One Percent Evaluation Set-Aside Title:
Evaluation of Customer Satisfaction with Selected National Library of Medicine Web Sites Using the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) Methodology
Final Report

Submitted by:

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In FY03, the National Library of Medicine was provided $100K in Evaluation Set-Aside funds to conduct a pilot test of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) online survey methodology for measuring customer satisfaction. Five web sites were selected for study (MedlinePlus in English and en espanol; the NLM home page; TOXNET; and AIDSinfo). The funded pilot study was intended to both evaluate the ACSI methodology and the application of that methodology to the select web sites. The rationale for the study was that, increasingly, agency programmatic information is made available to the public primarily via web sites, and that the ACSI offered an innovative approach to web site user evaluation that warranted serious consideration.

NLM has completed the major phases of the pilot study. NLM has conducted extensive discussions with the contractor Foresee Results Inc., and its academic advisors, on the ACSI methodology. And NLM has reviewed about six months of survey data for

each of the five pilot sites. The methodology looks solid, and the results to date seem to be quite consistent over time.

The results of the methods review indicate that the ACSI methodology meets or exceeds accepted standards for validity and accuracy of online user surveys. Additionally, because the ACSI uses a standard set of core questions across platforms, the ACSI results can be benchmarked to individual and aggregate results for participating US Government agencies and private sector companies. Further, the ACSI survey methodology allows for the inclusion of custom questions geared to each individual client, and thus permits a blend of both standardized and customized queries.

When compared to conventional snap shot online user survey methods, NLM has concluded that ACSI appears to be a useful approach that compares favorably to other methods:

- Combines the benefits of snap shot (one-time) and rolling (continuous) surveys;
- Combines the benefits of standardized and custom questions;
- Combines the benefits of top-line and drill-down results and analytics;
- With results available online via a user-friendly web interface;
- With survey instrument customization on a rolling basis;
- With extended benchmarking on a quarterly basis; and
- At a cost for an annual subscription of just one snap shot survey ($20-25K/year).

The ACSI survey fits well with NLM's multi-dimensional approach to web evaluation developed over the last few years. Within the category of User Feedback, the online user survey is one of the most important methods to generate data on customer satisfaction and other user attributes. And within the online user survey category, the ACSI methodology appears to offer a favorable benefit/cost ratio compared to other options.

With regard to the detailed ACSI survey data, the response data to both the standardized and customized questions have proved useful to NLM. The standardized data provide a robust indication of areas of relative strength and weakness of each web site as perceived by the users. The customized data provide deeper insights into the roles and demographics of the users, and a better understanding of why they came to the web site and what they did with the information found on the site. Both of these types of survey results can be compared over time and with the results of other surveys to develop a good sense of trends in user feedback.

Likewise, top-line ACSI survey results have proved useful in understanding the relative levels of customer satisfaction with the select web sites. MedlinePlus scored at the top of the participating government web sites, and all 5 of the pilot study web sites scored above the government-wide average. Also, several of the sites compared well with private sector companies in the e-commerce, online news, and online portal businesses. NLM and NIH have received significant media coverage from the ACSI survey results to date. (See, e.g., http://www.foreseeresults.com .)

One of the important lessons from NLM's web evaluation work to date is that continuous user feedback is needed, to assure optimal web design and content. Snap shot, once a year or two surveys are helpful, but can become outdated and certainly do not provide the frequency of feedback needed to properly inform decisions on web improvement. The ACSI helps meet this need cost-effectively, and also provides both benchmarking and customization. Further, the ACSI, offered by Foresee Results Inc. via the Federal Consulting Group (US Department of the Treasury) is fully compatible with the President's and DHHS E-Government initiatives, and has received expedited survey clearance procedures from OMB.

On these bases, NLM has determined that ACSI survey results are not only highly useful in guiding improvements to the five web sites, facilitating improved presentation and accessibility of NIH health resources to health professionals and the public, but also add value by allowing NLM to benchmark its sites against other Federal Government or commercial web sites. NLM would recommend the ACSI survey mehodology as a highly valuable and effective methodology in evaluating additional NIH and Department of Health and Human Services resources.