

About the Author

The author has a Masters in Information Science and a Bachelor in Electrical Engineering from the University of Brasília. She works as an auditor of Information Technology (IT) at the Brazilian Court of Audit (TCU). She previously worked at IBM Brazil for eight years.

She conducts IT audits in federal public administration companies and agencies. Her technical training in audit includes courses in systems audit at the *Contraloría General de la República* of Chile, at the British Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and at the Japan Board of Audit. In July 2000, she published the book: *Security and Audit of Information Technology*, by Axcel Books.

Author of several articles in the fields of information science and man-computer interaction, she developed researches about methods to evaluate usability. She also evaluates web pages and gives technical consultations in the area. In 2003, she published the book: *Usability of the Web creating more accessible pages*, by Alta Books.

Executive Abstract

Some experts define electronic government in terms of specific actions, such as receiving pieces of information about job offers, registering in Social Security, or paying taxes through the Internet. Others have a more comprehensive view and see electronic government as the automation of Government services to the citizen. The Gartner Group (2002), an institution in the field of computer science, defines electronic government as "the transformation of the internal and external relations of the public sector through operations made possible by the Internet and by IT and communication with the purpose of optimizing governmental services, participation of citizens, and internal governmental processes.

In many countries, implementation of electronic government is now being considered a priority public policy, involving solid investments in the development of services based on web technology. More than putting governments on the Internet, what is intended is to enable the population to enter the so-called information society. Due to a variety of technical, economical and political reasons, e-government initiatives take time to be implemented in their full capacity. The main benefits of e-government are, potentially, availability of new and better services for the citizen, improved public administration efficiency, greater transparency of government actions and more participation of citizens. On the other hand, its main challenges are the privacy and security of information, the disparities in the access of the population to IT, gaining the trust of the population regarding electronic services, and full comprehension of the issue of Web accessibility.

In the past few years, the Brazilian Federal Government has implemented a set of e-government projects and initiatives involving Public Administration, civil society, and the private sector. It is important to emphasize that, in addition to the Information Society Program officially launched in December 1999, there is growing concern regarding digital inclusion and Electronic Government policy in Brazil.

Similarly to other countries that have projects for the democratization of access to information of the use of digital technologies, the web portals of public sector agencies available to Brazilian citizens must be audited to ensure universalization and democratization of access to their information services. This work was the first of a series of actions that the Brazilian Court of Audit, as an external control institution, intends to perform to achieve these objectives.

The purpose of this preliminary survey was to collect data about the electronic government services and information made available to the Brazilian population through the Internet by the highest ranking agencies of the Judiciary, Executive, and Legislative Branches. Such information will be used to support future E-government audit works of the. to be promoted by Brazilian Court of Audit.

This study had no intention of judging the merit of visual presentation, content or quality of the information service provided by the agencies mentioned herein, in terms of efficiency, efficacy, and effectiveness. Such aspects will be object of analysis in future audits to be planned by the Court as a result of this mapping.

Visiting the homepages of 45 institutions during the month of February in 2004, the existence of elements connected to facility in accessing information (search tool, portal map, and accessibility) as well as those connected to communication between the user and the government (institutional information, "contact us", and privacy and security policy) were verified. Aspects regarding diffusion of news by the Government and diversity of services and information pointed out by links in the homepage were also included. In order to analyze the

type of service or information considered important by each institution the areas highlighted in their homepages were identified.

It was verified that the Brazilian citizen can use the Internet to register in Social Security, file income tax returns, monitor Court cases in which they are involved, follow Government news, report violations against public properties, send letters and telegrams, consult lists of generic medicines, consult phone fees, fares, fuel prices, and other services and information.

Finally, examination of portals demonstrated that some of the main challenges of the Brazilian electronic government are: to gain the trust of the population in electronic services by publicizing its policy of privacy and security; to entirely understand the matter of web accessibility, implementing the greatest number possible of accessible elements; and to point out with great precision, the services and pieces of information considered priorities by the citizens, emphasizing them in the homepages.