

Government On-Line Research Panel - Results from the Ninth Online Survey (January 2007)

Executive Summary

Background

The federal government has maintained an Internet 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 achieving 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 as well as other policy and program related issues. Phase 5 has been engaged since June 2003 to refresh and maintain the panel.

This report presents findings from the ninth survey conducted from November 22 to December 14, 2006 with Government of Canada Internet Research Panel members. A total of 7,289 panelists completed the ninth survey. The margin of error for overall results is estimated to be +/-0.68%, somewhat higher for most audience sub-groups.

Key Findings

The ninth online survey of the GoC Online Panel revealed the following:

Evaluation of Panelists Most Recent Visit to a GoC Web site

For the fourth consecutive year respondents were asked to provide details of their most recent visit to a Government of Canada Web site. Those that had visited a Government of Canada Web site in the past year were also asked to evaluate the experience.

Results from Survey 9 are similar to those from the previous three surveys that explored this topic. While two-thirds (65%) of panelists had visited a Government of Canada Web site within a month of completing the survey, this proportion has decreased by 5% since Survey 7.

In terms of site access, some 29% of respondents indicated that they arrived at the site using a bookmark, 23% from an Internet search engine, 19% by using the links on the Canada Site, and 18% by typing in the URL.

Over four in ten panelists (44%) were visiting Government of Canada Web sites with an information need such as to obtain general information or to get an answer to a specific question. Many were also visiting GoC sites to search for a job. While there have been slight declines in the proportion of panelists who were searching for a job (3% decrease) and obtaining information for a school project (2% decrease) since Survey 7, this can most likely be attributed to the decrease in the proportion of youth aged 16 to 24 in the overall panel sample. Once again, a relatively small proportion of panelists were visiting GoC Web sites to complete a transaction (16%) or to access a personal account (9%). Completing a form or application online is continuing to trend upward, however, there are still very few panelists visiting Government of Canada Web sites to participate in citizen engagement (3%).

The majority (78%) of panelists did not use other ways (i.e. in addition to accessing the Internet) to contact the GoC in relation to the purpose of their most recent visit.

A majority of panelists (73%) indicated overall satisfaction with their most recent visit. Contrary to results in Survey 7, there has been a slight increase (3%) in overall satisfaction in Survey 9. The increased satisfaction is more evident when examining different aspects of the most recent visit.

Of the 13 elements that are being tracked by the Government of Canada Internet Panel Survey, 'ease of purchasing goods and services online', 'ease of finding information', 'ease of applying for a job online' and 'search engines worked well' showed a positive increase (2-4% increase). Only 'ease of submitting a tax return' showed a decrease (2% decrease).

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. While trust in the Government of Canada to keep personal information safe has increased slightly since Survey 7, there still remains some doubt.

Similar to findings in previous surveys where these questions were asked, concern related to providing personal information to the GoC over the Internet varies significantly by type of information. Panelists were relatively comfortable providing contact information such as their address and telephone number, as well as their birth date. Panelists were least comfortable providing their social insurance number and credit card number. Only slight decreases were observed when comparing results from Survey 7. Specifically, there has been a small decrease (2-3%) in comfort providing birth dates, a line from a previous tax return and income to the Government of Canada over the Internet.

Findings indicate that privacy and security concerns are likely to have a meaningful impact on the use of personalized on-line government services, as 27% showed hesitancy and 15% indicated these concerns would likely / or completely stop them from using new services.

Top Menu Bar

This survey explored visibility and use of, and preferences for, the black portion of the menu bar found at the top of all Government of Canada Web sites.

The black portion of the top menu bar on Government of Canada Web sites is highly visible and widely used, particularly by panelists recruited from GoC Web sites, more experienced Internet users and frequent visitors to government sites. However, since Survey 3, there has been a decrease in the proportion of panelists who indicated they had clicked on at least one of the buttons or links. While the 'search' button continues to be the most popular button on the black portion of the menu bar, there has been a 7% decrease in the proportion of panelists who have clicked on it since Survey 3. The most notable decrease is in the use of the Canada Site button with 11% fewer indicating they had clicked on it since Survey 3.

With regards to the use of consistent menu bars and design elements on Government of Canada Web sites, the majority of panelists (79%) agreed that the use of consistent menu bars makes it easier to find the information and services they needed. While the use of consistent design elements (e.g. Canada flag and Canada wordmark) moderately increased trust of

Government of Canada Web sites (61%), the use of consistent menu bars did so to a lesser degree (55%).

Overall Experience with the CRA Web Site

The next series of questions in the survey focused on the Canada Revenue Agency Web site. Respondents who had visited the CRA Web site since January 1, 2006 were asked to evaluate the experience.

A small majority of respondents (64%) had visited the CRA Web site since January 1, 2006, a 12% increase since Survey 8, which was conducted in the spring 2006. Similar to results in Survey 8, panel members recruited from GoC Web sites, federal government employees, and those with higher income levels were more likely to have visited the CRA Web site since January 1, 2006. The results also show that panelists have visited the CRA Web site more frequently since Survey 8, with 5% more indicating they had visited the site 20 or more times since January 1, 2006.

The most frequently mentioned reasons for visiting the CRA Web site included to obtain general information, to download forms or guides, to file / view / change personal information and to learn how to contact CRA by telephone.

Similar to results in the previous two surveys that explored this topic, the majority of panelists had a positive experience in finding information or completing tasks. A strong majority (84%) were able to find / complete all or most tasks, a 4% increase since Survey 8. Only 2% of panelists were unable to find any of the information they were looking for or complete any of the tasks they had set out to accomplish.

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. The majority of panelists (64%) used only the Internet, a 5% decrease since Survey 8. Some 29% of respondents did have to call or visit the CRA to find information or complete the task on the Web site.

The majority of panelists (68%) were satisfied with the CRA Web site overall, however there was a 6% decrease in satisfaction since Survey 8. Very few (3%) indicated they were very dissatisfied with the CRA Web site.

Once again, panelists were moderately positive when asked to evaluate specific elements of the CRA Web site. The highest scores were related to the usefulness of the information and the information being understandable, although these two elements saw a 2-4% decrease since Survey 8. The lowest score was related to the ease of finding information on the CRA Web site.

Service Canada

Home Page Design Preferences

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to two different Service Canada Home Page designs (current Home page and a new design) and then asked to indicate their preferred design.

When presented with the two Home page design options, results for specific elements were very similar for both designs. The *new* Home page design received slightly more positive

results on appearance. While many panelists agreed that both Home Page designs were visually appealing, 8% fewer agreed to this statement when referring to the *current* Home page design. In addition, 2% fewer agreed that the *current* Home Page design is well organized when compared to the *new* Home Page design.

No clear winner emerged in terms of the design option preferred overall. However, a slightly higher proportion of panelists (48%) preferred the *new* Home Page design over the *current* Home Page design (44%).

When asked to provide suggestions for improving the *new* Home page design, the majority (64%) of panelists indicated they liked the *new* Home page the way it is. Notwithstanding this positive feedback, the participants did highlight some concerns about the amount of content on the page and the order in which the content is presented.

Interacting with Service Canada

Panelists were then asked how many times they have interacted with Service Canada using different channels.

By far, the Internet has been the most common channel used by panelists to interact with Service Canada. Some 73% of panelists indicated they have visited the Service Canada Web site in the past six months, many of whom had done so frequently (e.g. 5 or more times). Interaction with Service Canada using other channels was less common, still, over two-thirds of respondents stated they had contacted Service Canada by telephone and just over one-quarter had gone in-person to a Service Canada office. Residents of Atlantic Canada, panelists with lower household incomes and those working in not-for-profit organizations were more likely to have interacted with Service Canada both on-line and off-line.

Among panelists who had visited the Service Canada Web site in the past six months, many were visiting the site with an information need such as to obtain general information (47%) or to obtain an answer to a specific question (39%). Many were also visiting the Service Canada Web site to obtain a form or application (39%), to complete a form or application online (33%) and to search for a job (32%). A relatively small proportion of panelists were visiting the Service Canada Web site to participate in citizen engagement (6%).

Labour Market Information

Panelists were asked if they were aware that they can obtain labour market information from Service Canada such as descriptions of occupations, list of employers, labour market conditions, wage rates, supply of workers, industry analyses, etc.

Just under half of all panelists (42%) were aware that they could obtain labour market information from Service Canada. Awareness was higher among panelists recruited from GoC Web sites, residents of Atlantic Canada, those with lower household incomes, French respondents, experienced GoC Web site users, and those working in not-for-profit organizations.

New Features and Functionality

Panelists were informed that new features and functionality are being considered for the Service Canada Web site to better address the needs and interests of Canadians. They were then presented with a list of possible features that could be offered in the future and asked to select three features that are most important to them personally.

Two of the new features emerged as most important. Specifically, panelists were most interested in an interactive tool that determines eligibility for programs and services (72%) and a searchable listing of relevant programs and services offered by other levels of government (65%). Panelists were least interested in a listing of key information about programs and services in languages other than English or French.

Information for People with Disabilities

The survey explored awareness and access related to the Persons with Disabilities Web site and the *“Services for People with Disabilities” Guide*.

Approximately 20% of panelists who responded to the survey either have a disability or are involved in activities where they would have an interest in disability-related information. Of these respondents, 19% had visited the Person with Disabilities Web site.

The most frequently consulted sources for information on disability-related issues as cited by panelists, were health professionals, printed materials such as guides, brochures and information kits, Government of Canada Web sites, disability associations and other Web sites.

A large majority (80%) of panelists with disabilities or in a disabilities related field, were not familiar with the *“Services for People with Disabilities: Guide to Government of Canada Services for People with Disabilities and their Families”*. Nevertheless, approximately 1 in 5 indicated that they were aware of the guide. Browsing the Internet, word of mouth and Service Canada Centres were the most commonly cited ways in which respondents became aware of the guide.

Electronic formats such as HTML and PDF format and printed publications were preferred by panelists with disabilities or in a disabilities related field as ways in which they would prefer to receive information on disability-related issues.

Communicating to Youth

Approximately 11% of panelists who responded to the survey were considered youth for the purpose of this research. When youth panelists were presented with a description of the Youth Web site and asked the best way for the Government of Canada to promote it, several communication strategies were considered a good way to reach youth. The most frequently mentioned were ads on TV, followed by ads in magazines or newspapers, ads on other Web sites and sponsored links on search engines. A sizeable portion also mentioned ads on the radio, dedicated pages on key sites such as myspace.com, and promotional items.

The majority of youth panelists would prefer to receive information from the Government of Canada on issues important to youth through e-mail, followed by online information on Government of Canada Web sites and information mailed to their homes.

Canada Site

The next questions in the survey focused on the Canada Site. Respondents were asked when they first visited the Canada Site and what, if any, services they would like to see added to the Popular Services section of the Canada Site.

Just over one-quarter of panelists first visited the Canada Site recently (e.g. less than one year ago) while approximately 14% first visited the Canada Site more than 5 years ago. Panelists with higher household incomes, expert Internet users, frequent Government of Canada Web sites visitors, and federal government employees were among those more likely to have first visited the Canada Site 5 or more years ago.

Respondents were shown an image of the Canada Site Home page and asked what, if any, services they would like to see added to the Popular Services section. The majority of panelists (65%) did not offer any additional content. Among those that did, Government contact information, employment insurance, travel and tourism, health-related services, history and culture, and child tax credit or benefits were the top 6 additions raised by panelists.

Wireless Portal

Respondents were asked a set of questions about their use of Web-enabled wireless devices and what information they would like to see added to the Mobile Wireless Portal on the Canada Site in the future.

Only about 12% of panelists have accessed Web sites with their Web-enabled devices and an additional 6% plan to access Web sites in the near future. However, a strong majority (78%) do not intend to use a mobile device to access a Web site in the near future. Residents outside of Canada, younger panelists, those with higher household incomes, and frequent GoC Web site visitors were more likely to have accessed Web sites with their mobile devices.

The vast majority (95%) of those who have a wireless device and are at least planning to access Web sites with it, have not visited the Wireless portal.

Panelists were then asked to indicate, from a list of potential services, which one they would most like to see added to the Wireless Portal. Information of highest interest to panelists included: weather information, local traffic conditions, and, to a lesser extent, local government contact information, government forms and locations of in-person offices.

Government News Page

The survey also explored preferences with regards to receiving Government of Canada news updates electronically.

Panelists were first shown an image of the Government of Canada Newsroom Web site and asked how many times they had visited this section of the Canada Site in the past 6 months. Approximately 1 in 5 respondents had visited the Canada Newsroom in the past six months and had done so infrequently (i.e. once or twice).

Panelists were asked to what extent they were interested in receiving Government of Canada news updates electronically. Many (42%) indicated they were interested in receiving

Government of Canada news updates electronically and close to half of those who indicated they were interested stated that they would prefer to receive them daily in the morning.

Panelists who indicated they were interested in receiving news alerts electronically from the Government of Canada were also asked whether they would be interested in receiving them in RSS news feed format. The results were evenly split between those who indicated they were interested, those who were not and those who were not sure. While a definition of an RSS new feed was presented to respondents, results suggest they may not have fully understood RSS feed format functionality.

SafeCanada.ca

Three topics related to SafeCanada.ca were explored in the survey. First, panelists were asked the types of public safety information they have actively sought in the past 12 months. They were then asked to identify the sources consulted for this information. Finally, the survey explored the types of information panelists would be most likely to use on a Web site dedicated to public safety information.

The majority (70%) of all panelists have sought public safety information in the past year. The most frequently sought topic was information related to advisories and warnings. Other frequently mentioned topics include health information, environment, food safety, Internet and computer safety and financial safety.

The most popular sources consulted for public safety information were the media and the Internet, including magazines or newspapers, radio or television, federal government Web sites and non-government Web sites.

Panelists were asked what information they would find most useful if they were to visit a site dedicated to public safety information to search for information on a specific public safety topic. Overall, information presented by geographic location was deemed most useful by respondents, followed by news / press releases, Frequently Asked Questions and contact information. The information of most interest varied to some extent by specific public safety topics.

Service for Business Campaign

The survey explored recall of Government of Canada advertisements on services provided to help small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs succeed as well as any actions taken as a result of the advertisements.

Respondents were asked whether they had seen, heard or read any advertising on the services the Government of Canada provides to help small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs succeed. Overall, 15% of panelists had noticed these advertisements and 68% had not. Business respondents were more likely to have noticed these advertisements than the general population. These ads were noticed on television by about half of panelists, followed by the newspaper and on Internet or Web site banners.

Almost one-third of those who recalled the ads believed that the ads informed Canadians about funding available from the Government of Canada to help businesses. While the majority of panelists did not take any action as a result of seeing or hearing the ads, just under one-quarter visited a government of Canada Web site, 3% telephoned a Government of Canada Department or Agency and 3% visited a Government of Canada office.

Evaluation of the Canada Business Web Site

The final series of questions in the survey focused on the Canada Business Web site. Respondents who had visited the Canada Business Web site in the past four months were asked to evaluate the experience.

Just under one-quarter of respondents had visited the Canada Business Web site in the past four months and had a positive experience in finding information on the site. Some 28% of respondents were able to find everything and another 37% were able to find most of the information sought. Only 1% of panelists were unable to find any of the information they were looking for on the site.

Among those who did not find what they were looking for on the site, 29% of respondents were not able to find statistics / research / trend information, 15% were unable to find information on starting a small business and 13% were unable to find funding information.

While the majority (60%) of panelists were satisfied with the Canada Business Web site overall, panelists were moderately positive about specific elements of the site. The highest scores were related to the relevance of the information, ease of use, site visual appeal and the range of topics covered. Agreement was slightly less strong for statements related to the information being at the right level of detail and the site containing more information than expected. The majority of panelists did however indicate they would recommend the site to others.