Berlin Manifesto: Government services 2.0
Better public service provision in the information society!

1. Basic provision and open access

Open access to the Internet is now an essential feature of any information society. Not having Internet access means being excluded from vast areas of social and family life, being unable to avail oneself of educational opportunities and access information, and being excluded from the democratic process – both in one's private and working life.

Everyone – whether urban or country dweller, rich or poor, disabled or able-bodied – needs access to the Internet, with enough bandwidth. In order to avoid a "digital split" in the world of work and society we need to:
Redefine the concept of basic provision, guaranteeing access for all by ensuring that "human-to-human" services are maintained and that all persons in the world of work have intra- and Internet access.

2. Knowledge shared is knowledge multiplied

Education and access to knowledge are increasingly important basic rights. New technologies have made it significantly easier to access and exchange information and knowledge. We want to secure, use and expand these opportunities for social, economic and cultural participation.

Calculated curtailment of the wealth of information available, the introduction of technical barriers and the creeping privatisation of public knowledge bases is an offence against the public. Democratic participation in public life demands free access to knowledge bases.

Laws must be framed in such a way that they do not hinder the sharing of knowledge and culture but promote it. Open-source licences such as the Creative Commons and GNU General Public Licence must ensure that community assets are safeguarded against appropriation by private interests.

3. No privatisation of public goods in cyberspace

Public records, libraries, museums and other cultural establishments belong to everyone – and so do the digitised forms of their holdings and treasures. They must not be sold or handed over to private concerns.

Things that were funded from the public purse or out of subsidies must be freely accessible to the general public and should, as the new technologies evolve, also be made publicly available in their digital form and for the most part free of charge.

4. More self-government and public control

Many European countries have a long tradition of public service provision, promoting social achievements such as social coherence and equality of opportunity. Implementation of the EU Services Directive must not allow self-government and the democratic control of public entities to be undermined.

In the information society too, officialdom must continue to ensure basic provision out of public resources. Outsourcing, privatisation and 'public-private partnerships' (PPP) often mean that self-government and control are handed over to private concerns, allegedly for reasons of 'maximising efficiency' or 'cutting costs' – often with consequences that are unacceptable to the wider public.

With regard to IT, officialdom must be able to judge what it buys, estimate costs realistically in order to avoid disastrous investments and, where necessary, provide services itself. To that end it needs enough skilled (IT) personnel. A shortfall of technical competence in-house would create a huge degree of dependence on the private sector. That would be problematic for control and for democracy.

5. Reliable democratic methods and standards

Transparent procedures and trustworthy information sources are a central pillar of eGovernment. We must not allow government administrative processes to become obscure and hard to scrutinise because they are communicated electronically. That applies both to technical and organisational aspects.

Three essential areas:
1. Citizens must be able to have confidence in the electoral process. As things stand, electronic voting would mean that they were forced to relinquish all scrutiny of the procedure, simply hoping that the computer would pass on their voting intentions as expressed.

2. A municipality's website is a virtual 'city gate'. Selling it or ceding a majority of it to private operators wipes public space from the Internet. The site's commercial content must not be greater than the public-sector information and material provided; the city's Internet presence must not be reduced to a small corner of a media conglomerate. If the site was hosted by a private provider it would be very difficult to distinguish between commercially motivated content and official information provided in the common interest.

3. Call centre or electronic citizens' forum – if a member of the public contacts the public authorities, whether by phone or email, he has to be confident that he really is talking to public officials.

In order for democratic standards and structures to be reliable, public content must be clearly distinguishable from private content, and public content must be transparent and from a trustworthy source.

6. eGovernment with open standards

The technical interface with government must be such that members of the public do not have to make their own computer equipment compatible with specific (proprietary) hardware or software products in order to access public content.

eGovernment needs net-neutrality and open standards, for example as regards document formats, signatures and software applications. Only with these in place can technical interaction be problem-free and commercial providers allowed to compete.

Digital infrastructures of the state must not become dependent on manufacturers. eGovernment applications must be constructed on a technical base that is transparent, reliable and open to democratic scrutiny, and they must not cause any curtailment of self-government.

7. Safeguarding critical infrastructures

Nuclear power stations, hospitals or Hartz IV benefit payment offices – the use of ICT must not in itself form a threat to these facilities (hackers, viruses, etc.), and facilities providing basic services must not be so reliant on ICT that they could no longer function in the event of a protracted power failure, for example.

Technical malfunctions (for example computers being down when Hartz IV benefits were due for payment) have already prompted some local authorities to install manual back-up systems. It is important, in the social sector too, to identify 'critical infrastructures' and provide alternatives to digital work processes where appropriate.

8. Proper data protection and identity safeguards
All forms of data misuse in both public and private sectors must be made illegal and there must be appropriate technical and organisational measures to prevent it. Examples of such abuse include the disclosure and sharing of personal data for marketing purposes and personal profiling, etc. Electronic snooping on workers must be punished, and the Employee Data Protection Act must be brought into effect at last.

In all collection and storage of personal data the principle of 'data thrift' must be observed; in some cases there must be no electronic recording of data at all. There must be no storage of data and no online searching, existing databases must be scaled down, and privacy (in people's private and work lives) must be guaranteed. The private citizen must have the last word on how his or her personal data are used. The 'basic right to self-determination with regard to data processing, as upheld by the Federal Constitutional Court, is indispensable in the information society.

9. eDemocracy for the workforce, greater co-determination
eDemocracy must also apply to the providers of government services:
A democratic society needs co-determination and freedom of association. The relevant laws – Staff Councils Act (BetrVG), Federal Staff Representation Act (BPersVG), *Land* Staff Representation Act (LPersVGs) – must be strengthened and brought into line with the information age. Current adverse developments must be corrected.

Freedom of association and the right to engage in trade union activity must be preserved, in an electronically networked world where the organisation of work has changed. When the notice board is shrouded in cobwebs and work is increasingly decentralised, it is vital that employees, staff committees, works councils and trade unions are able to access the intranet and email systems of government departments and corporations. All employees need free and uncensored Intra- and Internet access.

10. Public service provision must not be left to IT lobbyists
Planning of public ICT infrastructure and the framing of legislation for the world of work and society generally must not be put in the hands of IT lobbyists. We need to (re-)build structures that are not profit-driven but designed to serve the common interest. For that we need committed media-savvy politicians and citizens. Shaping society along socially responsible lines also means better public service provision in the information society!

This Manifesto, released at the end of the ver.di conference on 'Government services 2.0', is designed to stimulate political debate. We welcome your comments and suggestions at www.governet.de/9/, where you can discuss and sign this Manifesto.

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Initial signatures:

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You can join and sign the Berlin Manifesto: www.governet.de/9/