

# Government On-Line Research Panel – Results from the Third Online Survey (December 2003)

## Executive Summary

### Background

In support of the Government of Canada's service vision, which is to have its most frequently used services online and realize a 10% increase in citizen satisfaction with government service delivery by 2005, the federal government has engaged Phase 5 to refresh and maintain the Government Online Research Panel over the next 1-2 years.

This report presents the findings from the third survey conducted with Government Online Research Panel members. A total of 6,727 panelists completed the third survey.

The margin of error for overall results is estimated to be +/-1.16%, slightly higher for audience sub-groups.

### Key Findings

#### Overall assessment:

Taking a view of the results overall, it seems that, among members of the Government Online Research Panel the government's performance to date on the GOL initiative is positive and the future bright, based on the following evidence:

- 70% agree that the Government of Canada is using new and innovative ways to provide information
- the perceived benefits of the GOL initiative appear to be reasonably well understood, and agreement that GOL will result in faster service, represents good value for tax dollars and will raise awareness of how government works has increased considerably over the past year
- a majority of visitors to GoC sites were satisfied with their most recent visit and were able to 'get what they needed'
- panel members see a big role for the internet in providing government information and services in the future
- panel members living outside Canada consistently offered higher ratings for all aspects of eGovernment covered in the survey

#### Attitudes towards GOC Information and Service Delivery:

Respondents indicated that the Government of Canada is delivering services and information in a respectful way and that they are using new and innovative ways to provide information. Slightly less strong agreement was found concerning the reliability of information and services and, in particular, the ease of contacting the GoC for information and services.

#### Perceived Benefits of the Government On-line Initiative:

- Support for GOL is strong, particularly among GoC Website Recruits, younger respondents, more experienced Internet users and those living outside of Canada.
- A majority believe that GOL will increase Canadians' ability to contact government, result in faster service and represents good value to tax dollars. Many also believe that GOL will improve the quality of government service, raise public awareness of how government works and provide services that benefit all Canadians.
- There has been a considerable increase from 2002 to 2003 in the sizes of the groups that agree that GOL will result in faster service, who think it will be good value for tax dollars and who believe GOL will raise public awareness of how government works.

#### **Government of Canada Web Sites – Motivation, Access and Satisfaction:**

- Most panelists access government web sites through a bookmark, an Internet search engine or by typing in the URL. A large majority of respondents found it easy to access GoC sites.
- Respondents are visiting GoC web sites primarily to obtain general information, to find an answer to a specific question or to search for a job. Only a very small proportion are visiting sites to complete a transaction (e.g. completing a form online) or to participate in citizen engagement.
- A large majority of respondents were satisfied with their most recent visit to a government of Canada web site.
- Difficulties encountered were most often related to finding information (navigation, inefficient search engines) as opposed to content issues or technical problems. Improvements in these areas could increase overall satisfaction scores.

#### **Ideas for New Information / Services**

- Expectations are high about the amount of information to be provided on specific topics. Visitors to Government of Canada sites are looking for depth. Key areas in which the available information could be expanded include employment, education, immigration and business opportunities.
- Panel members would like to see more government programs allowing online completion of forms / applications and greater access to personal information to allow address changes, etc.

#### **Canada Site Home Page Design Enhancements:**

Apart from some very specific modifications, the current design of the Canada Site Home page was preferred to other options presented.

#### **Top Menu Bar:**

- The top menu bar on Government of Canada web sites is highly visible and widely used, particularly the 'search' button. There was no strong preference for the labeling of the link to the Canada Site.

#### **Web Site Guides / Virtual Tours:**

- Half of respondents have used an online guide or virtual tour on other web sites, but use is typically infrequent and based largely on needing help. Moderate interest was found for including such a feature on the Canada Site, particularly among less experienced Internet users and less frequent visitors to GoC Web sites.

### **Handheld Wireless Devices and Government Information**

- Just over one-quarter of respondents (28%) indicated that they have used a wireless device to connect to the Internet.
- Some 83% of respondents have an interest in accessing Government of Canada information over a wireless device, and priorities include information that assists users in contacting government, and information one might have a need to access while traveling, such as weather updates, boarder wait times and passport services.

### **The Future of Government Service Delivery**

- Respondents believe the GoC should give citizens' guidance at first point of contact on the best method to obtain information or services they need, should partner with other levels of government to integrate service offerings, and should provide more enhanced, comprehensive and integrated services over the Internet while continuing to offer information and services through other channels.
- Respondents are concerned that a greater focus on the Internet as a channel for communication and service delivery will exclude many citizens from interactions with government. There was moderate support, however, for positioning the Internet as the main channel for citizen engagement. Consistent with this, a majority of respondents would feel comfortable providing their contact information in this setting for further exchange of information.
- Moderate support was found for promoting the Internet as a self-service channel and for greater sharing of client-government interaction information across programs, departments and agencies among certain groups and for specific purposes.
- Many had concerns with using pop-up banners on government Web sites to bring news or services to citizens' attention or partnering with the private sector for service delivery.

### **Opportunities / Future Directions**

Based on these results, and Phase 5's experience gained through numerous other projects conducted with users of Government of Canada Web sites, the following items are put forward as opportunities / future directions for GOL:

- A noticeable increase in perceived benefits of Government-on-Line was detected over the past year, but a clear warning signal not to pursue the Internet at the cost of other channels, at least at this point in time, was noted.
- Greater bundling of online services, including across levels of government, and the promotion of the Internet as a self-service channel, are welcomed.
- Proceed with caution on service delivery partnerships with the private sector. While support is strong for greater integration of services across levels of government, this is considerably less the case for partnerships with the private sector.
- Moderate levels of confidence in privacy protection and support for greater sharing of client-government interaction information across programs, departments and

agencies were found, although some concerns do remain. Still, opportunities would appear to exist for data sharing for specific purposes among specific groups in an effort to improve service delivery. Further investigation of the conditions under which this would be appropriate is warranted in a qualitative setting.

- Satisfaction with government services (online and offline) is moderately high, but the survey does seem to suggest there is room for improvement, particularly in the area of access / ease of contacting.
- As search engines continue to be a key source of referrals to government sites, particularly for first-time visitors, continue to monitor and seek ways to improve performance on major ones including Google, MSN.ca, Yahoo, etc.
- Continue the practice of periodically conducting usability testing on individual sites. While satisfaction with some of the more popular GoC sites is relatively high, some 26% of visitors encounter 'some difficulty' and in almost half of cases the issue is one of usability.
- Currently the large majority of visits to GoC Web sites are in search of information. Given the broad range of opportunities available for transacting online and participating in the public policy process, consider greater promotion of these other uses.
- Visitors continue to request greater depth and specificity in the content on specific topics including employment, education, immigration and business opportunities.
- The 'Search' button on the top menu bar is very commonly used by visitors to GoC sites, and some difficulties were found with this feature. Refining and improving the ability of keyword searches to direct users to specific content on individual sites should be a priority.
- Avoid the use of pop-ups to communicate with online with GoC site visitors.
- Moderate interest in the introduction of an online guide/virtual tour on the Canada Site warrants further exploration of this concept in a qualitative research setting prior to additional investment.
- Growing use of wireless and current and future interest in accessing certain government information using a hand-held device supports the continued development of a limited set of offerings through this channel. Specifically, there is a demand for information that assists users in contacting government, and information relevant to travel, such as weather, boarder wait times and passport services.