address social issues such as health care. The Deloitte Digital team collaborated with Georgia's Office of Commissioner of Insurance and Safety Fire (OCI) on a paid media campaign to encourage the uninsured population to enroll in affordable health care. To maximize campaign effectiveness, Deloitte took a data-driven approach to better understand the uninsured audiences, their pain points and behaviors, the channels they use, and how to best target them. Deloitte created 15- and 30-second video commercials and radio scripts to reach a mass audience across Georgia's broadcast TV and radio stations, cable, and streaming services. Print ads were created to reach more niche audiences across 12 newspaper publications. Social, digital, and search advertising was used to target more residents on a granular level based on their behavior and intent, while also testing multiple creative assets at a time. In just two-and-a-half months, the state recorded 236 million digital impressions and drove 334,000 unique users to GeorgiaAccess.gov. During Open Enrollment (OE) 2023, Georgia saw 879,000 plan selections (a 25% increase in enrollment on Healthcare.gov compared to OE22, which was double the national average year-over-year increase of 12.5%).

Trend 3:
Pushing the needle on effective communication with commercial creativity and innovation standards

The goal for all businesses and organizations, in both the private and public sectors, is growth. Creativity is the lens we use to analyze current challenges and identify innovative solutions for those challenges. Commercial industries have often run toward the latest and greatest technology using creative tactics, while the government has often been a slower adopter. Government agencies that begin to embrace commercial best practices will keep up with their industry counterparts and maintain the reach of their existing audiences while attracting new ones. Whether during a time of transition when government agencies need to develop new ways to reach residents, or in an economic downturn when residents need inspiration to find resilience, employing creative tactics using innovative tools will help government agencies amplify and extend their services in more deliberate ways.

Getting started

Create room for risk-taking: Government agencies are often seen as bureaucratic and risk-averse – a common barrier to innovation and creativity. In today's rapidly changing world, the most successful government agencies take risks to remain relevant and effective through the channels they advertise on and the types of content they produce. This means embracing a culture of learning and experimentation and encouraging disruptive thinking to come up with marketing and communications ideas that drive change and better serve the needs of target audiences.

Develop creative partnerships and collaboration channels: Teams and organizations can sometimes be limited by a singular perspective about existing challenges. When this occurs, government agencies can benefit from the perspectives and input of external stakeholders who are also invested in or stand to gain from the impact the government agency is seeking to make. Creative partnerships and collaboration channels can take many forms, including:

- **Joint research and development:** Government agencies can partner with external stakeholders to conduct research and development on solutions to challenges.

- **Co-creation:** Government agencies can partner with external stakeholders, including industry and academia, to co-create new products, services, or experiences.

- **Innovation labs:** Government agencies can establish innovation labs to foster collaboration with external stakeholders on new ideas and solutions.

By establishing creative partnerships and collaboration channels, government agencies can gain access to new perspectives, resources, and expertise. This can help them develop more innovative and effective solutions to marketing and communication challenges.

Trend in action

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: On March 11, 2020, after more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. The COVID-19 response has been the largest response to any disease outbreak in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) history. The government agency worked to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to protect people's lives and health. Its role in educating the American public is well understood. But as the pandemic unfolded, the CDC needed to explore and test new innovative ways to communicate COVID-19 guidance to as many international travelers as possible. Together with Deloitte, the CDC piloted geofenced messages to reach and teach as many travelers as possible about COVID-19, sharing lessons learned along the way that will inform future US public health responses.

The project started with primary and secondary research to charter the international travelers' journey once they arrived at a US air or land port of entry (POE) such as Chicago O'Hare International Airport and the US–Mexico San Ysidro Border Crossing. The research included literature reviews, analysis of historical flight and land travel data, focus groups, and surveys with target travelers and partners. Deloitte's analysis indicated that travelers prefer to receive personalized COVID-19 guidance iteratively throughout their journey with messaging that is tailored to their habits and preferences. As a result, Deloitte and the CDC concluded that a paid media outreach solution via social media and programmatic advertising, overlaid with geofence technology, was the best way to meet the CDC's goal.

The art direction for this outreach needed to be different, aspirational, and health-equity-focused, allowing audiences to see themselves in the creative. The use of bright colors evoked certain emotions and put forward authentic and transparent messages, so the branding was designed using lively, engaging colors that were whimsical and inspired feelings of excitement and hopeful anticipation, paired with modern, lively fonts. Maximalist iconography was also created to offer a playful combination when used with imagery. And the content was culturally competent to represent the diversity of travelers entering the United States. In total, more than 70 ads were designed that were engaging and motivational for travelers. Of the total ad set, 48 were in English and 37 in Spanish. Ad formats included still images, interactive graphics interchange formats (GIFs), polls, and video commercials.

As travelers entered the United States, they were served ads on social media apps, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, as well as on popular travel websites like WeatherBug, or gaming apps such as Words with Friends. In total, the CDC's messages reached more than 10.7 million unique travelers, generating 31.6 million impressions, and its programmatic pilot garnered a click-through rate (CTR) of 0.49%, which is above industry standards. This type of outreach was a significant step forward in helping the CDC launch industry best-practice marketing techniques to reach its target audiences by leveraging the power of innovative, public-facing, and multilingual products that reached people at the right place, at the right time, and in the right cultural context, using geofence technology.
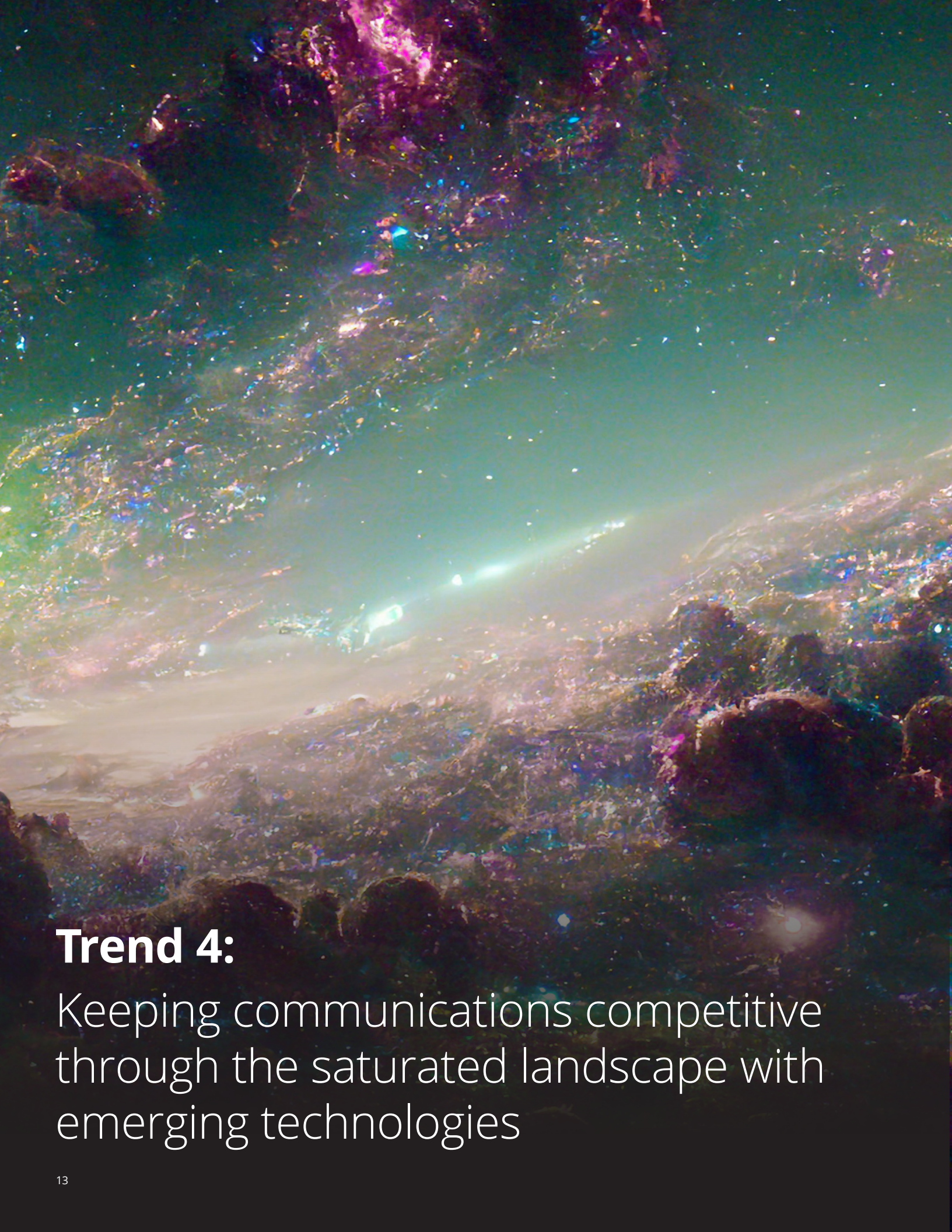
Trend 4:

Keeping communications competitive through the saturated landscape with emerging technologies

We're almost a quarter through the 21st century, and technological progress is doing anything but slowing down. Innovations, breakthroughs, and novel ideas dominate the headlines. Artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI, blockchain, cloud, the metaverse—they're not the future any longer—they're here. Government agencies can leverage these technologies to provide more targeted and optimized communications, aggregate and harness data for new ideas tailored specifically to the interests of the residents, and improve service delivery.

Getting started

Take advantage of the unprecedented opportunities: New technology offers the capability and capacity to perform tasks and make connections that traditional software and processes could not provide. In particular, the power of AI to pull disparate data and produce novel data-driven insights is groundbreaking. Utilizing these technologies gives government agencies the power to serve residents in ways that were previously unimaginable.

Establish meaningful connections: AI, cloud computing, and other new developments offer an answer to one of the greatest conundrums in marketing: how to personalize large-scale campaigns and predict effective marketing tactics that prioritize audience engagement. Prioritizing the wants and needs of audiences through meaningful content will not only help government agencies attract higher engagement but ultimately drive behavioral change. Prioritizing audiences to ensure they are receiving meaningful content is becoming much more effective, which will help government agencies just as much as their private-sector counterparts.

Proceed with (some) caution: Government agencies must make careful ethical considerations before and while rolling out any new capabilities. While all these technologies offer great benefits, there is evidence that these benefits may not be universally applicable. For example, facial recognition technology is less effective at recognizing transgender and nonbinary individuals, as well as people of color. These mistakes can often be harmful, considering that the technology is often used for security purposes. Similarly, the use of AI in hiring processes has also shown bias against certain marginalized groups.

Trend in action

Commonwealth of Kentucky: Deloitte is working with the Commonwealth of Kentucky in using cloud marketing technology to put food on the tables of those who need it the most. The Commonwealth received the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Progress and Technology Improvement Grant (PTIG) to use technology to improve the quality and efficiency of SNAP operations and processes. Deloitte has spearheaded a statewide matching and data filtering tool that would merge preexisting state data with available demographic data. The team combined existing data on current SNAP enrollees with data from HealthPrism™, a Deloitte program with a database of more than 1,700 Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) data points on more than 250 million adults in the United States. The two data sets combined identified that 39%, or around 500,000 of Kentucky adults, are likely eligible for SNAP benefits but not receiving any. After identifying a subset of that population to target for enrollment, the team utilized Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) to reach out to the prospective enrollees. SFMC delivers large-scale communications tailored to a recipient's preferences and behaviors. The entire subset was identified and received information about how to sign up for Kynect, Kentucky's benefits portal. As a result of these efforts, 12,000 Kentucky households have applied for SNAP through the PTIG project.

1 Forbes, "US Federal Customer Experience remains weak and uneven in 2019," December 13, 2019.

2 Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government,"
The White House, December 13, 2021.

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