

Delivering Services to Canadians

About the study

Launched in 1996, EKOS' Rethinking the Information Highway study grew out of a need to better understand how information technologies were reshaping the environment governments and companies were operating within.

Now in its eighth edition and more than 20 surveys later, the study is one of the largest and longest running studies in this area in Canada today. Given its big-picture focus on the full range of issues relating to technology usage, such as the interaction between traditional and electronic service delivery channels and privacy and security-related issues, Rethinking the Information Highway remains one of the most relied upon sources for senior decision makers who are tasked with guiding their organization through what continues to be a rapidly changing environment.

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Overview

The service delivery environment has changed dramatically since 1999 when the Government of Canada set out to make all government information available online by 2004. The Internet has become a prevalent source of information and has revolutionized how Canadians interact with their government. However, despite largely favourable views regarding government online service delivery, there are still concerns expressed by Canadians about some online transactions.

The broad service delivery environment

Support, but low trust levels:

Current efforts by governments across the country to modernize service delivery are occurring against a backdrop of low levels of trust. Few Canadians feel governments can be trusted to do the right thing.

Results also reveal that while Canadians overwhelmingly believe that the greater emphasis on the use of information technology by governments is a move in the right direction, they are more divided on whether governments are at the forefront in its implementation.

Broad perceptions

Positive outlook:

Canadians are generally optimistic about improvements in the delivery of government services. Those expecting improvements in service delivery outnumber those expecting deterioration across a number of key service areas, such as the ease of the transaction, choice of channel, and speed of service.

Recent contact with the federal government

The Internet as a main method of contact:

The Internet has equaled the telephone as a main method of contact for Canadians with the federal government. There has been a significant increase in usage of online channels over the past year, and an even more significant increase when compared to the late 1990s.

Multiple Channels:

Multiple channel interactions continue to play an essential role in the service delivery environment. About 4 in 10 Canadians with recent contact with the federal government report using multiple channels. And a clear majority of those who use multiple channels express satisfaction with the service experience.

Channel preferences

Methods of contact vary according to activity:

Canadians are comfortable doing many government interactions online; however, there are still certain interactions, such as obtaining an answer to a specific question or replacing a lost document, where Canadians prefer a more direct method such as the telephone or personal contact.

Online channels — direct use and intermediaries:

Results also reveal that Canadians are increasingly interacting with governments online, either through their own interactions or through those of an intermediary. In fact, fewer than 1 in 4 say they have not done any of a series of common online government interactions.

Results also reveal the majority of Canadian Internet users say they have visited Government of Canada websites in the past year, and most were able to do what they wanted through these websites.

Concerns with the Internet:

Although Canadians are optimistic about the effectiveness of the Internet as a way for governments to communicate with citizens, and show an interest in being able to do most of their government interactions online, a significant proportion continue to express discomfort with some types of online government interactions, particularly those that involve making a payment with a credit card.

Fostering uptake of online channels

Lack of awareness and value proposition:

There continues to be considerable room for further growth in the uptake of online channels. There are, however, a variety of factors limiting growth. Firstly, Canadians continue to lack familiarity with federal, provincial, and municipal services online. Equally important is the need for a strong value proposition. Despite increased interaction, half of Canadians say they do not deal with the federal government frequently enough to make it worth the trouble of obtaining an online account. The key will be to build on progress to date while promoting greater awareness and strengthening the benefits of contact through the online channel.

