

introduction

Over the past 2 months INTEC has been carrying out a market research project to assess how local authorities are making their services accessible to the communities that they support.

The main focus of this research has been into the use of 'online' benefit claim forms.

'online' - A form that can be completed and submitted over the internet.

"The number of unemployed people increased by 88,000 over the quarter and by 677,000 over the year, to reach 2.47 million."

"18.3 million households in the UK (70 per cent) had Internet access in 2009"

- Office for National Statistics
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

In the current climate more and more people need access to benefits and it is down to every local authority in the country to ensure their customers have maximum access to these services.

questions

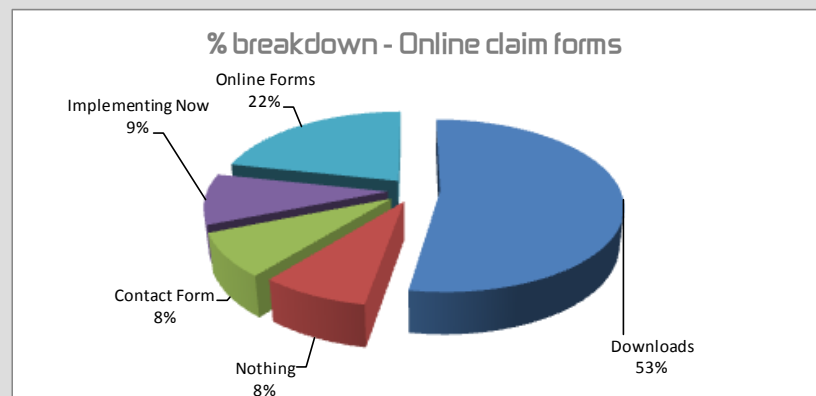
The first action was to look at various local authority websites to see what systems are currently in use. Those sites that did offer 'online' claim forms were noted and added to our list. We then contacted those local authorities that didn't appear to have an 'online' form. We advised them of our research and asked...

- ◆ Is an 'online' claim form something you have looked into?
- ◆ Why was the decision taken not to go ahead with an 'online' form? Was it an operational decision or were there other constricting factors?
- ◆ Is this something you are looking into in the future?

results

INTEC has taken these results and broke them up into 5 main categories...

- ◆ Online forms - The local authority has a 'live' online claim form in use
- ◆ Implementing now - They are implementing a new system in the 6 months
- ◆ Contact form - Customers can submit their details and request a form/visit/phone call
- ◆ Nothing - the local authority does not require any 'online' claim forms
- ◆ Downloads - Customers can download a PDF claim form and complete it by hand



As you can see from our findings, a massive 69% of all the local authorities' surveyed said they do not have an online claim form at the minute and are not in the process of implementing one.

Of that 69%, 8% said they had explored the possibility but a decision was taken not to implement any type of online service. This is because research into their customers needs had showed that there was not a requirement (e.g. areas heavily populated by over 60's).

This still means that nearly two thirds of the people we spoke to had looked at/wanted an online system but not taken it any further due to other constraints.

When we looked deeper into why online forms had not been implemented, the main reasons became very clear...

- ◆ The example costs involved in purchasing these systems was typically anything from £40K to £100K depending on the size of the authority in question.
- ◆ The complicated implementation meant that integrating the new system with their existing web site would impact heavily on IT support. In those local authorities with external IT contractors it meant thousands being added to the cost.
- ◆ Local authorities were not sure how many people would actually complete an online form so could not justify spending tens of thousands on a system that may not be used.

Whilst they are all different, all three reasons arrive at the same conclusion. In the current climate some local authorities just cannot justify spending tens of thousands of pounds on online forms. One benefits manager we spoke to said...

"It costs me around 31p per form to have my HCTB1 application printed, why would I spend £40,000 to £50,000 on a system that only a small percentage of customers would use"

