

Measuring website quality – DRAFT

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Policy official:	Adam Bailin
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Lead official:	David Pullinger
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Purpose

The perception of an organisation is influenced by the user experience of its website. Users may have no way to judge the operations of an organisation except through the experience of its public-facing services. Measuring website quality is a crucial step in building a website that is fit for purpose and helps the user to achieve their goals.

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Introduction

Purpose

The perception of an organisation is influenced by the user experience of its website. Users may have no way to judge the operations of an organisation except through the experience of its public-facing services. Measuring website quality is a crucial step in building a website that is fit for purpose and helps the user to achieve their goals.

Website quality data can also be used in conjunction with costs and usage data to make value-for-money judgements and aid in the planning and strategic development of websites.

Background

The National Audit Office surveyed 153 central government organisations between October and December 2006 for the report [Government on the internet](#)¹. They concluded that the quality of government websites had only improved slightly since 2002.

The Government has agreed to the [Public Accounts Committee \(PAC\) Sixteenth Report](#)² recommendation that a single set of website quality measures needs to be developed. This guidance describes those measures, their rationale and the mechanisms for data capture.

Audience

This guidance is intended for Heads of e-Communications (or equivalent) within central government departments, executive agencies and NDPBs.

¹ Government on the internet: progress in delivering information and services online
http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0607/government_on_the_internet.aspx

² Public Accounts Committee – Sixteenth Report
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmpubacc/143/14302.htm>

Core quality measures

1. Central government organisations should measure the following on an ongoing basis:
 - [Delivery of site objectives](#)
 - [User satisfaction](#)
 - [Usability](#)
 - [Standards compliance](#)
 - [Editorial quality](#)
2. In particular, central government organisations must measure user satisfaction via an online survey including, as a minimum, the [core set of questions](#) detailed in this guidance.
3. Central government departments must measure user satisfaction starting in the Financial Year 2009-10 for every website open on 1 April 2010.
4. Executive agencies and NDPBs must measure user satisfaction starting in the Financial Year 2010-11 for every website open on 1 April 2011.
5. At least one online survey per website should be carried out every year with figures reported annually.
6. Data should be provided to COI in the format specified in [the reporting template](#) in Appendix A.

Delivery of site objectives

7. Website managers should be clear what they want from each website. This will reflect the overall strategy of the site-owner and the contribution the website is expected to make towards delivering the strategy. Examples could include:
 - reducing calls to call centres by answering common questions on the website
 - registration for transactional services to follow
 - sign up for health promotional programmes such as Change4Life
 - encourage user participation in consultation or discussion groups to strengthen citizen engagement
8. Site managers should set specific measurable timed objectives for each site which they believe are realistic and achievable. These should cover:
 - operational elements linked to effective running of the site (e.g. site availability)
 - audience reach
 - measures of the user experience (e.g. user success, user satisfaction)
 - delivery of planned end benefits.(e.g. financial, behavioural, environmental, channel optimisation)
9. Site objectives should be translated into a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) which are monitored in a systematic way. There should be
 - a process in place for review of results
 - corrective action prioritised, planned and implemented

Web Performance Management Framework (PMF)

10. Cabinet Office, via the Contact Council, is developing a Web Performance Management Framework (PMF) for government sites. The Web PMF will sit alongside PMFs for other channels, such as the [telephone contact centre PMF](#) and that for face to face (which the Council aims to develop during 2009-10). It is intended to:
 - enable senior management teams to review performance against their peers, and thus encourage continuous improvement within and between web sites;
 - allow for more standardised comparison of service delivery across channels; on the web, face-to-face, and contact centres.

The suite of PMFs is intended to provide an invaluable toolkit for cross channel service delivery managers within Departments, Authorities and the broader public sector.

11. The Web PMF will start with and build upon the core measures proposed in this document.
12. More information on PMFs and the Web PMF in particular can be obtained by contacting the Contact Council at contactcouncil@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting Gerald Power at Gerald.power@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk (020 7276 3235).

User satisfaction

13. User satisfaction is a core measure of website quality. An online survey is considered the most appropriate method for capturing a representative sample of users and to gauge opinions. It is also the only method to collect information such as user profiles and reasons for visiting. User satisfaction must be measured via an online survey for each and every publicly accessible website operated by an organisation.
14. The benefits of running a website user satisfaction survey include:
 - Audience identification (or demographic profiling).
 - Identifying a site's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Suggests actionable recommendations for site improvement.
 - The results can feed into the strategic planning of a website.
 - Better understanding of site performance by benchmarking with other government websites.
15. The results of are particularly powerful when compared with data from peer websites or reviewed against other sectors. This is only possible if a consistent set of questions is used across all websites. This guidance sets the minimum set of questions for measuring and reporting user satisfaction.
16. User satisfaction data, when taken together with the standard measures for website usage and costs, allows assessment of the overall quality and value delivered by government websites.

Core questions

17. A set of core questions must be included in every website satisfaction survey conducted by an organisation. This core questions are detailed below and cover:
 - Overall satisfaction with the visit
 - Extent to which user achieved purpose of visit
 - Rating of the site on key dimensions
 - Likelihood to recommend the site to others
18. The core questions are based on the Directgov Customer Monitor and are designed to be relevant to every website, regardless of size, purpose or type.

A. How satisfied were you with your visit today?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
- Don't know

B. Did you get what you wanted from the site?

- Got everything I wanted
- Got most of what I wanted
- Got some of what I wanted
- Got none of what I wanted

C. Please rate the web site on the following aspects:

- Ease of use of the site
- Attractiveness of design/appearance
- Ease of finding information/services
- Information that was clear and easy to understand
- Accurate and up to date information
- Usefulness of site search (if used)

- Very good
- Good
- Neither good nor poor
- Poor
- Very poor
- Don't know
- (Add: 'Not used' for search engine question)

D. How likely are you to recommend this web site to a friend, colleague or family member?

- Definitely
- Probably
- Not sure
- Probably not
- Definitely not

19. The wording of these questions and order in which they are asked must be maintained exactly as set out to maximise consistency between surveys.

20. The survey must also collect information on:

- Purpose of visit. This will clarify what the website is being used for and will also aid interpretation of ratings for user satisfaction and extent to which user achieved purpose of visit.
- User profile. This must include age, gender, disability and extent of internet proficiency also collected together with site specific classifications. The user profile information generated helps identify a site's audience and whether it is reaching its intended target segment(s).
- User postcode should be requested (with opt out allowed) as it allows assessment of geographic coverage for the site and also facilitates integration with other postcode based data sources (MOSAIC etc)

Survey design

21. Responses to this core question set should be collected either as part of a broader website survey or as a standalone survey.
22. In all cases, the following template must be followed for survey design:

Question flow	Part of broader survey	Stand-alone
1	Screening questions including age	Screening questions including age
2	Standard question A : visit satisfaction	Standard question A : visit satisfaction
3	Purpose of visit	Purpose of visit
4	Standard questions B-D	Standard questions B-D
5	Other site -specific questions	-
6	User profile questions	User profile questions

23. An open ended question may be included directly after question A (user satisfaction with visit). This can provide valuable insight into the main drivers of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.
24. If including the core question set in a broader survey, it is recommended that the survey focuses **only** on customer satisfaction and related measures. Inclusion of broader areas e.g. questions related to future development is likely to reduce rates of completion, especially by those who are less satisfied with the site.

Sampling and representation

25. Surveys should be designed to provide feedback which is representative of all users. Online survey data may not be completely representative, for example proficient internet users may be over-represented. Supplementation by other methods may be appropriate to ensure a representative sample. This could include weighting data with input from panel-based sources (e.g. Nielsen Online, Comscore) or use of alternative channels (e.g. email, telephone).
26. Surveys should run over a minimum period of one week period in order to capture both weekday and weekend visitors, at anytime of day.
27. Sample size needs to be sufficient to allow analysis of major sub-groups of users. For most sites, it should be possible to achieve a sample of at least 1000 users: on line surveys add little extra cost for increasing survey size.
28. For sites with low levels of traffic, achieving this level may be impractical. A minimum of 250 is recommended.
29. In order to calculate the correct sampling interval, there is a need to obtain up to date traffic figures based on unique visitors. Understanding likely response and completion rates will also need to be factored into this collection. For example, if a site was attracting 100,000 unique visitors on a weekly basis, a sampling interval of 1 in 18 would need to be set in order to achieve 500 completes over a one week period, assuming a response rate of 15% and a completion rate of 60%.
30. Online surveys must comply with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act.
31. Under the MRS Code of Conduct, those under 16 must not be interviewed. A question to establish a user's age must be included at the start of the survey and under 16s screened out. For sites aimed specifically at young people, it may be possible to get special dispensation from the MRS to carry out research with under 16s. Site owners should seek advice before initiating research.

Survey implementation

32. The survey should be completed online by the user at the end of the visit. The recommended approach is to give users a chance to opt out by using an 'interstitial' – a page that appears between two other pages. The interstitial method works as follows:
 - i. The user clicks on a link from the website, but instead of launching a pop-up window, are taken to a new page in the same window en route to the destination page.

- ii. The user is then given the option to take the survey or not, or to do the survey later.
 - iii. For those taking the survey immediately, the survey is launched via a pop-up window (after being informed this would happen).
33. The interstitial method is particularly appropriate for creating surveys which comply with the accessibility requirements for government websites (i.e. Level Double-A of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). Further [guidance on accessibility](#)³ is available on the COI website.

³ Delivering inclusive websites (TG102) <http://www.coi.gov.uk/guidance.php?page=129>

Usability

34. The Power of Information Taskforce commissioned work on usability from the agency Bunnyfoot to identify good and bad aspects of government websites. The review found that some government websites are failing to get the basics right, for example:
- Not helping people to navigate the site easily
 - Not helping search engines like Google to find the site
 - Not speaking the language of the user
35. The Cabinet Office has asked COI to develop usability guidelines for web developers and web content editors across government covering the basics of usability in a way that is engaging and interactive. The aim is to raise awareness of usability issues across government and to improve the quality of government websites.
36. The guidelines cover 8 broad themes:
- Layout and design
 - Navigation
 - Writing content
 - Content elements
 - Forms
 - Search
 - QA and standards
 - Special pages (e.g. homepage)
37. They contain a total of 22 individual guidance modules ranging from 'Fundamentals of page layout' to 'When and how to use PDFs'. Each module has been written to be consumed and understood in just 5-10 minutes and is illustrated with examples of good and poor practice. In addition there will be self assessment tests, tracking of progress through the guidelines, and toolkits for downloading.
38. As recommended in the [Power of Information Taskforce Report](http://poit.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/poit/2009/02/government-websites-should-meet-basic-usability-criteria-final/),⁴ the guidelines will be published by April 2009 with an implementation plan by June 2009.

⁴ Power of Information Taskforce Report <http://poit.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/poit/2009/02/government-websites-should-meet-basic-usability-criteria-final/>

Standards compliance

39. Government websites must comply with the [standards set by COI](#). The following timetable is in place for central government departments:

By this date...	...you should have:	Standard
December 2008	XML Sitemaps for all open sites	TG122 Exposing your website to search engines
December 2008	accessibility plans for all sites open on 1 Jan 2010	TG102 Delivering inclusive websites
March 2009	redirection component plans in place	TG125 Managing URLs
1 April 2009	started measuring website usage	TG116 Measuring website usage
1 April 2009	started measuring website costs	TG128 Measuring website costs
1 April 2010	started measuring user satisfaction	TG126 Measuring website quality
September 2009	redirection component installed for all sites open on 1 April 2010	TG125 Managing URLs
December 2009	double-A accessibility	TG102 Delivering inclusive websites

Checklist for sites closing

40. Site closure falls broadly into the following four categories:

- Site is totally inactive
- Domain points to corporate or other website
- Retained for archive and FOI reasons only
- Site no longer part of government web estate (i.e. transferred to third parties)

41. For sites due to close:

- i. **Inform COI** of any changes to closure schedules. This is needed for reporting purposes and to ensure that archival snapshots can be taken by The National Archives.
- ii. **Signpost that the site is closed.** Website managers should ensure that a 'closed' site is clearly signposted as such. This should take the

form of a message on the home page in a prominent place with wording such as: 'This website is no longer being updated and the URL is maintained purely for archive purposes....'

- iii. **Maintain domain in perpetuity.** Keep old domains registered with the relevant certifying authority (JANET in the case of .gov.uk domains). In order to either serve content, or redirect users elsewhere (or both), it is necessary to keep the domain active and this means maintaining the appropriate DNS settings, so that users can be directed to the correct IP address for the domain. It is perfectly acceptable to close a site in terms of removing all content, but the domain should be left running to resolve incoming requests.
- iv. **Set up redirection.** This will enable users to be redirected to alternative content on an archived or live site.

Coding standards

42. You should follow a *progressive enhancement* approach to developing websites to ensure that content is accessible to the widest possible number of browsers. This approach to web development works by building your site in layers:
- Code semantic, standards-compliant (X)HTML
 - Add a presentation layer using CSS
 - Add rich user interactions with JavaScript

Further [guidance on browser testing](#)⁵ is available in TG117.

⁵ Browser testing (TG117) <http://www.coi.gov.uk/guidance.php?page=212>

Editorial quality

43. Editorial quality or quality of content is a key indicator of website quality. Content should be up to date, easy to understand, appropriate in tone and consistent. There are several methods for measuring and improving content quality, for example:
 - User feedback
 - Existence of editorial guidelines
 - Conformance with editorial guidelines (e.g. via automated tool)
 - Monitoring of search terms
44. All websites should have editorial guidelines and adhere to them. There should be a clear overall strategy about who can contribute, who needs to approve and an editorial policy for the whole website, as well as for each part, against which content is monitored and assessed. This would include ensuring overall processes are in place for checking adherence to Civil Service Code, for example each speech and blog checked that they are politically non-partisan.
45. Automated tools should be considered to help identify where the site has deviated from the editorial guidelines, for example to check spelling.
46. Monitoring the search terms used in both internal and external search engines provides insight into the language used by your audience. This information should be used to inform editorial policy; it is important to use language that users understand.

Survey details

Sample is	1) Weighted	2) Unweighted
Sample size (unweighted)	<i>(Insert number)</i>	
Survey	Date	Duration

User profile

Age		Gender	
16-19	%	Male	%
20-24	%	Female	%
25-34	%	Refused	%
35-44	%		
45-54	%	How often do you personally use the Internet?	
55-59	%	At least once a day	%
60-64	%	Almost every day	%
65-74	%	Every two or three days	%
75+	%	About once a week	%
Refused	%	About once a fortnight	%
		About once a month	%
		Less often	%
		Never but have access	%
		Don't know	%