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Social Media Revolution Changing the Face of Governance in Maharashtra



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eGov will Hinge on SMAC

SMAC is the way for everything - be it governance, rolling out of services or a task as simple as changing a name, says **Rajesh Aggarwal** in an interview with **Kartik Sharma** of ENN

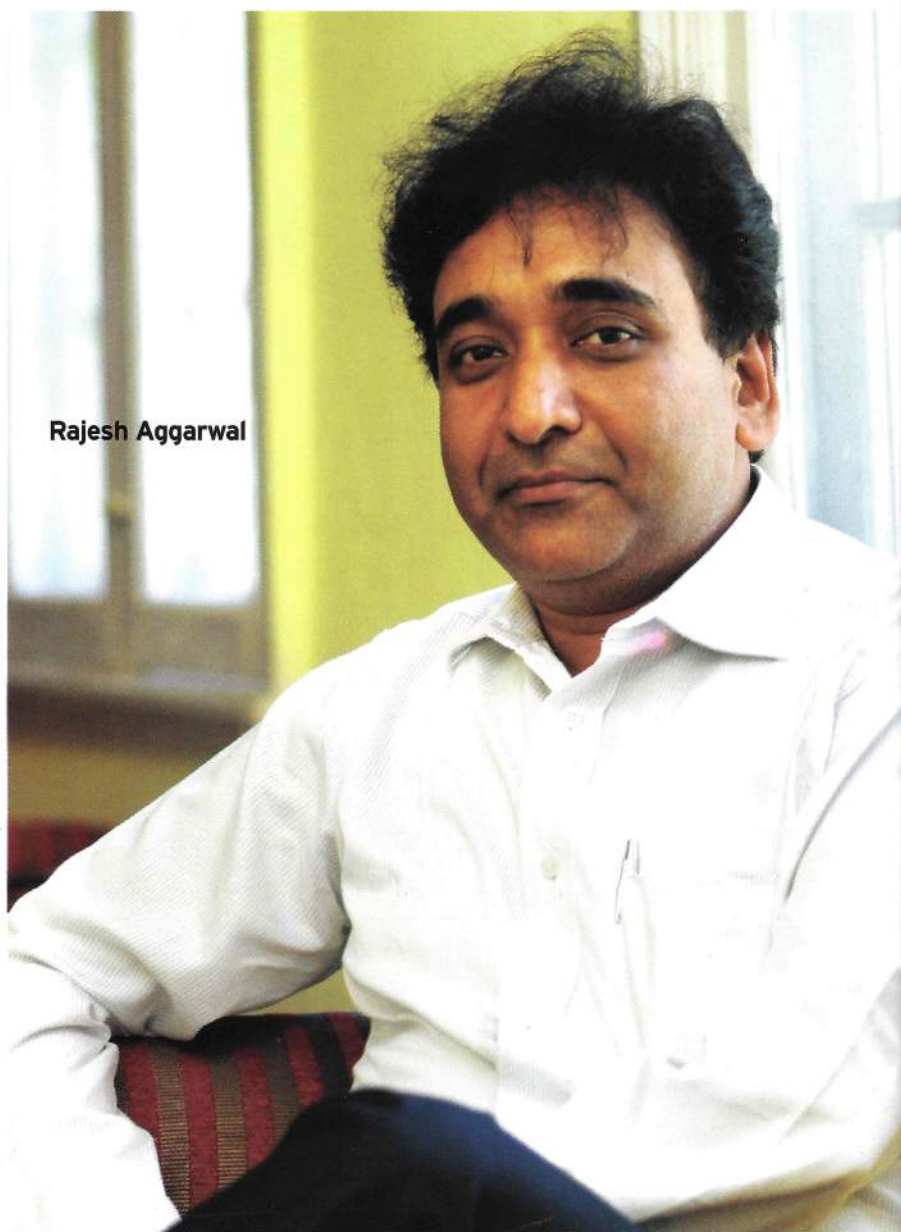
The Maharashtra Government is one of the early adopters of modern technologies. How is the government leveraging technologies like Social Media, Mobility and Cloud for e-governance?

SMAC (Social, Mobility, Analytics and Cloud) is no longer a buzz word as it is being used at various levels. Starting with Social, nowadays it has been seen that Mantralaya employees use Whatsapp as an office tool; they share their work-related queries on a groups created in it and also share personal info, jokes, stories etc. Through this, we have seen, not only work efficiency but also the personal bonding between employees increases.

After the general elections, government employees also realised the benefits of social marketing which was previously considered a private sector affair. As a result, at all the levels in government, there is an awakening that they can also use social media to interact with the citizen, listen to their issues, find solutions and do more.

What is your take on this new age of mGovernance? What is the acceptance of mobility in the government sector?

Mobility starts with a simple mobile application, like an SMS. There are approx five lakh candidates applying for police, another nine lakh applying for ITI and thousands of people taking part in the MHADA lottery. For them



Rajesh Aggarwal

to receive a confirmation SMS of their application, whether they are successful or unsuccessful in their attempt, is a huge relief.

In the near future, we will see mobile-based citizen-centric apps for easier access to services. mGovernance will be making its mark in the near future, so it is necessary to design websites for mobiles, not for desktops.

Maharashtra is one of the early birds to fly in the Cloud. What have been state's achievements in terms of cloud computing?

Yes, coming to the Cloud, we are running the best cloud infrastructure in any government in the country. Our data centers are almost 100 percent on the Cloud, we are using physical servers to a bare minimum and we are also able to give a department a virtual machine in flat two to three minutes, which was previously not possible. We also have a cloud burst system that if in a situation there are too many hits on something, we automatically cloud-burst on the nearby BSNL data center where we only pay for the time we use their virtual machines.

Another example is of the Employment Exchange Commission of Maharashtra. They had a Rs 30-crore project of computerising all the employment exchanges. We used the Cloud to cut down their costs and reduced the costs to five crores. And, in a matter of four months the software was rolled out. This initiative helped nine lakh candidates, instead of the previous three lakh, applying online for ITI admissions. So the Cloud saves money not only in costs but also in rolling out a project.

Introduction of new eGovernance technologies also involves large-scale capacity-building exercise. Tell us about such initiatives in the government sector.

It's a mixed bag, and I would not say that Maharashtra rules the roost here. My belief is that aspirations of the younger generation — which is tech savvy, believes that the need to stand in queues is over and delves into a thought like if a pizza can be delivered home, then why not a driving licence or a passport — would drive the way the government is supposed to deliver services.

Over 80 percent of Maharashtra is covered under the Aadhaar



scheme. Tell us about the further plan of the government in terms of UID enrolment.

Going back, when the Supreme Court ordered that it was not mandatory for departments to share data with each other, our backend came in handy and the order did not affect us much. We are still the only state to have our own eKYC platform where a person puts in his UID No. and finger print, and gets a YES or a NO answer confirming or disapproving his ID.

We've integrated this with a lot of our services. For example, previously, if a tenant were



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to vacate a rented apartment in search of a new one, both the owner and the tenant had to visit the registry office to submit their papers, and spend time and money for obtaining another piece of paper. For that, we have provided centers around Maharashtra which would enable the owner and the tenant to do the changes from the comfort of their home. Through this, we plan to bring transparency, accessibility, authenticity — all from one's home.

You have always been an advocate of encouraging startup companies, and small and medium scale enterprises. How is the government engaging the private sector for state's development?

When we were starting on NeGP, we wanted the work to be done by the best IT companies in India, which at that time were Wipro, NIIT, TCS etc. But there were some other IT companies also that had benefitted through outsourcing. So, through multiple levels of outsourcing

our project was completed. Currently, we are engaged with Nasscom to reach out to more smaller players.

If you see our latest RFP for mobile apps, you would find that we've also mentioned that college kids could also make apps for us. The reason is that a big company would do it for something around Rs 10 crore, while a college-going kid would do for Rs 50,000...and I am not joking.

What are the challenges you face in getting the departments e-Ready?

I feel that authorities lack in making their employees aware about the parameters determining the success of a project... If a project is smart and provides benefits to both citizens and government, we do not see much resistance. Sometimes the vendor and government's ways

of working do not match and that also determines the success of a project. Also, we see at times that there are transfers of officials in between the project, so a new official might say that he wants this to go this way, and that delays the project.

For this we are trying to sensitise the consultants who provide documentation in such a way that lots of stakeholders know the way you want to make things work, so that later on changes in the management process is clear and the vendor straight away starts work after getting the order.

How do you visualise eGovernance for Maharashtra in the coming years?

About three to four months back we circulated a list of priority projects for all the departments which sets the tone for the next five to 10 years. If even 70 to 80 percent of these projects get completed in the next five years, the state will continue to retain its number one position in terms of eGovernance in the country. 