

Overview

GobiernoUSA.gov is the official Spanish-language website and information portal of the United States government. It provides access to government services, transactions and information in Spanish through the World Wide Web, and is additionally intended to serve the Hispanic community by highlighting pertinent government programs and initiatives to Spanish-speakers. It was released on October 16 2003, and is managed by the U.S. General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies.

History

GobiernoUSA.gov was established in a joint-context: firstly, of the gradual espousal of online service delivery by the government in the early 2000s; and, secondly, of policy development that has sought to minimize discrimination and increase language access. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has the intention of minimizing discrimination by country of origin. In part for the purpose of enforcing this provision, Executive Order 13166 was signed by President Clinton in August 2000, and legally required government agencies to ensure that the services that they provide are meaningfully accessible to persons with limited English proficiency. This mandate of providing multi-lingual information on government services was reaffirmed in a 2011 Memorandum for the Heads of Federal Agencies from Attorney General Eric Holder. The 2011 Memorandum highlighted the importance of providing more equitable service access for both routine government matters and emergency government communications (such as for natural disaster and emergency preparedness), and cited the 2010 Decennial Census as evidencing the need for ensuring language access.

The government's Spanish-language web initiative was initially released as FirstGov en Español in 2003. The official October 16 2003 press release unveiled the service as a central portal for the then 28.1 million Spanish-speaking residents of the United States to access government information, communicate with government agencies, and complete official transactions, in their native Spanish language. Both the Spanish-language website and the English-language website, USA.gov, are managed by the U.S. General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies.

Rather than simply translating its English-language counterpart, the Spanish-language web initiative has sought to cater to the cultural sensitivities of the audience it serves. In 2005, a research effort was initiated - using surveys, Hispanic focus groups and public feedback, to increase the use of the website generally, as well as, in particular, the acceptance, credibility and trustworthiness of the website to the Spanish-speaking community. This research supported a name change for the website to GobiernoUSA.gov. In addition, the website was redesigned to include official government imagery and a color scheme that is distinct from the English-language website, and a new publication policy was developed which excluded linking to poorly machine-translated works. Through this research and resulting developments, it was intended to bring the website in line with the apparent cultural sensitivities of its Hispanic users.

Current functioning

The potential outreach of GobiernoUSA.gov is evidenced by the contemporary growth of the Hispanic population and the sizable proportion of that population which uses the Internet. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics became the largest minority group in 2000, and by 2010 came to represent 50.5 million people, or 16.3% of the total U.S. population. Moreover, the Pew Hispanic Center's 2010 report on Latinos and Digital Technology found that the Internet is accessed by 65% of Hispanics, generally, and 47% of Spanish-dominant Hispanics, in particular. Regarding online activity specifically, the Office of Citizen Services found in 2008 that social media sites are disproportionately engaged by Hispanics Internet users (77%) as opposed to Internet users from other groups (42%). In this context of unprecedented growth of the Hispanic population in the United States, which increased by over 40% in 10 years, facilitating interaction between the government and Spanish-speaking potential users has become increasingly relevant.

GobiernoUSA.gov leverages both its website and social media to attempt to serve this sizable and rapidly changing population in a language in which they are most comfortable. The website developed a social media strategy aiming, in addition to the basic objectives of the initiative, to expand awareness of the online availability of Spanish-language government services and to leverage networking features of social media platforms. GobiernoUSA.gov has accounts on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, allowing its users to interact with the government in an easier fashion. A smartphone version of the site was launched in 2011.

Although both GobiernoUSA.gov and USA.gov maintain a unified strategy when communicating to their respective audiences, GobiernoUSA.gov recognizes the particular needs of the Hispanic population. Both websites provide information about government programs and services, and offer a directory of local, state and federal government information. Yet GobiernoUSA.gov has adapted its content to offer targeted resources including immigration advice, visa services and access to residence forms. Additionally, it supports bi-lingual language education, and aims to increase the quality and quantity of Spanish-language content available on government websites.

Acknowledgment of American multiculturalism

As the official Spanish-language counterpart to the web-initiatives of the U.S. government, GobiernoUSA.gov is significant for the contemporary study of American multiculturalism. As Hispanics increasingly use the Internet, existing government services and information can be meaningfully complimented through online platforms. Equally significantly, the presence of a resource that is distinct from the English-language website may recognize the United States' society as being plural rather than monolithic. Electronic democracy initiatives that are tailored not only to a specific minority language, but additionally to cultural needs and sensitivities, evidence an important convergence of technological development in online government with recognition of the distinct civic needs of multicultural society.

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See Also: Hispanic; eGovernment ;

Further Readings

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