InterPARES 2 Project
International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Overview

General Study 08:
Survey of Government Web Site Interactivity

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The Context/Activity

This general study focused on Web-based delivery of government services, "because many of the governments represented in the [InterPARES] Project looked to Web technology as a means of achieving e-government goals."[1]

Its goal was to help determine which government systems might be considered interactive, dynamic or experiential, which are the three criteria sought after by the InterPARES 2 Project. In other words, by defining which systems fit the above criteria, the study sought to subsequently determine to what degree the various levels of government are relying on interactive, dynamic and experiential records.

As can be inferred from the scope and aim of this general study, it was limited to the Government Focus of InterPARES 2 and was conducted by working groups 1.3, 2.3 and 3.3.

Digital Entities Studied

For this study, the researchers used the four categories of Web sites defined in the "Guidelines for Keeping Records of Web-Based Activity in the Commonwealth Government" of the National Archives of Australia.[2] These categories are:

1. Static Web sites and Web resources (Documents sitting in folders on a server and tied together with hyperlinks and sharing a common address. Interactivity is in the links—move from one document to another.)
2. Static Web sites and Web resources with form-based interactivity (Including e-mail buttons)
3. Web sites and Web resources based on dynamic data access (A front-end for accessing an organization's database. May have own unique identifier, usually reflected in URL—can be bookmarked.)

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[1] Mark Wolfe (2003), "InterPARES 2 Project - General Study 08 Final Report: Survey of Government Web Site Interactivity," 1. Available at http://www.interpares.org/display_file.cfm?doc=ip2_gs08_final_report.pdf

[2] Available at http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/web_records/intro.html. Formerly "Archiving Web Resources: Guidelines for Keeping Records of Web-based Activity in the Commonwealth Government."

4. Dynamically-generated Web sites and Web resources (Generated "on the fly," thus requiring a number of software tools to build a page. The content, structure & presentation are created dynamically via databases & style sheets based on user preferences, access profiles, user query and/or capabilities of the user's browser)

Web sites may fall into more than one of the four categories if they have pages that meet the requirements for multiple categories. If this was the case, the sites were counted in both categories. A total of 321 Web sites in 20 international jurisdictions were surveyed. "Intranet sites in Ontario and at two universities in British Columbia were also surveyed to determine if a higher level of interactivity existed in that environment." (Wolfe, 2)

Category of Site	Internet (%)	Intranet (%)
Static	41	37
Static with forms	34	37
Dynamic data access	19	16
Dynamically generated sites	6	10

Documentary Practices Observed

Although this general study does not delve into the documentary practices of the government bodies surveyed, it does provide some indication of the systems in which documents/records are being created and maintained in a governmental setting.

Although InterPARES 2 seeks to study recordkeeping practices in dynamic, interactive and experiential environments, this general study has shown that in the government focus, only 6% of sites surveyed could be defined as having such systems, with the result rising to 25% if one is to include sites with dynamic data access. In the case of a restricted intranet environment, the results are comparable, with 10% dynamically-generated sites and 26% with the inclusion of dynamic data access.

Whether these results could be considered conclusive and whether they apply to the case studies in the government focus of InterPARES 2 is not discussed in the available documentation. What the survey does seem to show, however, is that a very small minority of government Web sites can be categorized as dynamic, interactive or experiential and thus are producing dynamic, interactive and experiential documents. In any case, these types of systems represent a minority of government systems at the present time.

Is that because governments are still delivering traditional services in the electronic environment and these traditional services do not lend themselves to such systems, or because the public's faith in and comfort with such systems is not yet at a level to introduce such technology in a government setting for the general public? (C.f. Domain 1 Questions, in which many of the government systems, even the most technologically advanced, mirrored paper-based systems in their look and feel.)

Accuracy, Authenticity and Reliability

Not addressed in the available documentation.