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E-INFORMING THE PUBLIC
INFORMATION ACCESS AND E-GOVERNMENT

Government Information Day – Ottawa, October 16, 2014
1999 Speech from the Throne:

• “By 2004, our goal is to be known around the world as the government most connected to its citizens, with Canadians able to access all government information and services on-line at the time and place of their choosing.”
E-GOVERNMENT?

I made it with my Internet Magic
WHAT IS ACCESS?

Figure 1. Access "Rainbow"

1. Carriage Facilities
2. Devices
3. Software Tools
4. Content/Services
5. Service Access Provision
6. Literacy Social Facilitation
7. Governance

Clement & Shade. The Access Rainbow: Conceptualizing Universal Access to the Information/Communications Infrastructure
1. INFORMATION PRODUCERS

- **Method** – small-scale interview study conducted with government employees

- **What are the goals of information producers?**
  - Primary: information dissemination
  - Secondary: increasing awareness of government activities, engaging the public with issues, educating citizens, facilitating interaction, etc.
INFORMATION PRODUCERS

- **Themes:**
  - Size and complexity of environment, but need for simplicity: “simple”, “consistent” and intuitive”
  - “Reigning [it] in... wrangling it, and trying to get it all under control”.
  - Designing for the “customer” – the whole public and for specialized stakeholder groups: layered content
  - Designing complex sites for browsing, while the public uses search engines and keywords, and is not effective at searching
  - Limited value of metadata – for keywords and topics
2. INFORMATION USERS

- Method: 33 micro interviews and 32 search sessions conducted in public libraries in the lower mainland.

- Questions:
  - What are the information needs and tasks that prompt government information seeking?
  - How do people search for e-government?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>% yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searching for government related information</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing information on a government program or service</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downloading a government form</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submitting a completed form</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filing personal income tax</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with government department or with an elected official</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing opinion during an on-line government consultation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting in a municipal, provincial or federal election</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other government on-line activity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Government Online Activities of Home Internet Users in 2009 (Statistics Canada, CIUS)
INFORMATION NEEDS

• Majority are common, service related tasks: finding program information, how to do things, downloading forms, etc.

• Tasks have high personal importance, are mostly short term, but may be part of a longer process, many combine online, telephone and face to face interactions, many are considered difficult.

• We designed our search tasks to represent different task types: learning, doing, fact-finding, known-item, and self motivated tasks
PRACTICAL TASKS

information that explains how to helps you fill out a CPP application.

a guide to filling out your taxes and contact information for follow up questions.

who to contact at tax Canada to be able to avoid writing the same letter every year.

a form or contact person that will change the portion of old age pension that is withheld for tax purposes.

tax deductions available in 2011 for using transit.

the requirements to apply for a work visa to Canada (from the Philippines).

contact info for all Canadian consulates in Africa.

information on how to get a password to look at your taxes online.
SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

- Average about 2.5 queries per search and 2.3 pages bookmarked
- Long queries (almost 5 terms), shorter for self motivated
- High satisfaction rates (6/7) and perceived completion rates (5.8/7), lower for self motivated
- Satisfaction and completion scores are lower for older participants
- High number of non-useful pages retrieved
NON-GOVERNMENTAL SITES

Acciona - World leader in renewables.

Canadian Rockies backpacking

Embassy of Canada in Ghana

GuelphMercury.com

How to Import a Car from the USA to Canada

World embassy page - The most accurate source for embassy information

BC Business
LOW SEARCH LITERACY

• Searching within Wikipedia
• Entering search terms in anything that looks like a box
• Bookmarking a set of Google results without examining them
• Bookmarking promotional materials or biased pages
3. INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

- Questionnaire of information professionals Canada wide - 113 responses

- Questions:
  - What do librarians perceive to be the effects of the digital shift on public access to e-government information?
  - What role do librarians see themselves playing in facilitating public access to e-government information?
“Government information has become more accessible in the sense that anyone with a computer will have access, but this does not mean that it is more easily found”

“Access may be diminished thanks to the ‘hidden nature’ of e-government information, requiring patrons to ask a librarian for help. However, if the public’s knowledge of how to access information can be increased, the potential for improved access is enormous”
### Responses to statements on e-government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% who Agree or Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Librarians need <strong>more training</strong> in order to provide effective information services for electronic government information.</td>
<td>Acad. 80  Public 91  All 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without significant changes in policy and practice, the move to electronic delivery of government information will <strong>pose a major threat</strong> to the long-term preservation of government information.</td>
<td>Acad. 80  Public 82  All 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting government information on the Internet makes it <strong>more accessible</strong> to the public than it was in print form.</td>
<td>Acad. 88  Public 75  All 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Search engines are effective tools</strong> to locate government information.</td>
<td>Acad. 39  Public 38  All 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic government information is <strong>easy for patrons to find.</strong></td>
<td>Acad. 22  Public 13  All 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Major Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation: long term, stable access</td>
<td>49 20</td>
<td>25 11</td>
<td>39 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findability of information</td>
<td>34 14</td>
<td>32 14</td>
<td>32 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Divide: disparities in access to Internet or in digital/information literacy skills</td>
<td>5 2</td>
<td>45 20</td>
<td>27 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing professional roles of librarians</td>
<td>24 10</td>
<td>30 13</td>
<td>27 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRESERVATION

• Who is taking responsibility? – need Canada wide policy framework
• Lack of persistent urls; content disappears
• Discontinued print publications that have no online equivalent
• Documents that change without indication of versioning
DIGITAL DIVIDE

• access to machines, access to broadband, and skills to find and use information

• “although regulations may require information to be available, in practical terms the “accessibility” has been reduced. Patrons coming to my library are often frustrated and come to the Library as a last resort”.
FINDABILITY

- Hard even for experts: poor organization and lack of good quality search tools
- “online organization is not very clear, and patrons might be lost or confused among different sources”
- “libraries do not have the resources to support the level of assistance required”
WHAT ARE LIBRARIES DOING?

Initiatives to facilitate access to e-government information by type of library (multiple responses accepted)
WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING?

• Public Consultations – Digital Economy and Open Government

• Ongoing redesign of Government web presence:
  • Plan to reduce the number of government websites from 1500 to 6 or fewer (!)
  • Plan to create a new “virtual library”

• Shift to “Open Government” as a concept
  • Open Government Action Plan
THE EVOLUTION OF E-GOVERNMENT: OPEN GOVERNMENT

• “the notion that the people have the right to access the documents and proceedings of government. The idea that the public has a right to scrutinize and participate in government …” (Lathrop and Ruma, 2012: Open Government)

• Core concepts:
  • e-democracy
  • Transparency
  • Public sector data
  • proactive disclosure
  • Open data
  • Data/information as a nonrival, public good
GOC ACTION PLAN - 2012

http://data.gc.ca/eng/canadas-action-plan-open-government
FINAL THOUGHTS

• What is the role of libraries and information professionals in e-government / open government?
• What is lost by simplifying e-government information so that anyone can find and use it? Is this even possible?
• Many of the same themes from E-gov are playing out in Open Gov: lack of motivation and skills
• Information and data as PR – have we really improved access? Should access always be preferred over preservation?
• Is Google the best mechanism to deliver up Canadian government content? Can we do better?
THANK YOU

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