

Title: Impact of Federal Information Policies on Assessing Agency Websites

By:

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Increasingly US Federal agencies rely on their websites as a means of disseminating information; providing access to agency services; providing forms, resources, and information necessary for citizens to interact with their government; and archiving basic information related to the conduct of business at that agency. Indeed, Congress and the Clinton administration have encouraged agencies to move to the web environment to conduct business, inform the public, and otherwise improve the effectiveness of government by use of the Internet.

Previous research by the authors suggests some confusion on the part of many Federal agencies as to the various laws, policies, and guidelines that direct agencies to conduct business in a web-based environment. The range of policy instruments related to Federal agencies' use of the web in terms of management, strategic planning, performance assessment (through laws such as the Government Performance Results Act), privacy, security, records management, digital signatures, and others has grown considerably in recent years. Moreover, there is little understanding of the effectiveness of web-based government services. There are virtually no programs in place of ongoing assessment and evaluation of such web-based programs, services, and information.



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The overall goal of this research is to assist Federal agencies in providing effective, efficient, and well-managed websites that meet the needs of citizens and others attempting to conduct business with the government via the web environment. The research questions guiding the study include:

- What is the current Federal information policy system affecting agencies' development and use of web-based information and services? What are the gaps, ambiguities, contradictions, and needs to improve this policy system?
- How do a sample of key Federal agencies implement the current information policy system affecting web-based information and services? What problems and issues have they identified that affect the delivery of high quality web-based services to the public?
- To what degree do agencies use existing Federal policies as a basis for ongoing assessment of their websites?
- What recommendations can be offered to Federal agencies to (1) better develop and integrate existing policy related to websites, (2) better manage websites to meet the needs of their users, and (3) assess, on an ongoing basis, their websites as a basis for continuous improvement.

Answers to these research questions will allow the researchers to propose recommendations to improve the Federal information policy system related to websites; assist agencies in better meeting the information and services needs of their users via the web-based environment; and offer Federal agencies a practical guide for conducting ongoing assessments of web-based services and resources.

The authors will provide an update and status report of work done to date on the project. They will also provide preliminary results from the policy analysis with possible recommendations that may improve the Federal policy system as it affects ongoing assessment of Federal websites.



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