

Government On-Line Research Panel – Results from the Seventh Online Survey (January 2006)

Executive Summary

Background

The federal government has maintained a Government Online Research Panel since 2001 in support of the Government of Canada (GoC)'s service vision, which includes bringing its most frequently used services online and to achieve citizen satisfaction targets related to government service delivery. The panel is used to consult with Canadian Internet users, including users and non-users of government Web sites, at periodic intervals on issues related to eGovernment. Phase 5 was hired in June 2003 and again in June 2005 to refresh and maintain the panel for a two-year period.

This report presents the findings from the seventh survey conducted with Government Online Research Panel members. A total of 6,547 panelists completed the seventh survey. The margin of error for overall results is estimated to be +/-0.99%, somewhat higher for most audience sub-groups.

Key Findings:

Evaluation of Panelists Most Recent Visit to a GoC Web site

Similar to findings in previous panel surveys, most panelists (70%) had visited a Government of Canada Web site within a month of completing the survey. The majority of panelists are visiting Government of Canada Web sites with an information need, such as to obtain general information or an answer to a specific question. Many are also visiting GoC sites to search for a job. A relatively small proportion are visiting GoC Web sites to complete a transaction or access a personal account. However, conducting transactions and accessing personal information is steadily trending upward. There are still very few panelists visiting Government of Canada sites to participate in citizen engagement. It is interesting to note that a strong majority did not use other ways (i.e. in addition to accessing the internet) to contact the GoC related to the purpose of the most recent visit.

A large majority of panelists indicated overall satisfaction with their most recent visit. However, there has been a slight decrease in satisfaction since Survey 5. The decreased satisfaction is more evident when examining different aspects of the most recent visit. Of the 13 elements that are being tracked by the GOL Panel Survey only 'ease of completing an online form / application' showed a positive increase. The remainder remained the same or declined. Ease of applying for a job online, purchasing goods or services and submitting your tax return declined by 4% or more.

The number of respondents who stated they had encountered some difficulty (19%) has remained steady since Survey 5. As in previous surveys, difficulties encountered were primarily related to navigation. However, there has been a slight increase in navigation issues since Survey 5. On the other hand, those reporting difficulties related to missing or unclear content and issues with the search engine has declined.

Perceived Benefits of the Government Online Initiative

As with Surveys 1, 3 and 5 this research included a series of statements to indicate the perceived benefits of the GOL initiative. While support for GOL remains solid, there appears to be a slight decrease in the perceived benefits of GOL since Survey 5. Again, it is interesting to note that all of the 7 statements used to test reactions to GOL declined slightly. This being said a solid majority of panelists believe that information obtained from GoC Websites is trustworthy, GOL will increase Canadians' ability to contact government and result in faster service. They are least likely to agree that GOL will raise public awareness of how government works. Agreement that GOL will be good value for tax dollars experienced the largest decrease (from 65% to 60%).

Overall Experience with the CRA Web site

Just under half of all panelists had visited the CRA Web sites since January 1, 2005 and a strong majority of these were repeat visitors having visited the site 2 to 5 times. The majority of panelists also had a positive experience finding information or completing tasks on the CRA site as 80% stated they were able to find all or most of the information they were looking for. It is important to note that almost one third did 'have to call or visit the CRA because they were unable to complete a task online'. However, the research does indicate that this was more prevalent among those who tend to use / prefer other channels.

When asked to provide feedback on overall satisfaction with the CRA web, the results are moderately positive. Respondents were most likely to agree that the information is useful and understandable. However, there was less agreement that the information is complete and that it was easy to find what they were looking for.

Service Canada

Respondents were asked a series of questions to explore familiarity with, and impressions of, Service Canada. Knowledge of Service Canada remains weak as 74% indicated they had 'never heard of Service Canada' or 'had heard the name, but did not know anything about the organization'. However, this has decreased significantly (9%) since Survey 6. Lack of awareness was more pronounced among members of the Household Internet Panel. Notwithstanding the increased familiarity with Service Canada, there appears to be increased confusion as to the impact Service Canada will have on how services will be delivered to Canadians. Only 43% percent of respondents stated service delivery would be different through Service Canada which is an 11% decrease since Survey 6. Survey 7 panelists were also less likely to indicate that Service Canada has (will) improved how the Government of Canada delivers services to Canadians as those who agreed that Service Canada has (will) improved service delivery dropped by 21%. There was a corresponding third of respondents who are on the fence in terms of whether Service Canada has (will) improved services, a 15% increase since Survey 6.

Respondents were also asked to react to the believability of messages related to Service Canada. There appears to be some skepticism related to the proposed messaging. The most believable message was "Service Canada's goal is better service to more Canadians in more communities" with 67% indicating it was believable. The least believable message was "At Service Canada, we will do business differently, with a mindset of continuous improvement" with only 44% indicating this statement is believable. Key barriers to credibility appear to be:

- Service Canada is still a federal government department and service quality is expected to remain the same → Participants do not understand how Service Canada will make a difference and / or believe that it will make a difference to Canadians / special groups of Canadians;
- The message was regarded as too general / broad → This makes it difficult for respondents to assess its credibility
- The tone and text did not induce credibility → Common comments included that it sounded 'cliché' or like a 'sell job' / 'electoral promise'.

Respondents were also asked to react to the Service Canada Home Page. Panelists were satisfied with the Service Canada Home Page overall with 70% indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied. A strong majority also agreed that the layout is easy to understand, they would know how to find a service they were interested in, the content made the purpose of the site clear, and, to a lesser extent, the Home Page met their expectations. While few panelists indicated they were dissatisfied with the Home Page, some were confused with the "I am" and "I am Interested in" sections in the centre of the page stating they were not sure whether the content under both headers would lead them to the same information.

When asked what would encourage them to visit the Service Canada site more often, panelists were most likely to suggest offering free tax filing software, more employment information, and the ability to access personal accounts for more government services.

Canada Site

The panel was used to explore the clarity of some of the links on the Canada Site and the extent to which panelists would use a 'Tell a Friend' feature. The results are summarized below.

- The majority of panelists were able to locate the correct link on the Canada Site to contact their Member of Parliament and believed it was easy to locate. The small percentage who said it was difficult to locate suggested using a larger font for the link, to create a distinctive link, and to write out MP in full in order to further simplify the search.
- When asked, the most frequently mentioned link for accessing information on personal health, public safety, and the Canada Pension Plan was Service Canada / Canadians and Residents. In all cases Departments and Agencies was the second most frequently mentioned link. However, panelists were more likely to use alternate search strategies for the topic of public safety e.g. 'Search, A to Z Index etc.
- Interest in a Tell a Friend feature on the Canada Site was low with less than half of panelists indicating they would use such a feature. However, 21% stated they would definitely use it and this rises to 46% among non-Canadians. In short, decisions related to the feature need to take into account the target audience and intended outcomes.

Privacy / Security of On-Line Transactions

The research was also used to explore topics related to privacy and security while completing online transactions on Government of Canada Web sites. Similar to other topic areas the results related to privacy and security are slightly more negative than the results from previous rounds of research. When asked, a modest majority of panelists (58%) stated they trusted the GoC to keep their personal information safe. This is a 5% decline from Survey 5.

Similar to findings in Survey 5, concern related to providing personal information to the GoC over the Internet varies significantly by type of information. Panelists were relatively

comfortable providing their date of birth, address, and telephone number, but were least comfortable providing their social insurance number and credit card number. Of note are significant declines in willingness to share information over the Internet in all categories tested when compared to Survey 5. The biggest decrease is in the proportion of panelists that would be comfortable providing their address and telephone number – a 10% decrease. This is followed by an 8% decrease in comfort in providing a line from a previous tax return and a 7% decrease in comfort in providing their Social Insurance Number. There has also been a 6% decrease in comfort in providing a birth date and credit card number to the Government of Canada.

Findings indicate that privacy and security concerns are likely to have a meaningful impact on the take-up of new personalized on-line government services, as 26% showed hesitancy and 17% indicated it would likely / or completely stop them from using new services. However, there has been a slight increase since Survey 5 in the proportion of panelists who indicated that concerns with privacy and security would not stop them.

When asked what the GoC could do to make them feel more secure, panelists suggested enhancing current technology, providing explanations in layman's terms on privacy and security policies, and using personal identifiers, access codes and / or passwords.

Evaluation of the Canadian Economy Home Page

Panelists were presented with an image of the Canadian Economy Online Home Page and, if interested in the content, asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements about the Home Page. The research indicates that there is strong interest in the site content. Seventy-eight percent indicated interest, with ¼ indicating they are very interested in the information available on the site. Only 22% stated they were not interested.

Overall reactions to the Home Page were favourable among panelists interested in the types of information available on the site. In addition, the majority agreed that the Home Page appears to have the kind of information expected, it clearly communicates the purpose of the site, looks easy to navigate, and they would know where to go to find the information they are interested in.

When panelists were asked to provide comments about the Canadian Economy Online Home Page, many stated that they liked the Pulse of the Economy section and the tools available on the site. Some did suggest additions such as provincial / international comparisons and historical trends and data. The most frequently mentioned dislike was that the page looked busy – a bit overwhelming.

Vision Statement

Respondents were first presented with the Government of Canada's Service Vision for how it plans to deliver its services in the future. The majority of panelists (69%) agreed that the vision statement represents what they feel the Government of Canada should move toward with respect to the way it delivers services in the future. This was particularly true of GOL panel members, expert Internet users, and GOL enthusiasts.

Panelists were then asked the extent to which they supported moving forward with specific actions designed to support this Service Vision. Support of specific actions was strong. A large majority indicated they support simplifying services to make them easier for Canadians to access and use; providing a consistent standard of service quality and access no matter how

the government is contacted; providing easy, one stop access to government services; making more government information available to interested Canadians; and integrating related government services. Support was slightly lower for tailoring or personalizing government services to meet individual needs and lowest for proactive services that anticipated the needs of specific Canadians. In short, support was strongest for standard service attributes such as ease of use, consistent service quality and one-stop shopping and lower for more tailored services. The primary concerns related to more tailored services included concerns with costs / tax dollars being spent and privacy / security.

When asked, panelists did not overwhelmingly indicate that these actions represent all their priorities for how the Government of Canada should be improving its service delivery. When asked what other actions should be taken, most of the suggestions were related to service features, accessibility and communication. For example, panelists would like the Government of Canada to increase and improve personal interaction with Canadians, improve communication of current and new services, ensure government is accountable or transparent, extend hours of operation for those not living in central Canada, improve turnaround times on requests etc.

Consulting With Canadians Section of the Canada Site

The series of questions related to the Consulting With Canadians section dealt primarily with navigation and design of the Home Page. Although some features worked well, the results indicate that modifications to the home page mock-up are needed to enhance the usability of the site. For example, respondents were shown a mock-up of the home page and asked where they would click first to find a consultation related to health issues. No dominant search paths emerged as panelists were using multiple search strategies. This likely indicates that users are uncertain as to where to start their search. This indication was born out when panelists were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements related to the Consulting With Canadians Home Page. Specifically, only 60% indicated they would know where to go find a consultation in which they wanted to participate. There were also other concerns with the home page as just over half agreed that the Home Page communicates the purpose of the site and that the site appears to have the information expected.

Canada International

Panelists were asked to indicate how interested they would be in the ability to access content on Government of Canada Web sites in a language other than English or French. Interest among Canadians was low at 11%. However, it was moderate among non-Canadians with one third stating they would be interested. The languages of most interest included Spanish, followed by Chinese, and to a lesser extent Italian, German, and Arabic.

In terms of the impact of providing foreign languages on GoC Web sites, not surprisingly, the biggest impact would be for non-Canadians. A strong majority of non-Canadians panelists indicated they would be more likely to recommend GoC Web sites, to visit more areas or pages and visit GoC Web sites more often.