

## Chicago's Digital Trio

Chad Vander Veen | February 29, 2012



For decades Chicago has been held up as a pre-eminent example of city government operating behind closed doors, amid an air of secrecy and corruption. But last year, Rahm Emanuel was elected mayor due partly to his commitment to change how city government works. .

To that end, Emanuel charged CTO [John Tolva](#), Chief Data Officer Brett Goldstein and Director of Social Media Kevin Hauswirth with using technology to revamp city operations and reshape public perception.

Tolva came to Chicago after serving as IBM's director of citizenship and technology. Goldstein, a former IT director for online restaurant reservation company OpenTable, became a Chicago police officer following 9/11, where he ascended to head of the Chicago PD's Predictive Analytics Group. And Kevin Hauswirth left his job teaching social media at Roosevelt University to join Emanuel's administration.

Not even a year later, thanks to the trio's efforts, the city has placed 200 data sets online, launched useful applications like [WasMyCarTowed.com](#) and [ChicagoBudget.org](#), grown the number of town hall meetings, and is launching Open311 — an online 311 platform on which residents “can openly exchange information centered around a single public issue,” according to Open311.org.

The city also announced a new “[snow portal](#)” at [ChicagoShovels.org](#), which features a real-time map tracker that plots the location of snowplows. It also offers preparedness apps for snow safety and readiness, weather reports, and 311 access. The portal proved popular with Chicagoans during an early January snowstorm.

“During this whole [snowstorm], we're tweeting with people and answering questions people had about, ‘Why is this thing over here? How is this working?’” Hauswirth said. “So as we turn the plow tracker on, now we're not only turning the plows on, we're turning on the conversation of how the snow program is working.”