

Statement

Of

Robert Pinkerton

Director, Public Sector Solutions

Adobe Systems, Inc.

Before the

U.S. Senate

Homeland Security & Government Affairs Committee

Sub-Committee on

**Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal
Services & International Security**

March 23rd, 2010

Mr. Chairman & members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Rob Pinkerton and I'm Director of Public Sector solutions at Adobe Systems. Adobe is a 27-year-old U.S.-based software firm with development and business centers in California, Washington, Massachusetts, Utah, New York, Minnesota and Virginia. At Adobe we are excited about the opportunity that open government represents to vitalize the operations of government as never before. We believe that opportunity resides within the public servants of our governing institutions and the citizens they serve, and it can be unlocked by technologies evolving before our eyes. My remarks today will focus, not on technology, but on how we can best enable people to effectively utilize these new technological resources to provide transparency and improve the discrete missions of government.

Technology is a Vehicle, Not a Destination

With mass adoption of low cost, easy to use computing devices and pervasively available computing infrastructure, individual technology users have become empowered to participate in the administration of government like never before. But with this phenomenon comes a dizzying array of new technologies, seemingly new decisions and creative vocabulary for government managers to consider. The President has appointed new leadership to guide the government through these decisions and I applaud the effort. Adobe is pleased to see such clear prioritization of technology as a means to government success and fully supports the open government strategy. The balance of my remarks will be focused on suggesting frameworks and priorities the Administration and Congress can use to build upon the existing Directive and take open government to the next level.

I think that it is important to clarify that specific technology use is not the ultimate destination of open government, but rather a potential vehicle to accelerate down our path to the destination of openness and accountability. I was recently asked by a government manager in Richmond, VA how she could solicit a following on Twitter. I asked her what she wanted people to follow, and she said she wasn't sure. I asked her why she wanted to use Twitter and she said because she wanted to be transparent. I asked her what she wanted to make transparent and she also wasn't sure. But she was sure Twitter was a part of the solution. While Twitter may or not have been a part of the ultimate solution, I do not think this is the way to view open government. The discrete missions of government agencies are still the same and the needs of the constituents they serve are unique. There is no one size - or one technology decision - that fits all. The open government strategies used by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid services to become more transparent to their beneficiaries over the age of 65 may be significantly different than those employed by the Department of Veteran Affairs to serve young service men and women returning from the Middle East, because their individual technology choices and needs may be

significantly different. For open government to be achieved, technology should be adopted that specifically amplifies the discrete missions of government. Publishing information and adopting technology for the sake of openness misses the broader opportunity of open government. Providing transparency into the components of federal spending programs to help those in need is valuable; providing transparency to enable access to those programs to those who actually depend upon them is critical. For example, an American who is out of work wants openness applied to program options and decision criteria for obtaining unemployment insurance, food stamps, job training and energy assistance, more so than an evaluation of funding priorities in the Jobs bill.

Encourage Innovation, Permit Imperfection

To enable the individuals to leverage new technologies in pursuit of the core missions of government requires leadership to encourage innovation and permit imperfection. The pace of technological change and the relative patience of techno-enabled citizens does not accommodate the traditional risk-averse technology adoption model typified by the multi-million dollar, multi-year outsourced mega project that is often times outdated on the first day of its delivery. Bottom-up innovation may contrast with the stereotype of the government. Risk aversion has traditionally ruled the technology procurement cycle because technology costs were high and skills limited. But the progress of technology offers opportunities for government to empower its community to innovate and deliver collaborative capabilities more quickly than the current system. Successes can be copied, failures abandoned at much lower cost than giant mega-tech projects designed, or too often mis-designed, for entire agencies. Government managers will decide the goals of development, but they need not dictate how the advances are achieved. A change in incentives empowered through technology can mold a cultural climate empowering government workers to take responsibility through technology.

I see this every day because of open government: Public employees formerly locked into bureaucracy are becoming the public servants they truly want to be. At the U.S. State Department, two innovative public servants conceived the Co.nx program with only a few thousand dollars, a passion for public diplomacy and a keen understanding of the ubiquitous reach of video technology. A year later they manage a weekly collaborative and open dialogue reaching tens of thousands of people around the world and showcasing American ideals from the President to the Secretary of State to senior officers in the Department.

Innovative leadership can inspire collaborative action through technology use. I recently sat on a panel with one such leader at the Department of Health and Human Services who helped conceive Flu.gov to inform the public of details of the influenza outbreak. I was delighted to hear how she collaborated with NOAA to leverage their weather information distribution network to

reach more citizens about outbreaks. This didn't require programmatic permission; it required an understanding of how openness can amplify mission success, and a permission to innovate towards those goals. Similarly, USSOUTHCOM recently repurposed its real time collaboration system to aid the response effort in Haiti. The action did not fall within the core mission of the military, but its technical capacity to respond was the best option and it felt accountable to act. This is the behavior open and transparent government can enable.

But these examples are exceptions more than the norm. I recently commissioned a survey of U.S. Federal executives and found that the majority of Federal leaders support open government and believe that it can advance mission success. But an equivalent majority does not feel they are able to actually do so because of cultural resistance and requirements for information control.

Recommendations for Evaluation

As you evaluate programs and priorities to leverage technology to change the way government interacts with Citizens and making agencies more transparent and accountable, I'd encourage you to consider three criteria we believe are critical to success.

- **Align to mission strategy:** Government agencies should open government priorities to mission strategy and support the fabric of mission success. This is a core element of the Open Government Directive but one that cannot be overemphasized. What works for one agency may not work for another. And technology adoption for the sake of technology adoption is not a recipe for success. Application of technology to discrete mission problems and support for specific agency constituencies and beneficiaries will yield positive results.
- **Encourage rapid adoption.** If a technology project takes longer than 18 months to deploy, it is likely that the project doesn't understand its users and will be obsolete when deployed. Entire technology industries have been built in this much time. Agencies should be encouraged to leverage ubiquitous infrastructure and incubate solutions in a more decentralized model to allow for innovation and to permit imperfection.
- **Require clear understanding of individual needs for technology use:** Technology procurements that don't consider and understand the needs of their end user community are doomed to fail. Agencies that do understand how their communities interact and consume information will reduce risk and enable innovation. Every program that solicits technology investment should be required to evaluate and serve the technology touch points of their target community.

Closing

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. By making this topic a priority, I believe the committee is advancing the opportunity of open government and demonstrating to public servants and citizens that our leadership is committed to improving the operations of government through the appropriate use of technology. I welcome the committee's questions.