Canadian Centre
for Energy Information

Canadian Centre for Energy Information
Audience Research
Summary and Conclusions

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Research Summary and Conclusions

Just over 400 randomly selected energy users completed an online survey to provide an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities associated with energy information in Canada. The respondents represented a diverse cross section of energy users, including educators, support services, producers, industrial users, government, distributors, consumers, NGO's, and public relations/communications. Generally, the respondents were senior technical and managerial employees as well as executive levels.

The response to the survey was very positive. Respondents were keenly interested in the Centre for Energy and the mandate for developing an information site. This could be seen by the level of response obtained from the survey, considering these individuals are often bombarded with surveys, yet took the time to complete our survey in great detail.

The current challenges faced by energy information users can be regarded as opportunities for the Centre for Energy information site. The main challenges include:

Too Much Information

From the survey it is evident there is an abundance of energy information. However, energy users are frustrated by the amount of searching they must do. The information for some user groups, like educators and students, is not available in a usable format or written at a level suitable to their needs.

Reliability

One of the biggest challenges is upon finding the information; the user is faced with having to assess the credibility of the source. Many fear the Internet suffers from a lack of credibility, whereas print media tends to be more reliable. This will be a major challenge for the Centre for Energy.

Bias

Many energy users alluded to bias being a major challenge in the provision of energy information. Educators noted the curriculum contains an energy component but they are uncomfortable going to company websites or sites developed by environmental groups. However, these sites are often the most complete in

terms of information needed for curriculum. The curriculum has all sorts of expectations to address energy, but no sites are listed in the curriculum. Further, there is an emphasis in the curriculum do deal with social and environmental issues, but there is no unbiased information source to go to.

Topics Not Well Represented

There were a number of energy topics identified that are currently regarded as 'gaps'. While information may exist on some of these topics, there are issues associated with them, such as difficulty in locating the information, the degree of bias, level of technical detail and cost. These include:

Research Studies (examples)

- Flaring
- Kyoto impacts; pros and cons, not propaganda - factual, and unbiased
- R&D Projects conducted by industry and universities
- Human health impacts

Media coverage of key energy issues

- Industry news
- Mergers and acquisitions

Innovations (examples)

- Hydrogen, biomass
- New products, methods – environmental
- Health and safety innovations
- Tidal
- Geothermal
- Knowing what else is out there

Patterns of energy consumption by sector and by user type (domestic, industrial)

Energy financial information

- Sales - domestic, exports, imports by type of energy
- Production information; reserves

Environmental Information (unbiased was frequently mentioned in this category)

- Pollution information by energy type
- Environmental measures
- Chemical emissions

Competitive and Corporate Information

- Listing of what companies are doing
- Rate sheets, pictures of systems
- Contacts
- Company information, size, locations, activities
- Number of wells, active drilling rigs
- Canada wide activity, jobs, project availability
- Geo-referenced maps showing location of energy production and should be downloadable for use with GIS (ArcView)

Pricing information

- Live gas and power prices - can be obtained but it is expensive
- Commodity prices
- Energy spot prices

Presenting the Information

Most indicated the information should be set up to allow searching by energy source and within the energy source would a listing of specific topics. The success of the Centre for Energy website will depend on the degree to which it can offer a "one-stop-shop" and can provide unbiased, reliable and up-to-date information. These are the main limitations perceived to exist among the vast array of sites available to users.

In addition to the Internet information site, the Centre for Energy could offer monthly or weekly newsletters as a means of informing its constituents. Email is the preferred method for this type of communication. Many indicated email newsletters should be self-subscribing.