

When Talking Becomes Doing: 4 Tech Issues We'll Recall in the Future

Paul W. Taylor | November 29, 2011

The Father Guido Sarducci principle, derived from a vintage *Saturday Night Live* sketch, holds that in five minutes you can learn everything you will remember about a given subject for five years, or in the case of the annual year-end column on the back page of *Government Technology*, about 500 words. The formula has worked surprisingly well over the years.

The tradition continues with this year's short list of things that we'll look back on and be glad we were paying attention to.

Less Is Less: The dismal science's long run continues as economists debate among themselves about double dips and the distinction between recessions and contractions. According to a recent estimate by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 42 states and the District of Columbia struggle to close another \$103 billion shortfall while revenues remain down 9 percent. Against that backdrop, public leaders are coming to terms with the reality that government's capacity to be the sole provider of services is permanently diminished, even as demand for those services is growing. To be clear, that's 103 billion reasons for government to look beyond itself for answers.

Code, Community and the Cloud: After a season of robust experimentation with code camps and contests, we have a keener sense of what works when it comes to useful and sustainable apps. The community grew up around activists intent on holding government accountable through greater transparency. It has been joined by commercial interests that are starting new businesses and providing services fueled by public records. These seemingly odd bedfellows are finding not just one another, but also the people — a.k.a. users or customers in the cloud — which provides a nimble, robust platform that can be deployed quickly and without a long-term commitment.

The Open Data Movement Isn't an Arms Race: A couple of years ago, the federal government's Data.gov repository launched with 39 data sets, which grew to 390,000 this fall. While not as pronounced, the numbers of data sets in state and local government have grown on a hockey stick-like curve. Surfacing data is good and noble, but it's worth asking about the possibility of malicious compliance. If the haystack grows, the needles become harder to find, even as jurisdictions can take credit for being unprecedentedly open and transparent. Yes, crowdsourcing is being used effectively in some cases to help clean up some of this data, but that doesn't remove government's responsibility to provide usable, contextualized, machine-readable information.

You Can See a Pin Drop: All data become more useful when tied to geographic references — that's true of expert GIS and consumer mapping alike. Dropping pins on

maps provides more evidence of that. Chicago added value to meeting schedules and itineraries by dropping pins on an online map to show where the mayor and council members have been. With a click, the map will show why, when and with whom. In Boston, the city invited mobile users to help decide where food trucks could do business by allowing them to drop pins to answer the question, "Where would you like to eat?" The exercise didn't replace the normal permitting process but focused it — all with tasty results.

A final note: This will be the last year-end reference in this column to mobile computing, because you should stop talking about something when everybody is doing it. And everybody is.

<http://www.govtech.com/e-government/When-Talking-Becomes-Doing-4-Tech-Issues-Well-Recall-in-the-Future.html>