

Website Users Study 2008



Economic Development Websites

Executive Summary



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Highlights of Website User Study

GOAL:

Establish guidelines for developing a business recruitment website that meets audience expectations for content and functionality at all phases of the site location search process.

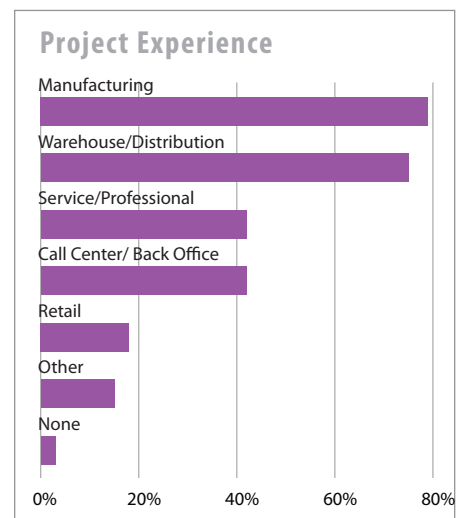
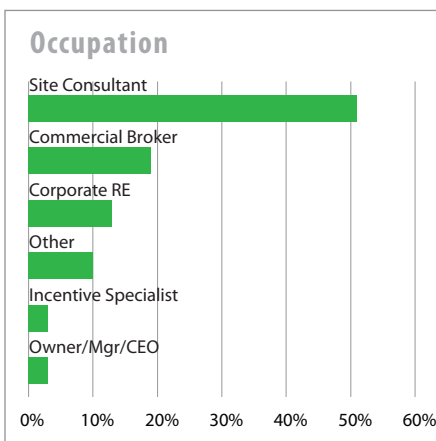
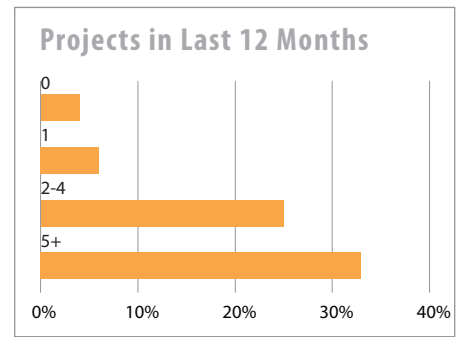
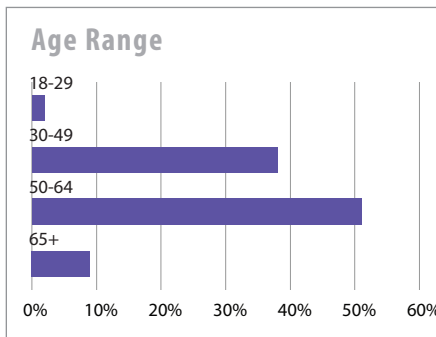
Chabin Concepts, Austin Consulting, and First Energy conducted an economic development website users study in 2007/2008. It was implemented in two parts:

- 1) Exploratory **user testing** of 4 site selectors performing assigned tasks on economic development websites.
- 2) **Online survey** completed by 67 respondents, roughly half of whom were site selectors. All but two had worked on a business location project in the last year.

The key findings are highlighted in this overview. To purchase a copy of the full report, please contact one of the survey sponsors listed on the back page.

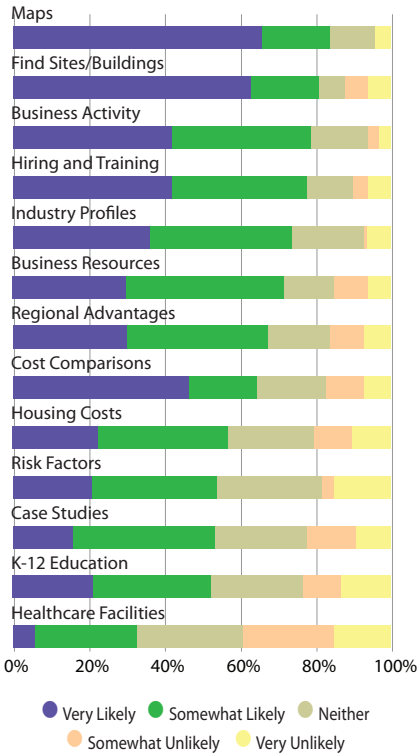
| User Testing | Online Survey |
|---|--|
| <p>WHAT: Observe users performing tasks on websites</p> | <p>WHAT: 22-question survey in Zoomerang.com</p> |
| <p>WHY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore behavior in 'real-world' setting • Observe navigational behavior • Test behavior vs. intention | <p>WHY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test broader audience • Measure preferences & priorities • Identify user trends |

Survey Participants



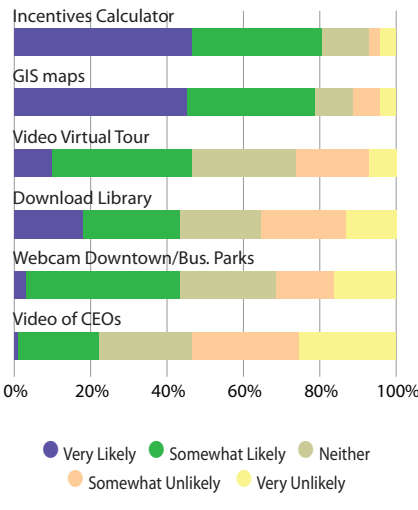
Content Priorities

What is the likelihood that you would go to each of the following web page links within an economic development website at some point during a business location project?



Extended Features

What is the likelihood that you would use these features at some point during a business location project?



Content

Issues related to the information delivered on economic development websites.

Top Frustrations

- Top 4 frustrations on ED websites:
 - Out of date (25%)
 - Lack of contact info (16%)
 - Incomplete information (16%)
 - Navigational issues (16%)

Top Content

- Top-ranked content tends to correlate with site selection factors.
- 60% or more were also interested in business activity, regional advantages, business resources, and cost comparisons.
- Housing and K-12 education were important to at least 50% of the audience.

Web vs. Personal Contact

- Website was preferred over personal contact as a source for obtaining every late-stage item listed except project-specific tax incentive details.

Home Page Behavior

- Users hunting for specific information looked at the home page only long enough to find a link.
- Users “just browsing” still looked for something to click, scanning rather than reading the home page.

Site Selectors Page

- 85% were somewhat or very likely to visit a “Site Selectors” page.
- A site selectors page may be most useful on sites with diverse audiences (retention, tourism, etc.); on business recruitment sites, the home page can serve this function.

Property Listings and GIS

- 78% were somewhat or very likely to visit a GIS map linking property to demographic data.
- 62% found radial and county/city data equally useful.
- An equal number (69%) desired workforce distribution figures by county and by radius on maps.
- 61% preferred to obtain a map with sewer and water online vs. 9% by personal contact.
- 57% preferred to obtain a map showing building position online vs. 24% by personal contact.
- Less than a third found property listings “complete” or “up-to-date.”
- Less than half agreed that property listings were typically “easy to navigate.”
- External GIS websites can create navigational difficulties for users seeking all available transportation, demographic, and tax incentive information for a given area.

Maps and Transportation

- 84% were somewhat or very likely to visit a “Maps” page.
- Features directly related to site selection were considered most desirable on a map.
- Transportation information is often separated from maps on economic development websites, resulting in navigational errors.
- Some users clicked on static maps, assuming they would be interactive.

Taxes and Incentives

- 80% were somewhat or very likely to use an incentives calculator.
- Incentive zone designation was the highest ranked item desired on maps (86% said they would use it).

- 55% preferred to get detailed incentive information (i.e., late-stage, project specific) in person vs. 37% on a website; however, other data (*Area Development*, DCI) shows general incentive information is a high priority on websites.
- Summary data to calculate estimates was valued over wordy explanations.
- On regional sites, tax and incentive information should describe qualifying geographic boundaries.
- Users looked for incentive information in community profiles, property databases, and local websites, as well as on the “Incentives” page of regional websites.
- Property taxes were a high priority tax issue during user testing.

Utilities

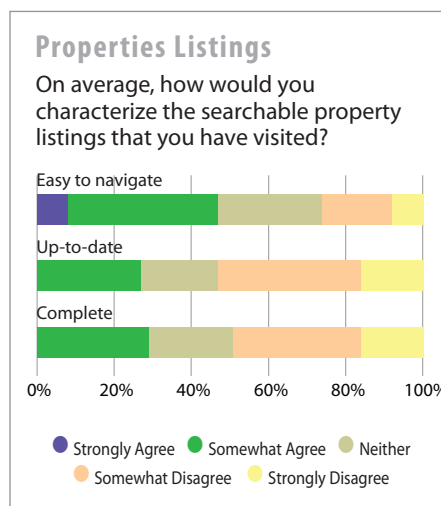
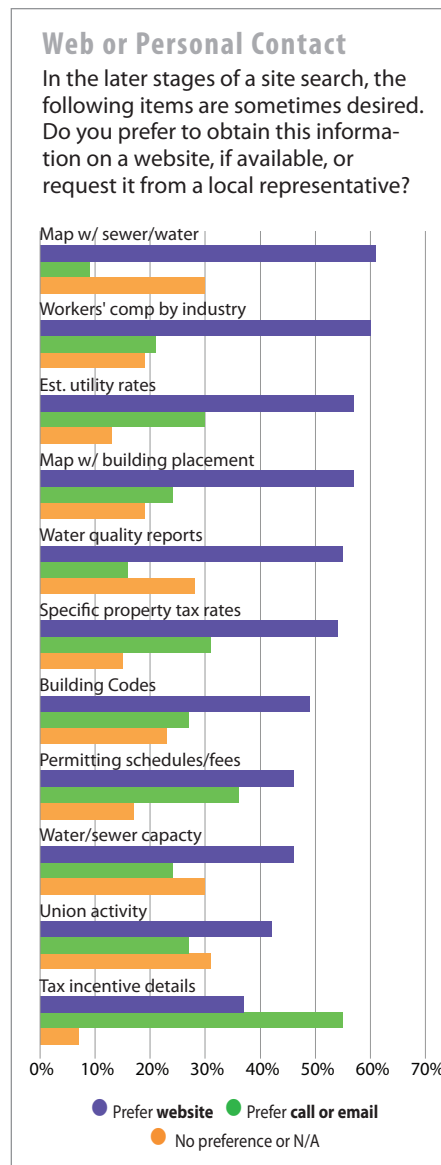
- 57% preferred to obtain utility rates online vs. 30% by personal contact.
- Users looked for rates in a format they could use to calculate costs (e.g., cost per KWH).
- Utility layers were desired on maps (see “Property Listings and GIS”).
- External links to utility providers should go to economic development pages of website.
- Regional sites with multiple providers should consider methods to identify which locations are served by each provider.

Functionality

What “bells and whistles” are truly valued by users?

Technology Adaptation

- 76% had viewed an online video for work-related information.



SAMPLE OF USER COMMENTS

Taxes and Incentives

“They have a little example how to calculate the tax credit, which is nice.”

“What I’d like to see is a table of all the communities in the region with their tax rate.”

“No phone call required. They had the local rates right there, with the explanation.”

“With Charlotte, it got down to specifics in the first few seconds. That’s why I was impressed.”

[Reading a utility incentive description] “On a case by case basis’ —that’s not helpful at all.”

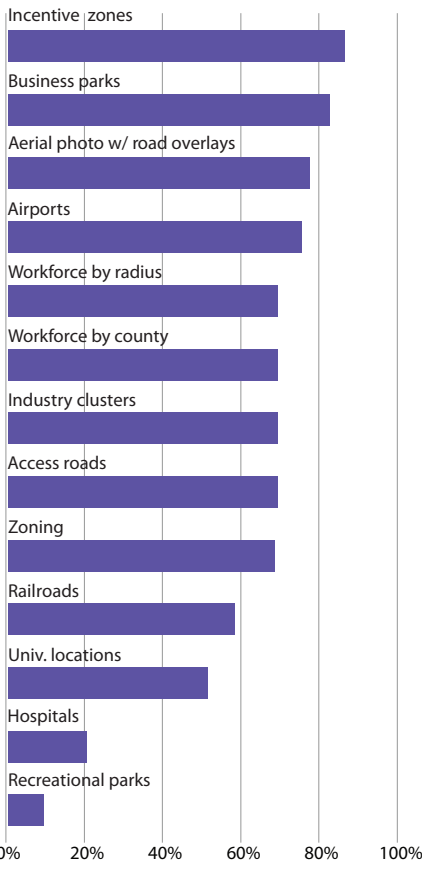
“At some point I like to get on the phone with someone and get the economic temperature. They sometimes will tell you which [incentive] to focus on.”

“Yeah, all the criteria are here. I can just cut and/or download this. Is there a way to download? I’m not going to nail this down, but these are possible/probable. I’m not seeing much on wage criteria.”

“We’re looking at 12 counties in 2 states. I need to get down to the county level!”

Map Layers

Given an interactive map that allows you to turn features on or off, what features are you most likely to select?



- 70% had viewed a website from a handheld device.
- 40% had visited a social networking site for work-related information.
- 33% had listened to a work-related podcast or posted to a blog.
- Only 15% had knowingly used RSS, but there are other reasons to believe this technology will grow.

Extended Features

- Incentives calculators and GIS maps were the most popular extended features.
- More than 40% were interested in video virtual tours, download libraries and webcam images of business areas.

Export Options

- Most community data is saved and used offline; however, users scan for screening information online.
- Report builders and spreadsheets were the most popular export options, but preference was dependent on the type of information (e.g., narrative information may be copied to word processing applications).
- In practice, report builders were often overlooked on websites (but users who found them liked them).
- PDFs are useful for supplemental information, but they don't accommodate copying/pasting, and they can cause viewing problems when used in place of HTML page content.

Online Proposals

- 66% were interested in receiving a project proposal online through a password-protected area of the website.

Navigability

How the audience navigates through the site (menus, search, etc.).

Site Organization

- Transportation, incentives, and some demographic information tends to be scattered across websites, resulting in missed pages and misdirected clicks.

Nomenclature

- Task-oriented users browsed menus looking for topic name, not function (e.g., "Transportation" or "Incentives" vs. "Custom Report").

External Links

- Links to external websites (e.g., utilities, transportation providers) were frustrating when users didn't know which provider to click or the landing page didn't satisfy the user's needs.

Format

How page layout and text formatting affect user experience.

Scanning Behavior and Formatting

- Screening info (e.g., data, rates, calculations, overview) should be formatted for rapid scanning.

Search Habits

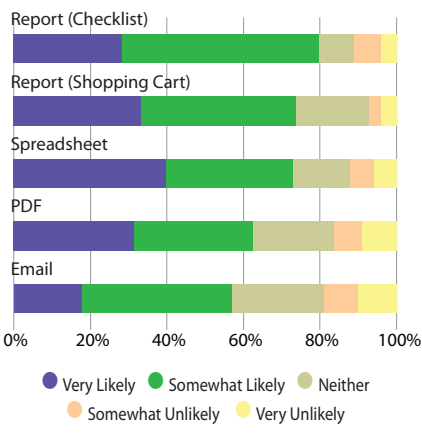
How prospects find economic development websites.

Finding ED Websites

- 52% reported starting at a state website to find websites to visit during a business location project.

Export Options

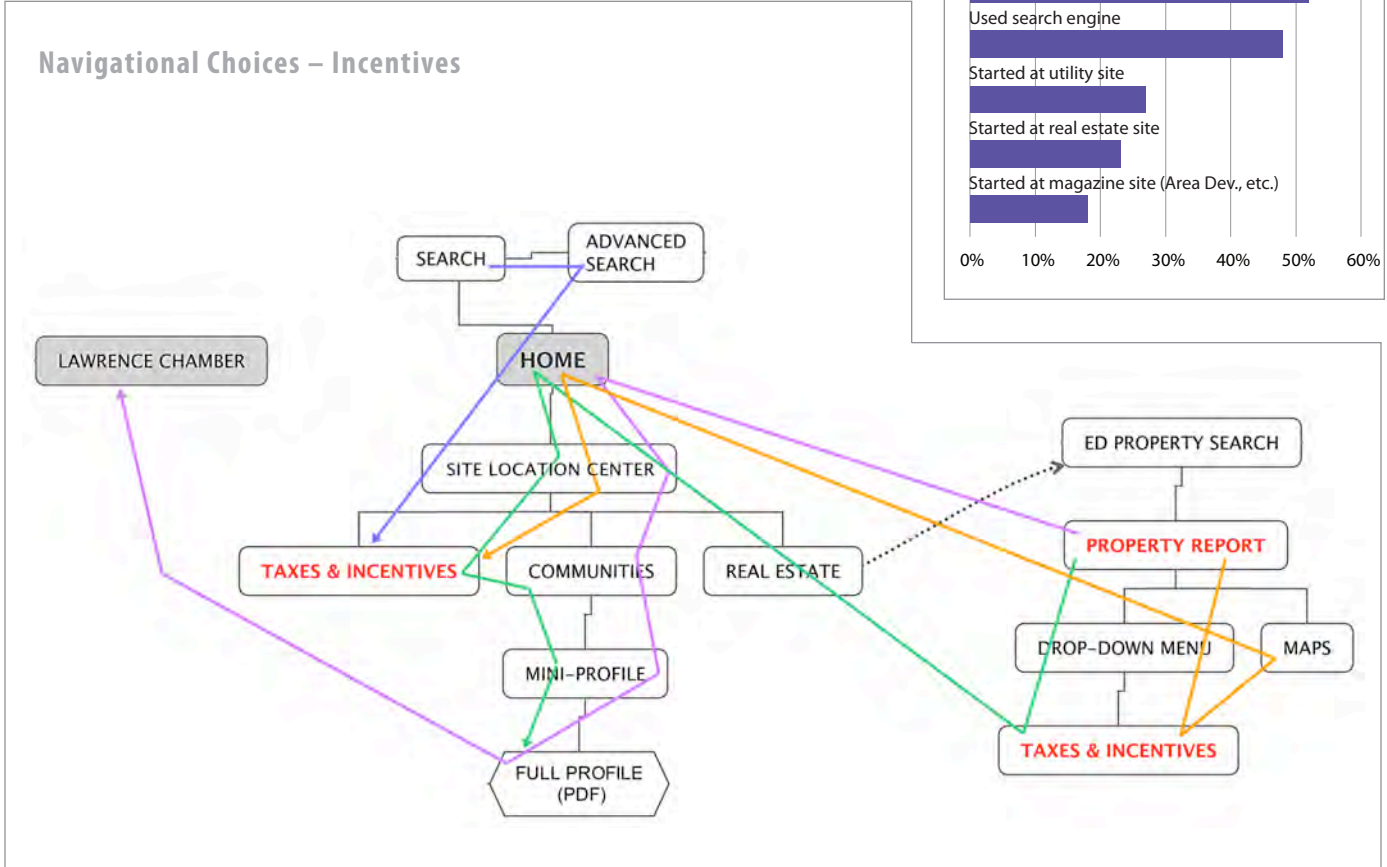
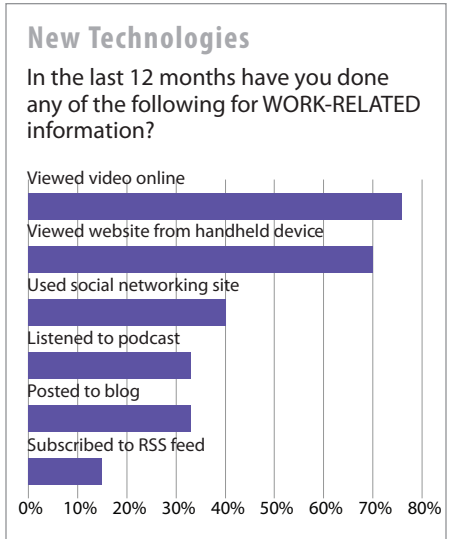
If an economic development website allowed you to export data, what is the likelihood you would use any of the following options:



- 48% reported using a search engine to identify websites to visit.

Search Terms

- During two assigned tasks, site selectors used the following search categories to locate websites with business location information:
 - *Economic development* was the most popular search term.
 - Refinements tended to be on geographic terms (e.g., state names, *Midwest*).
 - To a lesser extent, searches were refined with terms related to desired real estate or type of industry.
 - Labor-related terms were not used.



Four users took four different paths to find incentives information on both sites. Red pages are topics related to the task.

Survey Sponsors



Chabin Concepts

Chabin Concepts is an economic development consulting firm offering strategic solutions, marketing tactics, and dynamic tools for communities, regions and states.

www.chabinconcepts.com

(530) 345-0364



Austin Consulting

Austin Consulting, an arm of The Austin Company, is a team of location consultants offering specialized experience in developing and implementing location strategies for manufacturing, distribution and office operations.

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