

Evaluating www.canadaplace.gc.ca

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Introduction

In our fast paced world, the internet is becoming an increasingly valuable tool in providing information to the Canadian population. More people than ever before have access to the web and are using it as a resource to find the information they desire. Recent surveys have revealed that Canadians lack information about their history, heritage, geography and governance (Canada Information Office, 1998) and are keen to access this information on-line (Angus Reid Group, 1997, 1998).

Canada Place, located at www.canadaplace.gc.ca, is a dynamic public window to cultural information in Canada. This site includes, eight sections:

- Canada Rendez-Vous,
- Canadians Forum,
- Youth Connects,
- Visit O'Canada,
- Creative Canada,
- e-News,
- Service Canada,
- Canada Place Centres.

By providing such options as written text, chat rooms, videoclips, and additional internet links to many institutions and organizations, users can access needed information about Canada and the services it offers. In addition to the website, the information is also accessible at permanent physical sites located across Canada. The locations, posted on the web, offer displays, videos and educational resources about Canada and also offer internet access to obtain additional information and resources.

Presently, the Corporate Review Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage has requested the assistance of our evaluation team for suggestions on how to conduct an evaluation of the Canada Place website. However, the purpose of this report is not only to provide a creative and innovative evaluation framework for the website, but will also offer criteria for evaluating websites, our perceptions of the objectives, and suggestions on how to collect data on the indicators we propose.

Many stakeholders will be interested in this assessment. The stakeholders include: the Department of Canadian Heritage, members of the Canadian Heritage Portfolio, the target audiences and Canada Place partners. See Appendix A for a complete list of stakeholders.

Criteria for Evaluating the Web Site

The characteristics of a web site can strongly influence its performance and use. When reviewing a website, users should recognize who is hosting the site (credibility) and evaluate the content contained within the site and its technical aspects. While a brief overview of the criteria will be highlighted here, please refer to Appendix B for a complete list of criteria for web site evaluation.

The web site should have a clear purpose and provide accurate and interesting information. The site should be kept up to date, both on the content contained within the site and its presentation of possible internet links. The information must be appropriate for the target audience both in content and readability.(a readability assessment could be completed to determine the grade reading level of the material on the web. Numerous formula are available in research and evaluation texts).

The technical aspects of the web, such as presentation and navigation should be considered. Users will unlikely use a site that is poorly presented and difficult to use. The information should be presented clearly with legible text and interesting graphics that stimulate imagination and curiosity about the site. Users should have ready access to the site, short loading time of images, and the availability of icons, menus, and directional symbols.

Evaluating the Canada Place website would take place during the focus group meetings described under the methods of data collection.

Canada Place Initiative Objectives

The Canada Place Initiative is a complex program guided by three levels of objectives: broad, general objectives based on the Government of Canada's goals; Canada Place objectives; and Communications Team objectives (see pages 8 and 9 of the case background document). The broad, general level objectives seem to act as mission statements to guide the more specific objectives outlined in the other two levels.

Table 1 (see Appendix C) follows this three-level format and links the 16 program objectives (taken from pages 8-9) with potential performance indicators that will specify evidence of accomplishment. The table also outlines different methods for measuring performance indicators and notes the feasibility of those methods. These methods will be outlined in greater detail in the next section. Feasibility addresses issues of time, cost, resources and access to target populations and is described in Table 1 as low, moderate or high. For example, low feasibility denotes a method that may be of high cost (human resources, time, or dollars) or may be impractical to implement, while a high feasibility method may be a low cost or easily implemented approach.

The 16 objectives could be summarized as three key objectives:

- Accessing target populations (described on page 5 of the background document);
- Making connections between communities, individuals, and government in Canada; and,
- Dissemination of relevant and high quality government information to the public.

Methods of Data Collection on Indicators

Based on the indicators developed for the objectives, potential data collection strategies for this evaluation will be outlined. The data collection strategies outlined will provide information regarding effectiveness and efficiency of the Canada Place website. We will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

Website Survey

The Canada Place website itself provides an opportunity to survey website users to determine visitor experience, demographics, usage patterns, content, impact, accessibility and hyperlinks. Users would be invited (with an eye-catching icon) to complete the on-line survey on the homepage of the Canada Place website. To encourage a high response rate, there would be incentives to respond to the on-line survey such as free passes to a museum or Canadian Park. This incentive would also profile the partners of the Canada Place initiative.

The website survey will be as brief as possible because it has been shown that longer web questionnaires produce lower response rates (Dillman, Sinclair and Clark, 1995). Also reported by Dillman et al. (1995), completion rates for a sophisticated questionnaire (colour graphics, html tables, etc.) were 82% compared to the completion rate for a simple questionnaire (plain black and white formatting) of 93%.

Advantages

- Costs—collecting responses via the web eliminates printing and mailing costs, and reduces the burden of data entry and analysis. The plain format proposed above is also less costly from a questionnaire design perspective.
- Ability to reach large numbers of web users across the country and globally

Disadvantages

- Survey Error
 - Non-response error—Only people who access the website and also volunteer to complete the survey will be represented. Therefore the characteristics of respondents and non-respondents may differ and are difficult to evaluate.
 - Representativeness of target population, for example Canadians, not necessarily reflected in the responses.

Use of other National Questionnaires (Census)

As outlined in the Background Document, only one in four households include someone who uses the Internet from home, work or school. Thus, a large number of people in Canada are unable to access the Canada Place website for information or business. We propose adding approximately five questions to a national questionnaire such as the Canada Census to determine the awareness level of Canadians about the Canada Place Initiative, and whether they would access information through Community Access Points. In addition, possible barriers in accessing the initiative in general need be explored.

Advantages

- Canadian Census has high profile within Canada and is generally well-received by citizens
- High response rate of the Canada Census
- National representativeness of the Canada Census
- Canada Place Initiative is not required to conduct its own survey

Disadvantages

- Questions limited in scope and not specifically related to Canada Place Initiative
- Costly to add questions to a national survey
- Heavy burden of data collection and analysis

Focus Groups

Focus Groups are increasingly being used to obtain in-depth feedback from several people at the same time. In this proposed evaluation, focus groups could be very helpful in obtaining reactions to the website itself and determining perceived barriers to accessing the website of non-users.

Each focus group should consist of between six and 12 participants. Focus groups will be representative of the target audiences in Background Document. Two focus groups will be conducted from each target audience, but as many as six to eight may be required depending on the feedback and trends that emerge, the number of different groups that require representation and when saturation is reached.

Users

We propose recruiting participants from the website and in-person centres across Canada. This recruitment could occur by advertising the focus groups on the homepage. Website users could be asked to sign a guestbook with their e-mail address, and subsequently they could be sent an e-mail invitation to a focus group. At the in-person centres, staff could invite visitors to participate in a focus group.

Non-users

Random telephone survey will be conducted to recruit participants.

Advantages

- More structured than interviews
- Interaction and exchange of ideas among participants
- More economical than individual interviews

Disadvantages

- Cost associated with large numbers of target groups and different geographical areas in Canada

Performance Measurement Plan

Based on the Canada Place Initiative Objectives and the methods described in the previous section, we have developed a flow-chart for our Performance Measurement Plan (evaluation activities to be undertaken) in Appendix D.

We recommend that the website be evaluated using focus groups to determine reactions to the website. We also suggest that an on-line survey of website users be conducted to get a better understanding of their needs and perspectives. In order to find out the needs and access barriers of non-users, we recommend that questions be added to the Canadian Census. If additional money is available for evaluation, more focus groups with the target audiences for the Canada Place Initiative should be conducted. We would suggest holding these focus groups with youth in classrooms across the country. We also suggest that the indicators suggested in Appendix C are compiled on a quarterly basis to determine the effectiveness of the website.

Summary

In summary, we feel that the Canada Place Initiative is an innovative approach to connecting Canadians with each other and with their federal government. This project is exciting and innovative, with far-reaching potential in terms of access to Canadian content and government services. To evaluate the Canada Place website, we have developed a creative approach through our Performance Measurement Plan. This plan is utilization-focussed and reflects the uniqueness of the Canada Place Initiative.

Appendix A Canada Place Stakeholders

Stakeholders include the target audience and the partners of Canada Place

Target Audiences

- Canadian population
- Younger Canadians
- Canadian Internet Users
- Communities surrounding in-person locations
- Canadian media, including technology media
- Other governments
- Internet Users Around the World
- Employess of Canadian Heritage Portfolio members, partner departments and all other partners

Canada Place Partners

Canada Place Partners include:

- The Departments's sectors and regions (Western, Prairies and Northern, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic,
- Members of the Canadian Heritage Portfolio

Department of Canadian Heritage
Canadian Conservation Institute
Canadian Heritage Information Network
Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board
Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada
as well as seven departmental agencies and ten Crown corporation

Seven Departmental Agencies

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
National Archives of Canada
National Battlefields Commission
National Film Board of Canada
National Library of Canada
Status of Women Canada
Parks Canada Agency

Ten Crown Corporations

Canada Council for the Arts
the CBC
the Canadian Film Development Corporation
The Canadian Museum of Civilization
The Canadian Museum of Nature
The Canadian Rae Relations Foundation

National Arts Centre
National Capital Commission
National Gallery of Canada
National Museum of Science and Technology Corporation

- Other governmental departments including Industry Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Health Canada, Justice Canada and Solicitor General Canada

- Private sector companies including Bell Nexxia, Silicon Graphics, Watco Web Waves, Dynamix and Howe Brand Communications.

Appendix B - Criteria for Evaluating Web Sites

Purpose of Website:

- Audience/Coverage
 - Site's purpose; is it clearly stated
 - Is the information there to inform, explain, persuade, entertain, advertise a product or promote a particular point of view?
 - Is the focus popular or academic?
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - Is a specific geographical area or time period covered?
 - Kind of information is included - factual, bibliographic, abstracts, or full-text?
- Currency
 - How up to date is the site?
 - Are the links still viable?
 - Is the date of the latest revision posted somewhere on the page?
- Authority
 - Who is sponsoring the site?
 - Is it clear who is ultimately responsible for the content of the material?
 - What are the credentials/ experience/qualifications/reputation of the group or individuals who created the site?
 - Have people whose judgement you trust (i.e., librarians, professors) recommended this site as good source of information on the subject?
 - Is it well-written?
 - Does the site provide an e-mail address or other contact information?
 - Does author or producer respond to the feedback you give them?

Content:

- Accuracy/comprehensiveness
 - Error-free information
 - Current information
 - Updated frequently
 - Recent "last" update
 - Objective, balanced presentation of information
 - Bias-free viewpoints and images
 - Correct use of grammar, spelling, and sentence structure
 - Primary outlink (link that takes you to additional site) content is relevant, authentic, and appropriate
 - Authority
 - Expertise/reputation of author/designer
 - Author/producer is identifiable (contact information)
 - Expertise/reputation of host site
- Appropriateness:
 - Concepts and vocabulary relevant to students' abilities
 - Information relevant to the North Carolina K-12 curriculum

- Interaction compatible with the physical and intellectual maturity of intended audience
- Scope
 - Information of sufficient scope to adequately cover the topic for the intended audience
 - Logical progression of topics within original site (site being evaluated) and primary outlinks
 - Information offered not easily available in other sources

Technical Aspects:

- Navigation
 - Ready access to site; site not overloaded
 - Images load within reasonable timeframe
 - Intuitive icons, menus, and directional symbols that foster independent use
 - Inlinks (links that take you to locations within the original site) that allow easy navigation throughout the site
 - Standard multimedia formats
 - Logical options for printing/downloading all or selected text and graphics
- Presentation
 - Site follows good graphic design principles
 - Screen displays uncluttered and concise
 - Captions, labels, or legends for all visuals
 - Legible text and print size appropriate for the intended audience
 - Graphics and art functional, not merely decorative
 - Information presented through text, motion, still images, and sound
 - Information presented in a manner to stimulate imagination and curiosity
 - Product advertising not intrusive
- Design/Connectivity/Security
 - Are links provided to other relevant sites?
 - Are there links to search engines or is a search engine attached to the site?
 - Is the information well-organized?
 - Can you easily navigate on the site?
 - How stable is the connection to the site?
 - When it is necessary to send confidential information over the Internet, is encryption (a secure coding system) available and how secure is it?

Appendix C Table 1: Canada Place Initiative Objectives, Performance Indicators, Measurement Strategies and Feasibility

Objectives	Indicator	Measurement	Feasibility
Broad Mission			
Bring Info to Canadians	Provision of Quality and Relevant Information	n/a	n/a
Help Canadians do business with govt	Website Development and Canada Place Centers	n/a	n/a
Canada Place Objectives			
Contribute, in a new and innovative way, to Canadian Heritage Portfolio mission	Level of use of website and Canada Place Centers	-# of hits & # of users accessing centers (by various target groups)	High
		-compare quality and innovation with other existing information sources (websites, print, info centres, etc...)	High
Contribute to federal govt presence and visibility	Level of use of website and Canada Place Centers	-# of hits & # of users accessing centers (by various target groups)	High
Enhance the relevance of govt to citizens & business in arts, heritage, tourism & cultural products	Feedback from citizens & business in arts, heritage, tourism & cultural products	Surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... from target audience to determine relevance of info provided by website and centers	Moderate
Promote/provide access to Canadian identity, cultural development and national unity themes	Level of use by stated target audiences	-# of hits & # of users accessing centers (by various target groups)	High
		-surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... from target audiences to determine relevance of info provided by website and centers	Moderate
Engage Canadians, especially youth	Level of use and feedback by youth	-# of hits & # of users accessing centers by youth	High
		-surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... with youth to determine interaction capabilities with youth provided by website and centers	Moderate

Objectives	Indicator	Measurement	Feasibility
Give Canadians a competitive edge in a knowledge-based society	Quality of info and level of technology provided to Canadians through the website and Canada Place Centres	-surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... from target audience to determine relevance of info provided by website and centers -compare quality and innovation with other existing information sources (websites, print, info centres, etc...)	Low Moderate
Offer opportunities for on-line dialogue and exchange	Website chat-room level of use	-monitor number of different "chatters" using the chatroom -use of email linkages and contacts	High High
Help govt account to Canadians	Quality, variety, and amount of reporting available on website and Canada Place Centres	-collect performance indicators (as mentioned here) and report results in Annual Performance Report (available on web) -surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... from target audience to determine relevance of info provided by website and centers -compare quality and innovation with other existing information sources (websites, print, info centres, etc...)	High Moderate Moderate
Ensure & enhance Canadian content online	Quality of info provided to Canadians through the website and Canada Place Centres	-compare quality and timeliness of information with other existing information sources (websites, print, info centres, etc...)	Moderate
Communications Team Objectives			
Promote Canada Place as access point to federal govt info and services	Level and variety of marketing strategies targeting various audiences	-track and document each marketing strategy separately and link with use levels	Moderate
Demonstrate citizen-focused information and service delivery <i>and</i> (continued on next page)	Relevance of info provided to Canadians through the website and Canada Place Centres	-surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... from target audience to determine relevance of info provided by website and centers -compare quality and innovation with other existing information sources (websites, print, info centres, etc...)	Moderate Moderate

Objectives	Indicator	Measurement	Feasibility
Engage Canadians in expanding and improving access points to govt activities, programs and services	Level of participation of Canadian public in improvement exercises	-surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... with target audiences to determine if the website and Canada Place centers are continually meeting the needs of the different Canadian target groups	Moderate
Strengthen federal govt presence, visibility, identify across Canada and project it to the world	Level and impact of use of website and Canada Place Centres by Canadians and International users	-# of hits & # of users accessing centers separately for Canadians and International users -surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc... with Canadians and International users of the website and Canada Place centers (tourists)	Low Low
Showcase partnerships with federal govt depts, other govts, and business and voluntary sectors	Illustration of and easy access to partnerships in website and Canada Place Centres	-representation of partnerships	High
Communicate that Canada Place connects communities and citizens, rural and urban, in person and through technology, in both official languages, in all parts of the country	Level and variety of communication strategies promoting this message of connectedness	-track and document each communication strategy to determine level of promotion	High

Department of Canadian Heritage



