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RESULTS

AMERICAN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INDEX

E-GOVERNMENT SATISFACTION INDEX

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I. OVERVIEW

Health Information, Recruiting Are Important Government Functions Performed Exceptionally Well on the Internet; Citizen-Centric Approach to E-Government Shows Signs of Expanding

E-government is working exceptionally well in two areas that are arguably among the most important—providing health information to citizens and recruiting people to go into government service. In the latest quarterly findings of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) E-Government Satisfaction Index, these two areas are the strongest performers among the 44 federal agency web sites measured.

In fact, health and recruiting sites earn customer satisfaction scores that rival some of the better-performing e-business and e-commerce sites in the private sector. The latest findings also show some meaningful improvements in user satisfaction over the past six months and appear to be on a trajectory that portends even better performance in the future. (This quarter, sites appear in four categories: e-commerce, informational/news, portals/department main sites and recruitment/careers.)

The new report also reflects another encouraging fact about federal e-government: proactive efforts to make e-government more citizen-centric are growing. The number of federal web sites that have opted to subject themselves to user satisfaction assessment increased this quarter by 9 sites (over 25%). That comes on top of an addition of 14 sites to the Index in the previous quarter.

Since participation is voluntary, opting in to the Index indicates an interest in having an objective assessment of performance by users. Equally important, participating agencies are choosing to be assessed on the basis of what users themselves determine to be the most critical components of success.

The ACSI E-Government Satisfaction Index is produced using the sophisticated ACSI methodology. The ACSI is not a simple "top-box" beauty contest. It is driven by a scientific formula produced by capturing several pivotal components of performance that combine to produce overall satisfaction. The components are weighted, in this formula, according to what users demonstrate to be most important. Moreover, the ACSI is the only methodology that can accurately predict visitors' future behaviors, including their likelihood to return, use the site as a first resource or recommend the site to others.

II. HEALTH SITES:
EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO VOLUMES OF VITAL INFORMATION

Americans have had increasing access to huge quantities of medical information thanks to the Internet. Online medical sources abound. Amid all those choices, federal government sites are doing a very good job of being a preferred source of information.

Health and Human Services' MedlinePlus site earns the highest customer satisfaction score of any e-government site measured, an 86 on the ACSI's 100-point scale. That is an exceptionally strong score, only two points below the private sector's e-commerce leader, Amazon.com. MedlinePlus en español (with a score of 84) and the National Women's Health Information Center's 4woman.gov (81) are close behind—both earning scores that make them stellar performers by any standard, public or private.

The Spanish-language version of MedlinePlus ticked up two points in the course of just one quarter, while 4woman.gov fell two points. Both scores are well above the ACSI average of 75.

The high scores of these information-intensive sites are impressive indications that the promise of e-government is being realized. All three sites have a difficult but important job to do:
• The sheer amount of information they need to present poses a significant challenge
• Making the information navigable and understandable is no easy feat.
Users clearly find that HHS is performing this feat very well.

While the ACSI does not measure private-sector medical information sites, the HHS sites' scores are so high that it is safe to assume that they are seen by users as meeting expectations, even considering non-government competition. The sites' scores are among the very highest of any type of good, service, or web site measured by the ACSI—and to come within striking distance of Amazon is a strong indication of a job well done. While commercial news and information sites are only roughly analogous in the function they serve, it is worth noting that the online versions of major national newspapers and broadcast outlets measured by the ACSI earn ratings approximately 10 points lower than these government medical sites (ACSI aggregate score for news/information is 74).

Medical sites provide an excellent service. Much of the now-easily-accessible information used to be extremely difficult for a citizen to find in the pre-Internet days. In many ways, these sites take raw material for which citizens pay through their tax dollars and transform it into something valuable that citizens actually use.

The sites earn high marks for providing the kinds of information people are seeking. HHS has done a commendable job of identifying the right priorities in terms of getting information online. The sites also earn satisfaction and respect for the level of detail available, the accuracy of their information, and general accessibility.

Other health sites measured in the Index also show very strong levels of satisfaction, though not quite approaching the heights of the three highest-scoring sites.

AIDSinfo, measured for the first time last quarter, joins the Index with a score of 79. While that may initially seem significantly lower than the three high-scorers, in some ways the site has a more difficult objective because it is heavily used by health care professionals, as compared to the other HHS sites, which are primarily used by non-professionals. People in the medical profession, by virtue of their training, have more specific informational needs and, thus, higher expectations for content quality. In addition, the site is often used by people who are at very difficult and frightening times in their lives. In all, a score of 79 indicates that the site is viewed as a valued source.

Another site used extensively by people with technical backgrounds is TOXNET, measured for the first time last quarter. TOXNET earned a score of 75. The site contains information on toxicology and hazardous chemicals and organizes information in a fairly technical manner, accessible only to people with a reasonably high degree of familiarity with the topic.

The other health-related site measured is the National Institutes of Health main site, which improved by one point from the previous quarter to 73. The main site is essentially a portal, and not a specific medical-information site. Portals must address various audiences and needs simultaneously and, accordingly, tend to earn lower scores than sites with specific missions.

III. ONLINE GOVERNMENT RECRUITING: STRONG AND GETTING STRONGER

The pressure is on for government personnel recruitment web sites to do their jobs well. Scores for the different government recruiting sites measured represent a somewhat wide range, but compare favorably to analogous private-sector sites reviewed on a proprietary basis by ForeSee Results. These scores indicate that recruiting websites are meeting the challenge and filling a vital national need.

The imperative to attract good talent to government jobs seems clear. Reports show that, though the government workforce is shrinking, the urgency to fill jobs is increasing because so many in government service are approaching retirement age. In addition, national security concerns have created a need to attract specific types of talent and skills to areas such as intelligence and foreign service.

The main government recruitment site, www.usajobs.opm.gov, had more than 6.2 million unique visits in January. The site is obviously playing an important role in engaging candidates for government jobs. The site's score of 73 indicates room for improvement, but improvement is clearly in progress since a major site relaunch last Fall. Overall satisfaction is trending in the right direction. In addition, the site is in the midst of what is known as the "relaunch effect." Sites that make significant changes, as has been the case with www.usajobs.opm.gov, almost always experience initial declines in satisfaction as users get used to new navigation and functions for USAJOBS (www.usajobs.opm.gov).
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That being said, their performance increased a full five satisfaction points in just three months, from the previous quarter measured, and overall satisfaction tells only part of the story. Online career services were identified as an important priority to site users. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) responded with several innovations in that area, resulting in a significant increase in their career services score. In recruitment, word of mouth is important—particularly for the government, which spends relatively little on promoting the site, compared to private sector competitors such as Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com. The jobs site scores very high on the likelihood of users to recommend the site to others and likelihood of a user to return to the site. On both of these key dimensions, major gains have been made steadily in the past six months as a result of focused improvement efforts.

The CIA's recruitment web site is doing very well, with an overall satisfaction score of 80, and the State Department is close behind at 79. Both sites perform very well in comparison to private-sector jobs sites with which ForeSee Results has done proprietary analysis.

The State Department's recruiting site has improved its satisfaction scores considerably since it was first measured in the third quarter of 2003, jumping from 73 to 79 over that time period. The CIA was measured only one other time, in the last quarter of 2003, and its current score of 80 is unchanged since that measurement.

IV. ACSI E-GOVERNMENT SCORES: Q1 2004

ID	E-Government U.S. Agency/Department/Office	Website	3/04 Score
Portal/Department Main Websites			
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration	NASA main website www.nasa.gov	78
NARA	National Archives & Records Administration	NARA Presidential Library websites http://archives.gov/presidential_libraries/index.html	77
NCJRS	National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Justice	NCJRS main website www.ncjrs.org	77
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology, Commerce	NIST main website www.nist.gov	77
SSA	Social Security Administration	SSA main website - http://www.socialsecurity.gov/	76
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	Main website www.nlm.nih.gov	73
DOS	Department of State	Main website – www.state.gov	72
GSA	General Services Administration	FirstGov.gov website – www.firstgov.gov	72
GAO	General Accounting Office	GAO main website – www.gao.gov	68
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration, Transportation	FAA main website www.faa.gov	67
NARA	National Archives & Records Administration	NARA main public website www.archives.gov	66
USPTO	United States Patent & Trademark Office	USPTO main website - www.uspto.gov	66
Treasury	Department of the Treasury	Main website – www.treasury.gov	64
GSA	General Services Administration	GSA main website – www.gsa.gov	56
DOT	Department of Transportation	Main website – www.dot.gov	55

ID	E-Government U.S. Agency/ Department/Office	Website	3/04 Score
E-Commerce Websites			
Mint	United States Mint, Treasury	Online Catalog http://catalog.usmint.gov/	79
GSA	General Services Administration	GSA Advantage website https://www.gsaadvantage.gov	67
Information/News Websites			
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	Medline Plus main website http://medlineplus.gov	86
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	Medline Plus en español main website http://medlineplus.gov/esp/	84
OWH	Office on Women's Health, HHS	National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) main website – www.4woman.gov	81
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	AIDS info main website http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/	79
NLM	National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, HHS	TOXNET main website http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/	75
ERS	Economic Research Service, Agriculture	ERS main website – www.ers.usda.gov	74
NIJ	National Institute of Justice, Justice	NIJ main website - http://www.ojp.gov/nij	74
OJJDP	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Justice	OJJDP main website www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org	74
NIAID	National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, HHS	NIAID main website www.niaid.nih.gov	73
FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service, Agriculture	FAS main website – www.fas.usda.gov	71
IIP	International Information Programs, State	IIP main website http://usinfo.state.gov	71
FSA	Farm Service Agency, Agriculture	FSA main website – www.fsa.usda.gov	70
Forest	Forest Service, Agriculture	Main website – http://www.fs.fed.us	70
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service, Agriculture	NASS main website http://www.usda.gov/nass/	68
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service, Agriculture	FSIS main website www.fsis.usda.gov	67
NAL	National Agricultural Library, Agriculture	NAL main website - www.nal.usda.gov	67
DOS	Department of State	Student website - http://future.state.gov	66
CNS	Corporation for National and Community Service	CNS main website www.cns.gov	65
ESA	Employment Standards Administration, Labor	ESA main website www.union-reports.dol.gov	65
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service, Agriculture	NRCS main website http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/	65
NSF	National Science Foundation	NSF main website – www.nsf.gov	64
PBGC	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation	PBGC main website – www.pbgc.gov	62
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce	National Ocean Service (NOS) MapFinder website http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/mapfinder	47
Recruitment/Careers Websites			
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency	Recruitment website http://www.cia.gov/employment	80
DOS	Department of State	Recruitment website – www.careers.state.gov	79
OPM	Office of Personnel Management	Recruitment website – www.usajobs.opm.gov	73
CNS	Corporation for National and Community Service	Americorps website http://www.americorps.org	70

V. CONCLUSION:
WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING FOR E-GOV?

Although faced with budget challenges, the future looks bright for e-government sites. There are many strong signs that e-government will continue to improve and provide an increasingly high level of service for the citizens. Each of the categories measured improved over the last 6 months and quarter-over-quarter.

While citizens' expectations with all websites continue to rise, e-government sites are keeping apace with citizen-valued updates that fuel improved satisfaction scores. 43% of the sites measured last quarter registered improved customer satisfaction over the last quarter, an impressive feat for such a short time period. 9% of the sites measured scored 80 or higher, a performance-setting standard and 52% of the sites scored 70 or higher, a respectable showing with room for improvement.

Another key attribute of the sites' success is the impact that site experience has on how likely a site visitor is to return to the site in the future and recommend the site to others. The e-government sites measured exhibit a significant impact on the site visitors' likelihood to both continue to use the sites and recommend to others in the future. This is a great sign of success of the e-government sites and helps to continue to provide justification for the continued attention and investment that the sites receive.

And finally, the embracing of satisfaction measurements is a great sign for citizens. When government agencies are committed to measuring their online performance, citizens benefit by having easy, convenient, trusted access to government information and services.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larry Freed is an expert on Web Effectiveness and Web Customer Satisfaction. He is also President and CEO of ForeSee Results, a market leader in customer satisfaction measurement on the web, which utilizes the methodology of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI).

ABOUT THE ACSI

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is the only uniform, national, cross-industry measure of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available in the United States. A key distinguishing feature of the ACSI methodology is its patented scientific approach to customer satisfaction measurement. The technology behind the ACSI computes scores that reflect performance—based on the relative impacts of various components of satisfaction on overall satisfaction and the likelihood of desirable future behaviors, such as repeat purchases. Accordingly, the ACSI methodology is able to isolate and determine the importance of the features and functions most likely to produce these behaviors—an important distinction from basic customer satisfaction ratings. The Index is produced by a partnership of the University of Michigan Business School, American Society for Quality (ASQ) and CFI Group. ForeSee Results sponsors the e-commerce, e-business and e-government indices.

For More Information

1.800.621.2850

www.ForeSeeResults.com

ABOUT FORESEE RESULTS

ForeSee Results is the market leader in online customer satisfaction management and specializes in converting satisfaction data into user-driven web development strategies. Using the methodology of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) developed at the University of Michigan, ForeSee Results has developed a model that scientifically quantifies the elements that drive online customer satisfaction and predicts future behaviors like likelihood to purchase, return, or recommend the site. ForeSee Results, a privately held company co-founded by Compuware Corporation and CFI Group, is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan and on the web at www.ForeSeeResults.com.

ABOUT THE FEDERAL CONSULTING GROUP

The Federal Consulting Group, a franchise of the Department of the Treasury, serves as the executive agent in the government for the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), and holds generic clearance from the Office of Management and Budget that enables agencies to utilize the ACSI without having to obtain a separate clearance under the Paperwork Reduction Act to conduct customer satisfaction surveys. Agencies can participate in the ACSI through an arrangement between the Federal Consulting Group and ForeSee Results.

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