



Overall Findings from Weblog Analysis

Introduction

EPA has launched the National Dialogue on Access to Environmental Information, led by EPA's Office of Environmental Information. This effort seeks to understand EPA's audiences' needs and preferences for environmental information and find ways to improve and enhance information access.

To understand who uses the EPA website and how they get to the site, EPA analyzed the logs regarding activity on the site (i.e., "weblogs"). EPA evaluated users based on the web domains by which they accessed EPA's website, such as .gov or .edu. It is difficult to differentiate between audiences because several audiences can use a single domain. For example, industry and news media both use the .com domain. However, for this analysis EPA made the assumption that the majority of people using the .gov, .edu and .org domains can be respectively placed into the government, educational institution or non-profit groups. EPA also offers some observations that pertain to several audiences.

Government Audiences

1. **Federal, State, and local agency officials are equally likely to use the EPA website.** Federal, state, and local agencies number in the top users of the EPA website.
2. **Government officials from a variety of departments and areas of practice utilize the EPA website.** The top government users of the EPA website span diverse practice areas including environmental, health, and policy arenas.
3. **Government officials are interested in a broad range of information on the EPA website.** Government officials are interested in an array of information including technical, non-technical, and regulatory information in all major program areas.

Audiences from Educational Institutions

1. **Users from a variety of universities, university-affiliated organizations, military education institutions, and K-12 schools utilize the EPA website.** Users from a broad array of educational institutions access EPA information.
2. **Students and educators from institutions of higher learning access information on "hot" environmental topics.** Students and educators from higher learning institutions commonly access information on environmental topics in the media, such as climate change. In addition, these students and educators commonly access EPA webpages that contain news and updates (e.g., the solid waste and emergency response and wetlands, oceans, and watersheds webpages).
3. **Students and educators at K-12 schools use interactive EPA tools targeted at children.** Students and educators are using a variety of EPA's kid-friendly tools, such as "recycle city", the "kids home tour", and the "adventures of the garbage gremlin." There is the appearance that individual users, or potentially groups using a single computer, spend significant time navigating through these kid-friendly EPA webpages, suggesting that EPA-provided information is used as a basis for environmental learning in the classroom.

Non-Profits and Other Organizations

1. **Various organizations use the EPA website, although not as heavily as other EPA website customers.** A variety of organizations, including non-profits, access environmental information on the EPA website. However, there are no organizations that appear to be predominant users of the EPA website, as there are with other customer groups, such as government officials, educators, and students.
2. **Non-profits and other organizations look to EPA for a range of information.** Customers from organizations access a broad variety of information on the EPA website, ranging from technical topics to “hot topics.” While the intent of these customers cannot be shown through the weblogs, it is suspected that many of these groups are intermediaries that will be passing EPA information on to the public and other stakeholders.

Cross-Cutting Observations

1. **A significant number of customers accessing the EPA website do so using home grown automated search engines or repetitive manual searches.** Automated search engines (i.e., crawlers and bots) constitute a large portion of the weblogs, after factoring out the known automated tools. Additionally, there are many instances of non-automated, repetitive searches to EPA webpages. This leads to the conclusion that many EPA customers require access to environmental information using methods beyond search and navigation of the EPA website (e.g., through regular data streams or updates on specific environmental topics).
2. **Some customers are referred to the EPA website through external sites that are not search engines and are not associated with environmental agencies.** Some customers access the EPA website through collaborative and social network sites such as Wikipedia and Facebook.
3. **There is a mix of users searching for information and accessing known sites.** There appears to be an equal ratio of users that believe they know where to find information and users who need to navigate for information and/or search the EPA website.
4. **The majority of EPA website users utilize search engines and links within the EPA website to access pages of interest.** The majority of customers are using a combination of external search mechanisms (e.g. the Google search engine or a Lotus Notes database), the EPA search engine, and links within EPA webpages to get access to EPA webpages. Often, an individual user will use a combination of these modes of access.
5. **EPA website users are just as likely to access program specific webpages as they are the EPA homepage.** Many users access the EPA homepage, and use this page as a starting point for further exploration of the EPA website. However, just as many users go directly to a program-specific webpage and bypass the EPA homepage.
6. **The majority of customers access the EPA website during normal business hours.** Most users accessing information through the EPA website do so in the range of typical working hours.
7. **The extent of customer access to electronic EPA resources is not completely known at this point in time.** This analysis did not incorporate information on access to some electronic resources, such as EPA databases. Information on access to these resources may provide further insights into customer needs and website navigation patterns.