

**Analysis of Survey Results
Of the Canton Public Library Internet Branch**

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Introduction

In contrast to the standard view of the internet in the library community, the Canton Public Library does not view the Internet as its competitor, but rather as a tool that can be used to strengthen the role of the library in the community. The Canton Public Library's Internet Branch, therefore, is intended to serve as an Internet extension of the physical branch of the library. In other words, the designers of the Internet Branch intend it to be a replication of the atmosphere and civic role of the actual library. Part of this goal is to also replicate the functionality of the library (such as access to the catalogue, research tools, the ability to reserve books, etc.) and, to a large extent, the Internet Branch is a fully functioning branch of the Canton Public Library that one needs not go to in person.

The Canton Public Library resides in a newly remodeled building, with large, open spaces. It is clear from the moment that one walks in the door that technology is important to the decision-makers at the library, in part because of the ubiquitous computer terminals. The library also pulls together a diversion collection of resources to try and meet the public's needs, and makes them as accessible to the public as possible. The designers of the Internet Branch intend to capture this environment for the Internet Branch.

Much like the physical branch, the Internet Branch is meant to serve the entire public of Canton. It needs to serve a wide variety of ages, backgrounds, and technological capabilities. For example, many of the people that responded to the survey reported that they had computers that were several years old. The Internet Branch must work with these computers. Further, the ages of the respondents ranged from middle school to senior citizens. The Canton Public Library cannot get away with making assumptions about its audience or narrowly focus on making one group happy, because it must serve everyone in Canton.

In order to gauge the feelings of as many potential users as possible, the survey was given in two parts: the Internet version offered through the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch, and the paper version that was administered at the physical branch. If only the paper version were offered, it would miss the users of the Internet Branch who rarely visit the physical branch—an audience that the Canton Public Library is trying to pull in. On the other hand, the survey could not be offered only online, because it is also valuable to find out who is not using the website, and why they might not be using the website.

The survey asks questions to establish demographics of the users, to not only get a sense of who is using the Internet Branch, but also what those users are like. The survey also asks questions about the technological capabilities of users (both skills and what they own). The survey also asks about users' feelings about the Internet Branch and the nature of their typical interactions.

The Canton Public Library frequently hosts surveys at their Internet Branch, so they already had the infrastructure in place to develop an Internet survey. Once we had completed our survey, we handed it over to their web development team, where our document was translated into an interactive survey to be hosted off of the main page of the Internet Branch.

The paper version of the survey was checked to make sure that it was synchronized with the Internet version, and then it was printed and distributed at the Canton Public Library.

The survey was offered for one week at the end of February, and then the results were collected and analyzed. Thirty-eight people responded to the survey—twenty-four in the paper version, and fourteen through the internet version. Much of the initial work was simply averaging the answers among the various respondents, but then we delved more deeply into the material, looking for trends—particularly based on demographic or technological information. We spent time focusing on the use of specific features of the Internet Branch, such as the Children’s Library, Teen Place, and Help Me Make It Through the Day, a collection of resources geared toward adults and located on the main page of the Internet Branch.

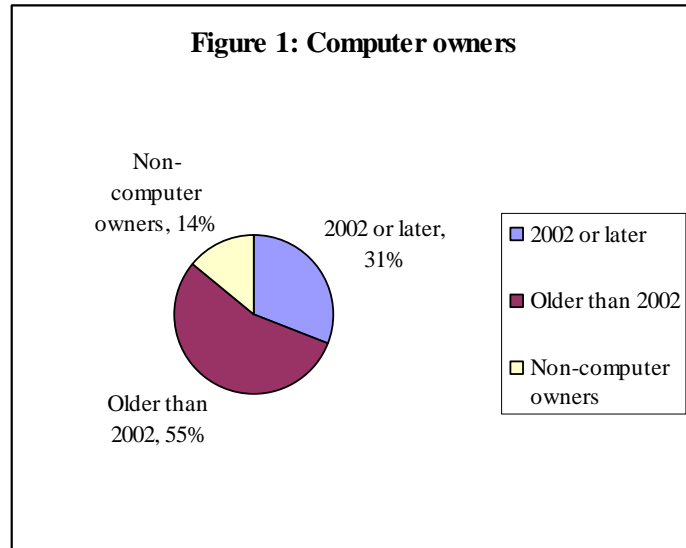
The survey has produced some good news for the Canton Public Library: The survey respondents indicated that the Internet Branch is a useful and attractive website. Moreover, the library had been successful in spreading word of the Internet Branch, and most of the respondents had used the Internet Branch prior to taking the survey.

Further, the respondents spanned many age groups. We had theorized before starting the survey that the Internet Branch’s target audience would be diverse, and that theory played out in the results. These diverse respondents also used computers and the Internet to a great extent.

Users

Technological capability of users

Thirty-one of the respondents (82%) claim to own computers. Of those that own computers, 65% have computers that are older than 2002 (see figure 1). Obviously, it is important that the Internet Branch be accessible to users with a wide range of technology. The Internet Branch supports this need through the content on its pages; much of the content is textual, with images used primarily as ornamentation. The site contains little Java script, and does not implement Cascading Style Sheets. The Internet Branch, as a result, should work on a wide variety of systems—particularly on older systems that may not have been upgraded as time has passed.



Internet users and the Internet Branch

Obviously, all of the daily visitors must use the Internet on a daily basis. However, it is interesting to note that 50% of the respondents that use the Internet on a daily basis also visit the Internet Branch on a daily basis. Given the number of websites available to Internet users, it is surprising that the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch is able to attract so many repeat visitors.

- 50% use the Internet on a daily basis.
- 36% of daily visitors use HMMITTD.
- 79% of daily visitors use the IB to conduct research.

However, only 36% of the daily visitors use Help Me Make it Through the Day. On the other hand, 79% of the daily visitors use the Internet Branch to conduct research. Based on anecdotal answers, we know that at least some Internet Branch users are using it primarily for its basic library functionality (looking for books, renewing books, etc.), and many visitors are utilizing the Internet Branch for research, a common activity at library websites.

Overall, it seems that people know that the Internet Branch is a useful resource, but given the few respondents who have used Help Me Make it Through the Day and the few respondents to visit the Children's Library or Teen Place, there is still more work that can be done to publicize the features of the Internet Branch.

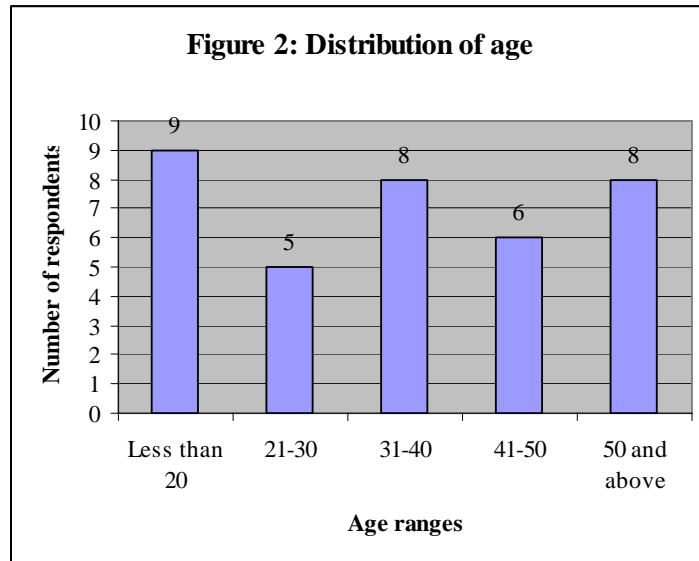
Age and accessibility

The respondents to the survey are from a variety of age groups, as we had predicted while writing the survey. The Canton Public Library, though, is already aware that it must serve

a variety of age groups as part of its goal of serving Canton, and the Internet Branch reflects this necessity. It is important to note from these results that, given the great numbers of respondents below 20 and above 40 years old (see figure 2), accessibility is an important issue for the Internet Branch. The website must be child-friendly, without an overly complicated interface, and it must also serve the elderly, who may have problems with vision, motor skills, or lack technological savvy. Given the high ratings that the Internet Branch was given for appearance and usefulness, it would appear that the Canton Public Library is meeting these needs, but it will be important to find out why some parts of the site are not utilized as much as others.

Education levels

Overall, the people that responded to the survey are well educated. Adjusting for those too young to have attended college, with 79% of all respondents of equal to or greater age of 18 having a college level education, and it is possible that better-educated individuals are more heavily invested in the library (and will volunteer to fill out surveys to improve that library, for example). Causation cannot be inferred from this survey, but it is important to note that a portion of the users—possibly a significant portion—requires tools to support research activities at more than just a surface level.



79% of respondents above 18 have a college education

The Internet Branch

Use of “Help Me Make it Through the Day”

The Canton Public Library wishes to make their web site more than just a typical library web site, which they characterize as simply providing information about the physical branch of the library, such as its hours of operation. Instead, the Internet Branch of the Canton Public Library is viewed as an extension of the physical library. Because of this, they include on their website content that typically might not be found on a typical library site. One significant instance of this sort of content is the Help Me Make it Through the Day portion of the web site. In the Help Me Make it Through the Day portion of the site, content such as news, stock market results, weather, and so on can be found. One interesting result from the survey is that the majority of users did not use the Help Me Make it Through the Day portion of the website. Of the people surveyed, only 27% of them reported to having used this portion of the site.

- 27% of all respondents had used Help Me Make it Through the Day.
- Users of Help Me Make it Through the Day rated the usefulness of the IB 12% higher.

Part of the reason for this fact may be that the content on this page is not original content. Instead, the links on this page generally link to other pages that create the content Canton Public library hopes will help its patrons through the day, such as Yahoo or Headline News. It stands to reason that users have to have a reason for getting content from a particular source. Since the Help Me Make it Through the Day material was not original material, but rather links to sites that created this content, this link on the website would only be useful to people who did not know where to get this content in the first place. The typical user will find it easier to bookmark pages that they need to see frequently, such as Headline News, and bypass the Canton Public Library entirely. This is not to say that the results indicated that this portion of the website is useless. In fact, the results indicate that this portion of the site is used by a significant minority of people who rated the Canton Public Library’s site as slightly more useful than the average user. However, this may indicate that the Canton Public Library needs to look elsewhere in order to create a true “internet branch”.

Other uses of the Internet by library patrons

In contrast to these results, 42% of users indicate that they use chat on the Internet and 45% of users say that they use bulletin boards on the Internet. These results are close to twice the usage indicated by the Help Me Make it Through the Day links, and yet are not features currently offered by the Canton Public Library.

- 42% chat on the Internet
- 45% use bulletin boards

It is also interesting to note the way that the users of the library use the physical branch and the Internet Branch to augment their lives. For instance, many of the people who responded to the survey reported using both the library and the Internet for social activities such as chatting and playing games. In fact, more than one respondent

mentioned making friends as their primary activity at the library. These activities have an underlying social aspect. To foster a greater sense of community, the Canton Public Library could look to this desire for association.

Rates of use of the Internet Branch

- 55% of library visitors use the Internet at the library
- 47% of daily visitors to the IB visit the physical branch daily
- 21% of all respondents visit the physical branch daily

On the other hand, the site proves to be popular with the Canton Public Library's patrons. The Canton Public Library does not view the Internet as its competitor, but rather as a tool for extending the physical library's capabilities. As such, it is interesting to note that 55% of all visitors to the library use the library's computers to search the Internet despite the fact that most users who visit the library have computers of their own. One can infer therefore that the Internet Branch does not replace the physical branch. Nor is the physical branch more important than the Internet Branch. Instead, both instances of the library complement the other.

Out of the daily visitors to the Internet Branch, 47% visit the physical branch on a daily basis (as compared to 21% of all the respondents who claim to visit the physical branch daily). It appears then that prodigious users of the site are more likely to also be prodigious users of the physical branch itself. This may be because of how much the two branches complement each other, by providing content the other can not and in each case by facilitating the use of the other branch. For example, the physical branch facilitates the use of the Internet Branch by allowing easy access to it throughout the library. The Internet Branch, on the other hand, extends the physical branch and facilitates the use of the physical branch by allowing the user to do things such as search the card catalog and by allowing access to a number of other library related functions from the Internet Branch.

It is possible that the Internet Branch furthers a sense of community among the patrons of the library that the Canton Public Library is trying to foster at its physical location. It is also possible that daily visitors of the physical branch are exposed to advertisement for the Internet Branch more often than infrequent guests (indeed, 66% of the respondents claim that they had been referred to the Internet Branch by the library itself).

Perceptions of Internet Branch usefulness

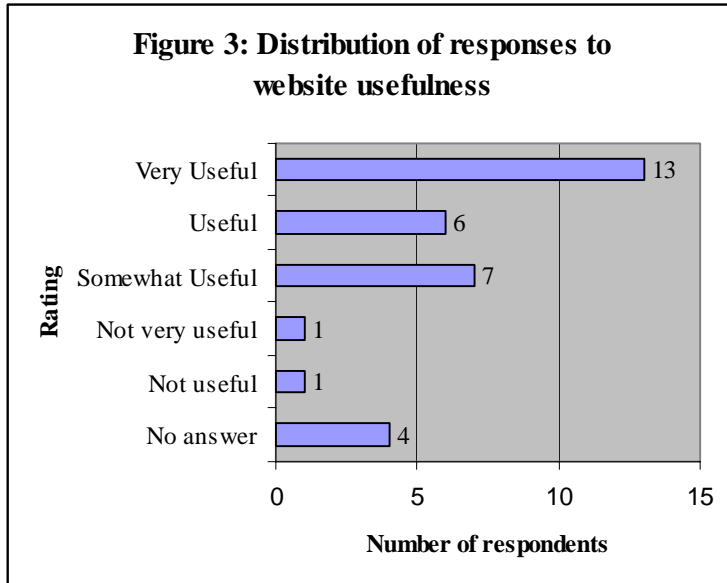
Visitors to the Internet Branch rate both the usefulness of the site high, and the appearance of the site high. In the chart of website usefulness (see figure 3), thirteen respondents rated the usefulness as very useful (a rating of 1). Six more respondents rated the usefulness as useful (2). Clearly, more than half of the respondents rate the Internet Branch as being useful.

- Average usefulness rating is 1.75
- Average attractiveness rating is 2.26

Visitors to the Internet Branch also rated the site highly on appearance. Among respondents, it seems possible that an attractive interface may be part of the appeal. The results of the survey (see figure 3) indicate that more than half of the respondents rated

the appearance positively. Those that did respond to using the Internet Branch did not report significant problems with the site’s operations or how it looked, although a small but vocal minority did indicate that they felt that the main page on the Internet Branch was too busy. In fact, only two people indicated any problems finding information at the Internet Branch whatsoever.

The majority of all respondents reported to having used the Internet Branch before. In



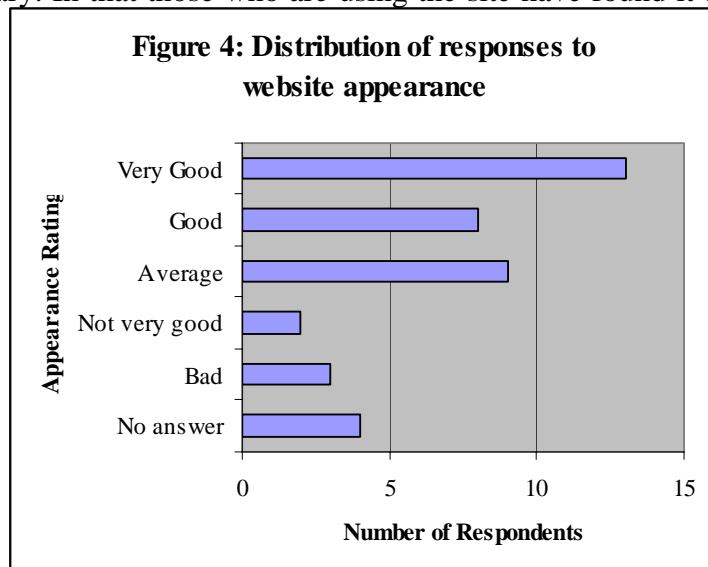
fact, 39% of all people who responded to the survey tell us that they use the Internet Branch on a daily basis. These large numbers indicate that the Internet Branch is a vibrant part of the library’s existence. Not surprisingly, library and the Internet Branch are interwoven to a very significant degree. For example, 68% of all people responded that they had found out about the Internet Branch through the library. The majority of the remaining people who responded to this

question found out about the Internet Branch through a friend.

- 82% have used the IB before
- 39% use the IB daily
- 68% of all respondents had heard about the IB from the library

As we have indicated previously in this paper, the Canton Public Library’s intention in creating the Internet Branch was not to merely place library related content such as the hours of operation on there, but to create a fully operational extension of the library. In that those who are using the site have found it to be useful this has been accomplished.

Based on the results above, one can infer that the website has to a significant degree been successful in accomplishing its goals. Most of Canton Public Library’s patrons are finding the Internet Branch to be a useful tool and are getting significant use out of it. It seems that the majority of all users at the Canton Public Library use the internet and those that do use the Internet



Branch are telling their friends to use it as well. It is easy to surmise that the reason behind this success is because the majority of all people are finding the Internet Branch useful and attractive. Some respondents complained that the site is too crowded and lacks clear organization. However, most respondents did not note these problems.

Conclusions

The Canton Public Library faces a daunting task with its Internet Branch: To extend its community into the online realm. Toward this end, they sought to create a library website that features more than just the basic functionality of common library websites. Rather, they wanted to make a website that not only offered content to entice people to return, but also to reflect the atmosphere of the physical branch itself.

The Internet Branch, in addition to supporting the tasks one would normally do at a library, offers additional content in the form of links to resources across the Internet, such as the Help Me Make it Through the Day section. Although the Canton Public Library has a high correlation between visitors of the physical branch and the Internet Branch, there are ways that the Internet Branch could be made more valuable to users and more relevant in their lives.

At the same time, the Internet Branch must remain accessible its audience, the population of Canton. Users come from many age groups, with many of the users being young and elderly. Although most of the respondents own computers, many of those computers are older models that may not easily access a flashy website. Also, although most of the respondents who are old enough to hold a college degree have one, the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch must still remain accessible to users with a variety of education levels.

Finally, it is important to note that respondents to the survey rate the appearance and usefulness of the Internet Branch high, and many of the respondents to the paper survey claim to have visited the Internet Branch. Although the selection of respondents is small, results among these respondents indicate that people are getting the message about the Internet Branch and are finding it to be a pleasing website.

Future testing will examine the specifics of how users interact with the Internet Branch's features. Further, it will begin to answer why some parts of the website that the Canton Public Library feels are excellent features, such as Help Me Make it Through the Day and the Children's Library, are being under-utilized.

Text of the Survey

- How old are you?
- Sex? M F
- Education level: Elementary Middle School High School College
- Have you ever been to the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch before? Y N
- How did you hear about the library's Internet Branch?
 - Though a friend
 - Though the library
 - Through the newspaper
 - Through another web site
 - Other (please specify)
- About how often do you use the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch?
 - Daily
 - Less than 4 times a week
 - Once a week
 - Every other week
 - Once a month or less
- Have you found the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch useful?
 - Very useful – 1 2 3 4 5 – not at all useful
- Have you ever had any problems finding information at the Internet Branch? Y N
 - If so, please describe the problem:
- On a scale of 1-5 please rate the overall appearance of the web site:
 - Very good – 1 2 3 4 5 – Very bad
- Have you ever used the “help me make it through the day” portion of the CPL web site? Y N If so, what for?
- Have you ever used the web site for research? Y N
- Have you ever used the Teen's Place portion of the internet branch? Y N
 - If so, what did you use this for?
- Have you ever used the children's library portion of the internet branch? Y N
 - If so, what did you use this for?
- Do you own a computer? Y N
- When did you purchase your computer? Y N
- How often do you use your computer?
 - Daily
 - Less than 4 times a week
 - Once a week
 - Every other week
- Do you use the internet? Y N

- Where do you use it?
 - At home
 - At work
 - At the library
- How often?
 - Daily
 - Less than 4 times a week
 - Once a week
 - Every other week
 - Once a month or less
- Do you use bulletin boards hosted on the internet? Y N
- Do you use the internet to view news? Y N
- Do you use the internet to chat with friends? Y N
- Do you use the internet to play games? Y N
- What other sorts of things do you use it for?
- How often do you visit the library?
 - Daily
 - Less than 4 times a week
 - Once a week
 - Every other week
 - Once a month or less
- What are some common activities for you at the library?
- Do you use the library to search the web? Y N
- What do you think works the best at the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch?

Are there any changes you would like to see at the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch?