Employment and benefits websites among worst in UK e-Government

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New report identifies employment and benefits websites among worst in UK e-Government

Simple website errors limiting access to public services and information
Primary users of public services should be an e-Gov priority

Websites offering information and services for the jobless and people on benefits are among the worst in e-Government a new report reveals.

The analysis conducted by leading automated website testing company Business2WWW, using its SiteMorse™ software found that users of sites such as www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk (Job Centre), www.worktrain.gov.uk (National Jobs and Learning Website) and www.dwp.gov.uk (Department for Work and Pensions) may be presented with error pages when trying to access vital information and services.

A combination of simple website errors such as missing files, poor management of website structures, illegal characters used in web addresses, lack of compliance with the Government's own search index system and hosting websites on servers that are not able to manage demand are the most common causes of problems.

The new research comes just days after Rt. Hon. Phil Woolas MP, Deputy Leader of the House of Commons reported that 68 per cent of Government services are now online.* All Government services are due to be online by 2005, although Mr Woolas could not state an exact month.

Nicholas Le Seelleur, Director of Business2WWW said, "The Government has achieved a lot by placing much of its information and services online. However getting services online is one thing. Ensuring that citizens can actually access vital information and services is quite another.'

Research has shown that those most likely to use public services are also the least likely to use, or be comfortable using, the Internet.**

Mr Le Seelleur continued, "Key to the success of the Government's online strategy is encouraging the primary users of public services to access such services via the internet. It's imperative that websites delivering public services for jobless people and benefits claimants are as faultless as possible, otherwise the very people the Government must encourage to use e-Government services may be put off. The primary users of public services should be an e-Government priority.'

The SiteMorse™ report identifies www.worktrain.gov.uk as the Government's worst website in terms of quality.

Most e-Gov Websites Fail Disabled Accessibility Tests

The SiteMorse™ analysis also judged the performance of e-Government websites in line with the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), a drive to attain a high degree of usability for people with disabilities. Only 14 sites attained full compliance with WAI. 14 other websites were less that 10 per cent compliant — four of which failed on every page.

Mr Le Seelleur said, "This does not bode well for the Government's obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act to make websites equally accessible to people with disabilities, the deadline for which is October 2004.'

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Notes to Editors

For further editorial information email brian@pwkpr.com or telephone 020 8342 8709.

* Phil Woolas MP, Deputy Leader of the House of Commons answer to Parliamentary Question from Richard Allan MP on Wednesday 19th May 2004.

** SmartGov: Renewing Electronic Government for Improved Service Delivery, by Noah Curthoys and James Crabtree (17/07/03)

About the Report and SiteMorse™

The SiteMorse™ tests were carried out on the top 250 pages of 67 major central Government websites and were completed on the 10th May 2004. The findings of the report take into account the size of the website.

SiteMorse™ from Business2www (B2W])helps website owners and managers improve performance and effectiveness of their online services using unique automated website diagnostic testing and monitoring.

SiteMorse™ acts as a user's browser would in requesting pages and images from the web server and interpreting the responses. This is a very powerful technique. SiteMorse™ 'sees' exactly what end-users see, not a possibly flawed 'simulation' of a user's experience.

Every combination of every item on every page is tested and SiteMorse™ reports detail exact problems or failures. The report identifies each problem it finds exactly by page, line, type and link, enabling website managers to remedy them quickly and effectively.

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