

Government On-Line Research Panel - Results from the Eighth Online Survey (May 2006)

Executive Summary

Background

The federal government has maintained a Government Online Research Panel since 2001 in support of the Government of Canada (GC)'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 e-Government. 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 eighth survey conducted with Government Online Research Panel members. A total of 4,675 panelists completed the eighth survey. The margin of error for overall results is estimated to be +/-1.07%, somewhat higher for most audience sub-groups.

Key Findings

The eighth online survey of the GOL Panel revealed the following:

Attitudes Towards Government of Canada Online Services:

- Respondents' reactions to the Government of Canada's online service delivery are fairly positive, but slightly less positive when compared to Survey 6 results. A clear exception is the statement related to privacy and protection of personal information which has had a 6% increase in agreement. Agreement was strongest on statements related to flexibility and privacy and security, with the majority agreeing that you can choose how to access information or services, the GC is committed to privacy and protection of personal information, and online delivery of GC services means better service and more choice for Canadians. As in previous surveys, fewer agree that online services are fast, convenient, easy to access and always available, and that the most commonly used services being available online.

Privacy and Security:

- Although results for Survey 8 show that concern with conducting online transactions that would require them to exchange personal or confidential information with the Government of Canada over the Internet has decreased somewhat, there is still concern among one third of the participants. Some 16% of panelists were "extremely concerned" about transmitting confidential information and 17% were "somewhat concerned." However, this has dropped 8% since Survey 6 (Spring 2005). Half of all respondents stated they were not concerned with transmitting confidential information.
- Thirty-seven percent of panelists agreed that they did not deal with the Federal Government frequently enough to make it worth the trouble to obtain a username and password to allow

them to conduct online transaction and 39% disagreed. Respondents in Survey 8 were slightly more likely to strongly agree with the statement (+2%).

3rd Party Authentication

- Respondents were most likely to allow family members or someone else to interact with the Government of Canada on their behalf in order to file or review their taxes. Some 36% of respondents currently allow and a further 25% would allow a family member or someone else to carry out this interaction. In addition, 8% currently allow and 33% would allow someone to request information, 6% currently allow and 30% would allow someone to apply for benefits, and 9% currently allow and 21% would allow someone to view their personal information.
- Respondents were more reluctant to allow someone to change information with only 4% of respondents who currently allow and 18% who would allow someone to change direct deposit information and 4% of respondents who currently allow and 16% who would allow someone to change personal information.
- Although results differ somewhat by type of activity, spouse or partner, mother or father and accountant or financial advisor are those who most frequently act on behalf of others. In addition, some 21% of respondents also allow a lawyer to request information from the Government of Canada.
- The majority of respondents would be comfortable allowing someone to request information (75%), apply for benefits (72%), and file or review taxes (70%) over the Internet. Respondents were less comfortable allowing someone to view personal information (65%), change direct deposit information (64%), and change personal information (60%) over the Internet.
- The majority of respondents who indicated they would not allow someone else to interact with the Government on their behalf over the Internet were concerned their personal information would be shared without their consent. There was also strong concern about fraud or theft or that someone could steal their identity. For most interactions, close to one third simply stated they prefer using other methods.
- One quarter of the panelists act on someone else's behalf as a third party with a federal, provincial or municipal government with 18% indicating they file and review someone else's taxes, 12% request information for someone else, 9% view their personal information, 8% apply for benefits, 7% change their personal information, and 6% change direct deposit information.
- The majority of respondents act on behalf of their spouse or partner (56%), followed by their mother or father (29%) and son or daughter (27%). Fewer mentioned other family member (14%), clients (10%), and friends (7%).
- In terms of preferred channel, the majority of respondents would prefer to act on someone else's behalf on-line (64%), followed by over the telephone (19%), in person (9%), through the mail (6%), and by fax (1%).

Service Standards:

- One-quarter (26%) of respondents were aware of the service standards for the Government of Canada service they most recently accessed. The majority of panelists were either not aware (48%) of the service standards or could not recall (21%).
- The large majority of panelists (85%) stated that it is important that the Government of Canada makes its service standards available to the public and only 4% stated it is not important.
- Panelists also believe it is important that the Government of Canada publicly report the extent to which it has achieved its service standard goals with 80% of panelists stating it is important and only 5% stating it was not important.

Providing Feedback or Complaints to the Government of Canada:

- Close to two-thirds (63%) of respondents had not been unhappy with the level of service they have received when they accessed a Government of Canada service. However, one-quarter of panelists indicated they have been unhappy with the level of service they have received from the Government of Canada.
- Of the respondents who were unhappy with the level of service received from the Government of Canada, half (51%) indicated they were very unhappy with the service they received and one-quarter were only a little unhappy.
- In terms of the nature of the problem they encountered with the level of service they received from the Government of Canada, 29% of respondents were unhappy with the information they received either on the Internet or over the phone, another 13% mentioned long wait times / slow service, and 11% received poor service from staff. Other problems encountered were that respondents received inaccurate or outdated information (8%), they encountered issues when applying for benefits (8%), problems with a specific program or department such as the gun registry or taxation (6%), and they did not receive any follow-up or information as promised to them (5%).
- Of the respondents who were unhappy with the level of service they had received from the Government of Canada, only 18% had complained and this tended to be those who were very unhappy about the service they received. The majority of respondents who did not complain were only a little unhappy with the service they received.
- The top 5 reasons respondents did not file a complaint were that they did not expect it would change anything (24%), the issue was not important enough (19%), the complaint process is too complicated (14%), too busy / no time (10%), and they didn't know where or how to complain (10%). It is interesting to note that close to a third of these comments reflect *lack of faith* that complaining would achieve the desired results.
- The majority of panelists who contacted the government with a complaint did so by phone (66%) followed by e-mail (18%), and in-person (8%). Some also contacted the Government of Canada with a complaint through a form on a GC Web site (3%), mail (3%), and fax (1%).
- Close to one-third (32%) of respondents did not continue to interact with the Government of Canada after their initial contact. Of those that did, the majority continued to interact by phone (55%), e-mail (22%), mail (15%), and in-person (14%). This shows that for subsequent interactions the relative reliance on the phone decreases (66% to 55%) while reliance on other channels tends to increase. For example, interaction by mail moved from 3% in the initial interaction to 15% in subsequent interactions.
- Agreement with statements related to the complaint process was very low on all statements and, not surprisingly, those who were dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint were less likely to agree with the statements about the complaint process. The highest agreement was related to being treated fairly (26% agreed) and the complaint process being easy (20%). Lower scores were related to the complaint process being clearly explained (17%), resolved in a timely manner (16%), and knowing who to contact with a complaint (15%). A very small percentage of those who filed a complaint were satisfied with the outcome (13%).

Multi-Channel Service:

- About half (51%) of respondents have experienced a situation where they have had to use more than one contact method in order to complete an interaction with the Government of Canada.

- The specific services that required multi-channel interactions were primarily related to tax / GST (31%) followed by Employment Insurance (15%), CPP / OAS / Death benefits (7%), Citizenship (6%), Passports (6%), and problems with the Internet channel (6%).
- When using more than one contact method in order to interact with the Government of Canada, about half of respondents indicated that it was an easy experience (51%) and 25% indicated it was a difficult experience, resulting in a mean score of 3.36.
- Panelists suggested that the experience could have been made easier by providing direct access by phone to a knowledgeable person (21%), followed by better trained and less rude staff (20%), easier access to a real person / less reliance on an automated phone system (18%), and improving the information available on GC Web sites (14%).

Business Information Needs:

- Respondents were asked how likely they are to start a business in the next 12 months. The majority of respondents (76%) stated they are not likely to start a business in the next year. However, 16% indicated they were somewhat likely and 8% very likely to start a business in the next year.
- Respondents were then asked how likely they would be to access a Government of Canada Web site to look for business information. Results were split with 52% indicating they would not likely access business information from Government of Canada Web sites, 25% indicating they were somewhat likely, and 23% indicating they were very likely.
- Respondents who indicated they would likely access a Government of Canada Web site to look for business information, were asked to specify, in an open-ended question, up to three types of business information they would be most likely to look for on a Government of Canada Web site. Not surprisingly, given the time of year of the survey, the majority of respondents were seeking business tax information (54%) followed by information on business registration and licensing (25%), information on grants and loans (23%), regulations / environmental regulations (22%), and information related to business start-up (17%).

International Polar Year:

- A series of the survey's questions were related to International Polar Year -- a targeted science and research program that will build on and support existing programs, networks and facilities to focus on challenges for Canada's northern regions. The vast majority of panelists (87%) have not seen, heard or read anything on International Polar Year.
- The majority of respondents who had heard about International Polar year did so by browsing the Internet (51%), followed by word of mouth (23%), newspapers (22%), and television (19%). Fewer panelists heard about International Polar Year through the radio (12%), magazines (12%), pamphlets or brochures (6%), and through work (5%).
- Although not many respondents had heard of International Polar Year, just under half (48%) of all respondents were interested in the program and only 9% indicated they were not at all interested.
- Respondents who were interested in the International Polar Year were asked how they would like to be informed about the program. The majority of panelists would prefer to be informed about the program through Internet browsing (37%), television (27%), newspapers (13%), and pamphlets or brochures (9%).

Overall Experience with the CRA Web Site:

- Just over half (51%) of respondents had visited the CRA Web site since January 1, 2006, a 7% increase since Survey 7 that was conducted in the Fall 2006. Similar to results in Survey 7, GOL panel members, federal government employees, and those with higher income levels were more likely to have visited the CRA Web site since January 1, 2006.
- Similar to results in Survey 7, only 17% of respondents who had visited the CRA Web site since January 1, 2006 had done so only once (Figure 11.2). The remaining respondents were repeat visitors with the majority having visited the site 2 to 5 times (56%), another 14% 6 to 9 times, 7% 10 to 19 times, and 6% 20 times or more. The results of Survey 8 show that there are slightly more respondents who visited the site only once since January 1, 2006 (+2%).
- The majority of panelists had a positive experience in finding information or completing tasks. Some 36% of respondents were able to find everything or complete all tasks and another 44% were able to find most of the information sought or complete most tasks. In fact the percentage able to find / complete everything increased by 4%. However, 17% of respondents were able to find only some of the information sought or complete some of the tasks and only 3% none.
- Respondents were asked whether they had to call or visit the CRA because they were unable to find the information or complete a task on the Web site. A small majority of panelists (69%) used only the Internet, a 5% increase since Survey 7. Some 27% of respondents did have to call or visit the CRA to find the information or complete the task on the Web site and an additional 4% did not know.
- The majority of panelists were satisfied with the CRA Web site overall with 74% indicating they were satisfied, a 10% increase since Survey 7, and only 8% were dissatisfied resulting in an overall mean satisfaction score of 3.96. Very few (3%) indicated they were very dissatisfied with the CRA Web site.
- Once again, panelists were moderately positive although all scores increased slightly when compared to Survey 7 results. The highest scores were related to the usefulness of the information (79% agreed) and the information being understandable (75% agreed). Agreement was slightly less strong for statements related to the time it took to complete a task or find the information (65%), the site having all the information needed (62%), and ease of finding information (58%). The biggest increase in agreement was related to the information on the CRA Web site being understandable with a 6% increase since Survey 7.
- While the majority of panelists did not foresee the need to book an appointment with a CRA agent (71%), some 15% stated that they would need to book an appointment.

Evaluation of the Service Canada Web Site:

- The majority of respondents had visited the Service Canada Web site less than 6 months prior to completing the survey (75%) with 34% having visited the site 1 to less than 6 months ago, 21% 1 week to less than 1 month ago, and 20% as recently as less than 1 week before they completed the survey. Some 14% had visited the Service Canada Web site 6 months to less than a year before completing the survey and only 4% more than 1 year prior. Only 7% had never visited the Service Canada Web site.
- The majority of panelists were visiting the Service Canada Web site for information related to their taxes (24%), to look for a job (18%), and to report or find information for Employment Insurance (12%) and to browse for general information (11%). Many were also seeking information related to passports (6%), CPP or Old Age Benefits (5%), Citizenship and Immigration (5%), and business related information (5%). Some 3% of panelists were visiting the Service Canada Web site to obtain contact information and another 3% to view or update personal information.

- Respondents were asked whether they had used any other ways, in addition to the Internet, to contact Service Canada related to their most recent visit. The majority of panelists (78%) used only the Internet. Some 22% of respondents did contact the Government of Canada using other channels including the telephone (15%), in-person visit (7%), e-mail (3%), and regular mail (2%).
- Survey respondents were asked how they accessed the Government of Canada Web site they most recently visited. Some 29% of respondents indicated that they arrived at the site using a bookmark, 28% by using the links on the Canada Site, 20% from an Internet search engine, and 18% by typing in the URL. Access modes used to a lesser extent included links in email messages (4%) and links on non-Government of Canada Web sites (2%).
- When asked how easy or difficult it was to access the Service Canada Web site on their most recent visit, a large majority of respondents (87%) indicated it was easy, resulting in a mean score of 4.37 out of 5 (Figure 12.6).
- A large majority of respondents were satisfied overall with their most recent visit to the Service Canada Web site, with some 79% giving the site an overall satisfaction rating of 4 out of 5 or higher. The resulting overall mean satisfaction score was 4.05. Very few (2%) indicated they were very dissatisfied with their most recent visit to the Service Canada Web site.
- information being up-to-date (84%), ease of printing forms or documents (81%), page load times (80%), and confidence in the protection of personal privacy (77%). Agreement was slightly less strong for statements related to the site's visual appeal (72%), having the information needed (72%), the functionality of the search engine (71%), and ease of finding the information sought (66%).
- High ratings for most site elements is likely the result of the fact that, overall, some 75% of visitors indicated that in the end they got what they needed from the site. Those attributes found to be most strongly associated with getting what was needed were the site having the information needed, the ease of finding the information sought, and the information being up-to-date.
- While the evaluation of a recent visit to the Service Canada Web site was largely positive, 19% of respondents indicated that they had encountered some difficulty. Of those who did report difficulties [n=723], the majority reported navigation and content issue. Difficulties can be broken down as follows - 39% usability, 35% content, 7% search engines, and 19% technical difficulties.

The Science.gc.ca Home Page:

- Just over half (54%) of respondents expect scientific and technical information to be posted on the relevant Government of Canada departmental sites only, while another 28% expected it to be posted on all locations identified in the research i.e. relevant departmental sites, the Canada Site and Service Canada. Only 17% expected scientific and technical information to be posted only in a Government of Canada central location such as the Canada Site (12%) and the Service Canada site (5%).
- Panelists were somewhat interested in the type of information found in the Science and Technology section with a small majority (56%) indicating they were interested and 17% stating they were not interested. This resulted in an overall mean score of 3.55.
- In terms of site evaluation, results were positive. The highest scores were related to the Home page appearing to be user-friendly (78% agreed) and the Home page clearly indicating what content is available on the site (76%). Many panelists also agreed that they would know how to find a topic that they were interested in (73%), the Home page is visually appealing (73%), the content makes the purpose of the site clear (72%), and the Home page

looks more interesting that they thought it would (70%). Respondents who indicated they were interested in the type of information found in the Science and Technology section were more likely to agree with all the statements related to the Science and Technology Home page.

- Respondents were asked to comment on the Science and Technology Home page and indicate what, if anything, they like, dislike about the Home page and any terms that are unclear. Of the 82% of respondents who provided comments the majority indicated what they liked about the Home page. Some 38% stated that the site is visually appealing, 12% that it was informative and interesting, and 11% stated it was clear and easy to understand. Notwithstanding this positive feedback, 16% of respondents pointed out that the site is not visually appealing.
- Finally, respondents were asked what, if any, additional information they would like to see on the Science and Technology Home page. Sixty-five percent of respondents had no comment. Of the 35% or 1,620 respondents who did provide a response, 16% indicated they would like to see environmental / natural resources information, 10% stated that the Home page needed to be redesigned before adding more topics, 10% wanted to see more resources for children and teachers, 8% information on the latest research being conducted, 8% a publications section, and 7% a section covering government policy and legislation.

Services Where You Live Section of the Service Canada Web Site:

- The majority (60%) of respondents would prefer to find information about local Service Canada offices and about services available where they live, regardless of whether the service is delivered locally, regionally, or nationally in the Services Where you Live Section. Another 21% of respondents would prefer to find information about local Service Canada offices and about services available at the local and regional level and 12% would prefer to find information about local Service Canada offices and about services available at the local level only.
- The majority (64%) of panelists indicated that they would prefer to see information about services available at local, regional and national levels all on the same page within the Services Where you Live Section. Only 28% preferred to see them on separate pages.

ID Section of the Services Canada Web Site:

- Respondents were asked to what extent they liked each proposed name for this section. The majority of English respondents liked the title "Passports, Licences and Personal Documents" and the majority of French respondents preferred the title "Passeports, permis et cartes d'identité".
- Respondents were then asked if they had to choose between one of the titles which one they would prefer. Results are similar to the titles that respondents liked in that the majority of English respondents preferred the title "Passports, Licences and Personal Documents" (52%) and the majority of French respondents preferred the title "Passeports, permis et cartes d'identité" (41%).