

# IT and the Government

✘ Earlier in the year, I wrote an article entitled Government at Work – Ain't It Grand?, about the inefficiency of any government activity. Although I'll have to admit the Department of Motor Vehicles has cleaned up its act and made things move along more smoothly, I stand by my words.

Recently, I read even more disturbing stories which reveal how incompetent the government is at almost everything it touches – and with a big price to the taxpayer.

Here's the perfect example. There's a federal jobs program called USAJob.gov which matched openings with applicants. Back in 2004, the feds outsourced USAJobs.gov to Monster.com. If you're unfamiliar with Monster.com, it's the market leader in online job search sites. But in a brilliant move, eighteen months ago, the Obama Office of Personnel Management decided the feds could do a better job and spent about \$6 million developing a new in-house version of the site.

Well, needless to say, the whole thing is a disaster. The volumes of requests crushed the government servers, slowed down the system and locked out thousands of applicants. Monster.com has "graciously" offered to host free job postings for federal agencies for a month as the government reboots its "improved" website.

My nephew who is an IT director at a very large software company wasn't surprised. While I don't fully understand how all this stuff works, he explained a lot to me and, even as simple-minded as I am when it comes to the workings of the internet, even I scratched my head at the government's stupidity.

Monster.com has spent untold amounts of money and time on their site to make it was it is. So what did the government think was wrong with how Monster.com was handling its website

that it believed it could do better? How did the Obama administration think they could improve on it? God only knows how much all this is costing the taxpayers!

Here's another example. The government apparently has an electronic green-card lottery system in place. This year, about 15 million people submitted entries to the lottery, which offers a quick path to permanent U.S. residence for 50,000 people selected randomly. Well, a recent report released by the State Department's Inspector General's office revealed a major screw-up, which affected thousands of the 22,000 people who had been notified they were in line for permanent U.S. residency through the annual May lottery. Apparently, the snafu resulted from a failure to test a new computer program wreaking havoc with people's lives. Government officials weren't aware of the problems "until after it failed and results had to be voided." The computer glitch caused 90% of the winners to be selected from applications received on the first two days, instead of from the entire 30-day registration period.

(By the way, the fact that 15 million people from around the world submitted entries for permanent U.S. residency should be startling news to those morons who think America is such a rotten place. Maybe we can trade some of those losers for some of the 15 million people who would be thrilled to be part of the 99% in the United States.)

Recently, I heard of a municipality that bought a software package that must "go live" on January 1, 2012. The municipality bought this very expensive software package for its financial, payroll and HR systems way in advance in order to be sure it's tested properly and all systems were be working perfectly by the first of the year. Unfortunately, it hired a consulting firm at the lowest bid (already a bad sign) that didn't know what they were doing. Everything got behind, and now if they can't go live by the first of the year, the damages are incalculable. The municipality now has to cut

corners because it's committed to the January 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. In order to make that deadline, they're not sufficiently testing the system to ensure that everything will work as expected. We'll see in January if people are receiving their paychecks.

In January 2008, King County (Seattle) announced that after approximately 2 to 3 years and \$38 million, the County's SAP initiative "blew up" creating a "political maelstrom." (My nephew decided I'd heard enough about IT, SAP, and the rest when he saw my eyes glaze over.)

More horror stories about the government's IT failures, including the FBI, IRS and problems with the southern border fence, can be read here if you have the stomach for all this waste of money.

My nephew assures me that private companies have problems too. As far as I'm concerned, private companies aren't using my money. But that's just me.

From a professional's point of view, analyst Tom Foristell, "software implementations fail for a variety of causes and factors in both the private and public sectors. Failed government ERP software implementations often exhibit strong negative organizational cultures, turf wars and deep rooted politics which collectively challenge even the most well managed ERP implementations. While software technical challenges generally play a contributing role in implementation failures, the catastrophes are exacerbated by inexcusable executive leadership, insufficient project management and denial of the facts."

When it's not your money, you just don't care. That's my opinion of the government.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.