Formative Evaluation of Strategis

Final Report

Submitted to:

Industry Canada

Submitted by:

Performance Management Network

May 2002

Formative Evaluation of Strategis
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Executive Summary

A formative evaluation of Strategis was undertaken in 2001-2002. A formative evaluation typically focuses on the design and delivery of a program or initiative and provides feedback on areas that are working as well as areas that need to be improved. The purpose of this evaluation was to examine how Strategis has functioned as a web service for Industry Canada and external clients and, further, how it may have transformed the delivery of Industry Canada services. A second objective for the study was to inform decisions regarding the possible future directions for Strategis. In order to meet these two study objectives, this summary presents findings in terms of fundamental evaluation questions regarding the current and past performance of Strategis, as well as in terms of considerations for the future.

Methodology

The evaluation addressed a series of issues categorized according to the Treasury Board Secretariat evaluation guidelines:

Issue 1   Relevance - Is Strategis meeting the needs of the relevant businesses, consumers, and other users in providing them with a source of secure, affordable, accessible, user-friendly, credible, well-packaged, unique information products and services, in order to promote competitiveness and efficiency?

Issue 2   Objectives Achievement - To what extent is Strategis achieving its intended objectives?

Issue 3   Cost Effectiveness/Alternatives - Is Strategis well designed and implemented or are there significant modifications which need to be made to increase its efficiency and effectiveness?

These issues were addressed using sound evaluation practices and multiple lines of evidence for each issue. The methodologies included:

- review of documents and Strategis Management Information System (MIS) data;
- interviews with Industry Canada staff;
- feedback from Strategis Content Providers;
- online survey of Strategis users;
- interviews with intermediaries and associations;
- case studies of nine Strategis products;
- a comparison of international sites; and
- interviews with representatives of Industry Canada Regional Offices.

Please see Section 1.2 of the Report for more detail on the methodology for this evaluation.

The Current and Past Performance of Strategis

The findings are summarized below according to evaluation issue (relevance, success and cost-effectiveness).

Relevance *(Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the Report)*

Strategis remains a popular, relevant site. However, recently, usage has levelled off and interviews, document reviews and surveys indicate that in some respects, it is a service which has reached maturity. For example, certain components of Strategis now have several competitors. Strategis appears to need some rethinking regarding its vision, governance and value proposition to users.

Success *(Section 5 of the Report)*

The original objective of Strategis was essentially to enhance Industry Canada's ability to get information out to its clients. There is no doubt that Strategis has achieved this original objective set in the mid-1990s. The capability and use of the Internet, and Strategis with it, has evolved significantly since then. It is therefore important to gauge Strategis' success in terms of the current context and clients' expectations.

The majority of clients report that they are satisfied with the information and tools on the website and that Strategis has had a positive impact on their business or organization. The most important impact was one of timesaving, followed by its ability to increase reach and access to information. Strategis was also found to be highly trusted by users as a source of information. Conversely, Strategis does not stand out from other similar web products in terms of its ability to satisfy users, especially infrequent users.

Cost effectiveness *(Sections 6 and 7)*

Strategis has clearly improved the cost effectiveness of certain functions and services of the Department, especially those involving the dissemination of published information and the completion of transactions. However, the effectiveness of Strategis products is hampered by a number of factors. These factors include the increased ability of users to independently search and retrieve information without the involvement of Industry Canada officers, the myriad of independent contributors, combined with a lack of dedicated resources to maintain the system. In addition, Strategis has not appeared to have had a significant impact on the way in which Industry Canada officers interact with their client groups. Finally, the shared accountability of Strategis appears to have led to a significant governance gap further hindering cost-effectiveness.

Future Considerations

The report structures the findings, the conclusions and recommendations by four major themes. These themes start with the broad issues (the relevance and vision of Strategis, the impacts of Strategis and governance issues) and then move to the more specific issues related to the design and delivery of Strategis. The key conclusions and recommendations emerging from the evaluation are summarized below according to these four themes. Please note that the conclusions and recommendations related to vision and governance are likely to be of most interest to senior executives, senior managers and the CIO (*Strategic*). Those conclusions and recommendations related to client orientation and design and delivery are more to individual product managers and the CIO (*Operational*).

Vision *(Section 9 of the Report)*

Conclusion - A common, unifying vision for Strategis is needed. Many Industry Canada interviewees felt that Strategis lacked a common, unifying vision to provide overall direction to the site. This lack of vision or focus was believed to have contributed to the decrease in the emphasis placed on Strategis as an innovative product for the department and the resulting lowered management attention. In addition, in the absence of any concerted vision, individual sites have taken on the responsibility for their own marketing and planning. This has contributed to the continued, yet varied, growth of the site without a strategic focus.

There were divergent views about Strategis within Industry Canada. For example, there was some disagreement over the continuing relevance of Strategis. One group felt strongly that Strategis remains a valuable, well-used tool that serves an ever-growing number of Canadians. The second predominant view was that Strategis is a mature product that has stagnated and no longer meets the needs of users and Industry Canada. In addition, there were differing opinions between those who perceived the value of a common department-wide website or Internet presence and those who valued the independence of the individual products.

Recommendation - Review the future vision and form for Strategis. There is a need to develop an updated guiding vision for Strategis. It is clear that this is an opportune time to pose some key questions about Strategis and its role within the Department. Suggested questions include:

▸ What does Industry Canada wish to achieve with its online presence within Strategis?

▸ What is the value proposition for Strategis? (i.e., What unique value does it seek to continue to deliver, build-on or develop with key client communities? Also see client orientation discussion below)

▸ What is Strategis' role in promoting the use of new technologies?

▸ How does Strategis help Industry Canada implement its legislative mandate and achieve the Strategic Objectives? What role should Strategis play in supporting the Portfolio?

A number of conceptual models are discussed in this report. The intention is to use the results of this evaluation to inform the discussion on future directions for Strategis and for these models to provide a framework for this discussion. These models address concepts such as resources versus reach (see page 13), diversity and complexity (pages 16 to 17), continuum of involvement (page 55) and the line of visibility (pages 68 to 71).

Governance and Shared Accountability *(Section 9 of the Report)*

Conclusion - There is a need to engage senior management in the department around the governance and maintenance of Strategis. One of the critical issues facing Strategis is the need to engage senior management of Industry Canada in the governance and ongoing management of Strategis. While the overall responsibility for Strategis lies with the CIO, individual groups are responsible for the content that they deliver and maintain. Currently, there does not exist a department-wide forum or committee at which to discuss strategic issues or overall direction for Strategis. The Strategis Content Providers Committee is used as a vehicle for sharing information

about common initiatives with officers and others working with client sites. However, this committee addresses technical rather than strategic issues. If a new vision were to be developed for Strategis, an existing committee at a management level is not already in place. This absence of a governing body for Strategis appears to have contributed to the lack of shared accountability for this Industry Canada-wide initiative.

A significant number of officers, Strategis content providers and publishing staff commented that there was little management support of a vision for an online client service strategy in their organizations. Indeed, in a number of organizations, officers working with online products commented that senior managers did not view working with websites as a competency for professionals, instead viewing it as a junior role.

Recommendation - Reconvene a senior management committee with responsibility for overseeing Strategis. This committee would be responsible for providing overall governance to Strategis and would provide a mechanism for making decisions about Strategis at the senior management level. This committee would be tasked with the development of a new vision and directions for Strategis as well as developing clearer accountability around site management.

Client Orientation *(Section 9 of the Report)*

Conclusion - Strategis no longer offers a unique value proposition to clients. When Strategis was first launched, there were few, if any, similar services provided by the private sector or other government sites. This no longer true. For example, company directories and industry specific information are available on private sites. There is also an internal perception that Industry Canada itself has a number of competing or similar web products (e.g., Strategis, Business Gateway, Canada Business Service Centres and the Industry Canada corporate website). Information and services on Strategis that are unique include department-specific initiatives as well the delivery of mandated and legislated services.

Conclusion - The information and services on Strategis have an impact on clients. More than one quarter of respondents (26%) reported that Strategis had definitely had a positive impact on their business. In addition, another two-fifths (39%) stated that Strategis had a somewhat positive impact on their business. The most common impact was time savings. Of the total number of clients who answered the question on impacts 41% reported that Strategis had saved them time.

In some respects, the nature of Strategis impacts appears to correspond to the maturity of the Internet services marketplace. As of 2002, it appears that the biggest impacts occur when Strategis saves time in the processing of (somewhat complex) transactions. As time goes on, it may be expected that Strategis and Internet services will show greater impacts in terms of serving needs with greater *richness* of information and to accommodate higher *diversity* (see Section 2.3 of this report). Such future impacts will, of course, also depend in Industry Canada's management of these services.

Recommendation - Strategis as a whole must work to ensure a client-centred focus. The

uneven client focus across Strategis was a theme that emerged strongly from the fieldwork. This issue is closely related to the development of a new vision for Strategis. Indeed, the need for a strong focus on the client may be addressed by a new vision that includes a client-centred philosophy. Groups developing tools, information or other products for Strategis should be able to identify the primary audience for their site (e.g., For whom are we developing this product? What need(s) will it meet? What change(s) would we like to effect as a result of the tool/information that we are developing?). In many cases, there are secondary audiences for the product as well as peripheral users. In addition, Strategis continues to be difficult to navigate for new and infrequent users. Although there has been some usability testing of the site conducted in the past and changes made, additional work is required to structure Strategis following client centred principles.

Design and Delivery *(Section 9 of the Report)*

Conclusion - Shop Floor is not currently meeting the needs of all internal clients. Confusion over the role of the Shop Floor and requirements for developing and launching a new product is causing a great deal of friction and frustration among internal clients. The Shop Floor is not seen as a client-service oriented organization and is seen by many to be a barrier. One suggestion made by numerous interviewees was that the Shop Floor should become a service organization that tries to facilitate the work of the content providers rather than be a hindrance as they are currently perceived to be. Rather, it was suggested that they should adopt the role of facilitator rather than "police." Individual staff are well regarded, but internal clients see the structure and process of the Shop Floor as significant barriers to client service.

Recommendation - Review the role of the Shop Floor. In order to better meet the needs of internal clients, the Shop Floor should:

- ▸   review the needs of internal clients;
- ▸   assess the role that the shop floor should play to best meet these needs;
- ▸   revisit the client relationship (e.g., proactive as opposed to reactive);
- ▸   analyze the required skills and training required for staff; and
- ▸   promote the exchange of best practices between products and services.

In addition, the Shop Floor should communicate the menu of services available to internal clients and clarify. This review of the role of the Shop Floor would be dependent on decisions made with respect to the vision and future form of Strategis.

Recommendation - Develop site management protocol or tools. Strategis should develop site management protocol or tools. To provide a much more useful service, it was recommended by a number of interviewees and Strategis content providers that a greater degree of rigour should be applied to clearly defining the site scope, content selection, inclusion criteria, information indexing and classification. Common site management protocol or tools could be developed.   One suggestion made a number of times was for a simple checklist of responsibilities and timing for site management. Another suggestion was to share best practices across Strategis.

In summary, the vision for Strategis will set the context for governance and client orientation. Design and delivery issues will then be informed or affected by decisions made around the vision and governance. The four levels of issues, conclusions and recommendations are inextricably linked.

Introduction

Proclaimed as one the fastest-growing communications phenomena in history, the World Wide Web has had a fundamental impact on the delivery of information and services by Industry Canada. In 1996, Industry Canada formally launched Strategis, "an information-age tool for Canadian Jobs and Canadian Growth."[1] The Strategis initiative arose as a means for Industry Canada to improve on the delivery of its mandate:

> To work with Canadians to build a growing competitive, knowledge-based economy. Industry Canada hopes to improve conditions for investment, enhance Canada's innovation performance, help make Canada the most connected nation in the world, increase Canada's share of global trade, and build a fair, efficient and competitive marketplace.

Initially, Strategis was envisioned as a portal that would direct distinct groups of users toward the information that Industry Canada had already produced, but did not have the capacity to make available to a large audience. As information technology and usage became more sophisticated, Industry Canada expanded the range of services and products that it offered through the Strategis web site.

The technological improvements that have become available to users has broadened the reach of Strategis which now receives approximately 9 million hits per year. It is estimated that Strategis is visited by more than 30,000 users per day, with approximately the same number of users regularly receiving Strategis Headlines, the weekly magazine update. With this expanded reach, Strategis now touches a much larger audience and provides a much broader range of services than can be reached through any of Industry Canada's other means of communication.

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[1] Industry Canada. "STRATEGIS: Building Canada's largest Web site". Presentation for the Yeltsin Democracy Fellowship Program, March 23, 1998.

A formative evaluation of Strategis was undertaken in 2001-2002 in order to help Strategis remain an effective tool of Industry Canada. A formative evaluation typically focuses on the design and delivery of a program or initiative and provides feedback on areas that are working as well as areas that need to be improved. This report provides the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation. The formative evaluation study results should be viewed as contributing to decisions surrounding future directions for Strategis.

1.1   Scope of the Evaluation

The scope and focus for the formative evaluation were discussed at the first meeting of the Strategis Formative Evaluation Steering Committee on September 25, 2001. The Steering Committee has been active in providing guidance and feedback throughout the evaluation. The Committee membership includes senior managers from across Industry Canada. The direction that was set for the formative evaluation was to examine how Strategis has changed the way in which internal and external users do business. There was also a request from the Steering Committee that the formative evaluations examine future directions for Strategis. Therefore, the formative evaluation focuses on the delivery transformation aspect of Strategis' role as well as its function as a web service.

The federal government's evaluation policy has identified three broad themes for evaluation: program relevance, objectives achievement/impacts, and effects and alternatives to the present strategy. The evaluation issues used to guide the formative evaluation of Strategis were based on these themes. The following evaluation issues were reviewed and confirmed with the Steering Committee before the formative evaluation began:

Issue 1   Relevance - Is Strategis meeting the needs of the relevant businesses, consumers, and other users in providing them with a source of secure, affordable, accessible,

user-friendly, credible, well-packaged, unique information products and services, in order to promote competitiveness and efficiency?

Issue 2   Objectives Achievement - To what extent is Strategis achieving its intended objectives?

Issue 3   Cost Effectiveness/Alternatives - Is Strategis well designed and implemented or are there significant modifications which need to be made to increase its efficiency and effectiveness?

A matrix showing the coverage of these issues in this report in included in Appendix A.

1.2   Methodology

The methodologies undertaken for the formative evaluation of Strategis included:

- ▸   review of existing data;

- ▸   interviews with Industry Canada staff;

- ▸   feedback from Strategis Content Providers;

- ▸   surveys of Strategis users;

- ▸   interviews with intermediaries and associations;

- ▸   case studies;

- ▸   a comparison of international sites; and

- ▸   interviews with representatives of Industry Canada Regional Offices.

These methodological approaches are discussed in more detail below. In addition to these methodologies, it is also important to note that a second study was conducted at the same time as the evaluation of Strategis. This other study, a review of Industry Sector's information products (Business Information by Sector or BIS) was closely coordinated with the evaluation to avoid duplication. The purpose of the Review was to re-examine client delivery strategies across the

Industry Sector and the role that BIS plays in supporting those strategies. Relevant findings from the BIS Review have informed the Strategis evaluation and vice versa.

▶   *Review of Existing Data*

The review of existing data included the examination of existing surveys and reports as well a detailed review of the Strategis Management Information System (MIS). The review examined the types of questions asked, the scope of the survey, frequency and other aspects of existing surveys. This initial analysis was used to lay a foundation for the other elements of the evaluation study.

▶   *Interviews with Industry Canada Staff and Managers*

Interviews were conducted with Strategis staff and managers and with other Industry Canada staff who contribute to and use various aspects of Strategis. The purpose of the interviews with Strategis staff was to explore background, internal issues, possible performance tracking issues and future vision and role for Strategis. Interviews explored views related to the relevance, objectives achievement and cost effectiveness/alternative for Strategis. In addition, these interviews covered the role of Strategis as a mechanism for the transformation of how services and products are delivered. Interviewees were asked if Strategis has had an impact on how Industry Canada program officers work with their user base and if it has changed their role as an information broker. In total, 30 Industry Canada mangers and officers were interviewed.

▶   *Feedback from Strategis Content Providers*

An email-based questionnaire was forwarded to the members of the Strategis Content Providers Committee, Industry Canada. All responses were received on or before March 28, 2002. Of the 80 Strategis Content Providers forwarded the survey, there were 13 respondents (16.3% response rate). The information gap represented by this low response rate was compensated by the fact that approximately half of the members of the committee were covered as part of the Industry Canada interviews, the case studies or the BIS Review. Participants were told that they did not have to respond if they had already provided their feedback through another mechanism. The purpose of this survey was to ensure that individuals heavily involved in the design and delivery of Strategis content were provided every opportunity to participate in the evaluation.

► *Survey of Strategis Users*

The surveys of Strategis users were an important means for determining the value and effect that Strategis has on the use of information and technology. In total, 1107 Strategis clients completed the whole online survey questionnaire.

The survey of Strategis Users was conducted in two parts. First, an online survey of Strategis users was hard coded onto selected pages of the Strategis site for the last two weeks of March. A number of technical difficulties resulted in the use of hard coded links rather than the use of a pop-up invitation to participate in the survey.

Second, an invitation to participate in the survey was included in the Strategis Headlines, a weekly newsletter that is circulated to a sub-set of Strategis users. There are over 30,000 recipients of the Strategis Headlines.

► *In-depth Interviews with Intermediaries*

Twenty interviews with the intermediary organizations were completed. The original proposal stipulated that 10 interviews would be conducted with associations and other proxy organizations. This number was increased to 20 to reflect the concerns of the Steering Committee. A range of organizations, representative of the regional composition of the country, were interviewed. This ensured that a diversity of opinions about Strategis was collected from those who use it closest to the front-line of delivery.

▸   *Case Studies*

To ensure the formative evaluation included an in-depth examination of the role and impact that Strategis plays on the various program and service areas within Industry Canada, nine programs/services within Strategis were selected as for detailed case studies. These nine case studies were:

▸   Bankruptcy
▸   Biotechnology Gateway
▸   Canadian Companies Capabilities Database
▸   Canadian Environmental Solutions
▸   Consumer Connection
▸   E-biz Enable
▸   Micro-Economic Policy Analysis Branch (MEPA)
▸   Solutions for Advanced Manufacturing
▸   Spectrum Management and Telecommunication

The purpose of the case studies was to collect in-depth information on the role that Strategis plays within the delivery of specific products and services and how this role could evolve in the future. A summary of each case study has been developed and is included as Appendix B.

▸   *Comparison of International Sites*

Although the role that Strategis plays is unique within Canada, other countries also maintain an online presence to provide similar services to their citizens. To explore best practices and determine possible models for future changes, three international sites were chosen (from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia). It is interesting to note that, during the course of the formative evaluation, each of these sites underwent significant changes in the structure of their online presence. The international review then evolved to contain a before and after look at these sites. Using the evaluation issues, the existing Strategis mission, and goals for Strategis that were drawn from the document review, a number of comparison criteria were developed for an in-depth site review of both Strategis and the comparison sites. In addition, reasons for the changes were solicited from the hosting nations. The comparison of international sites is included in Appendix C.

▸   *Interviews with Representatives of Industry Canada Regional Offices*

Interviews with Industry Canada Regional Offices were conducted. These interviews included both Regional Executive Directors as well as with officers involved in client or Strategis outreach activities. Given that regions have the most interaction with clients, they were a valuable source of information about Strategis. These additional interviews focussed on their views of Strategis' strengths and weaknesses, the impact of Strategis on Industry Canada and on users, perception of user issues, and future directions for Strategis.

1.3   Organization of this Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the findings to date for the Steering Committee. The next section of this report provides a brief background on Strategis and the context of this evaluation. Chapter 3 outlines the approach used to group the findings and also provides a profile of Strategis users based on the results of the online survey. Findings are then presented in Chapters 4 to 7. Chapter 8 summarizes some of the best practices emerging from the comparison of other international sites. Conclusions and recommendations are reported in Chapter 9

2.   Context

The Strategis website was initiated to address the information needs of Canadian business and was described as "an information-age tool for Canadian Jobs and Canadian Growth."[2] This initiative was designed, in part, to counter evidence that was found in the mid 1990's that Canada's competitiveness was falling when compared to its economic competitors. By ensuring that businesses and consumers had ready access to a wealth of accurate, current, reliable and well-organised information, it was believed that growth in productivity, competitiveness and innovation could be influenced so as to improve Canada's economic performance.[3]

2.1   Background of Strategis

After a series of consultations and surveys with clients, Industry Canada determined that Canadian businesses needed to tap into a reliable source of information on markets, technology, and commercial contacts, in a timely manner in order to improve their competitiveness. The view was that Industry Canada, in particular, had a wealth of information created by economists, engineers and industry experts that had the potential to be invaluable to Canadian businesses, if only it was organized and presented in a logical, and easy-to-access fashion. Thus, the idea of providing easy, direct access to Industry Canada's extensive expertise and information resources was born.

The initial objectives for Strategis were to:
- ▸   improve the international competitiveness of Canadian business;

- ▸   foster productivity growth;

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[2] Industry Canada. "STRATEGIS: Building Canada's largest Web site". Presentation for the Yeltsin Democracy Fellowship Program, March 23, 1998.

[3] Ibid

▸   encourage businesses to make better use of information technology; and

▸   enable businesses to make more informed decisions about new markets by providing relevant information in a timely and accessible manner.[4]

It is important to note that these were the objectives proposed in 1997. However, as Strategis continued to evolve rapidly, other objectives or priorities are mentioned in presentations and documents. A specific group of objectives is not referred to in the documentation reviewed as part of this evaluation, with the exception of those proposed in 1997 by the evaluation framework document.

Strategis was designed with the goal of providing information and services that would be useful to as broad a range of users as possible. To this end, a resource commitment was made by Industry Canada's Information Management Committee (IMC) of approximately $5 million per year from 1995 to 2001 through the IMC Fund. The intention of this fund was to help leverage funds and provide additional funding for the development of new information services and products to meet the changing demands of Industry Canada clients. The IMC Fund was to be used as "an investment fund for entrepreneurs; [to be] focussed on funding business cases for program delivery; and, [to follow] the principle that the investment of resources become supportive of business cases that amplify and are in the same direction of Industry Canada's strategic objectives and agenda."[5]   This included users which are both internal and external to Industry Canada.

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[4] Hickling Corporation, *"Evaluation Framework for Strategis"*, July, 1997, pp. 1-8.

[5] Industry Canada. "IMC Fund Mid-term Review". October 25, 1995.

The information products and services were tailored to the needs of specific sectoral audiences. Businesses were attracted to the world of on-line business information through the "Insights" products, to be prioritized and consolidated according to Industry Canada's Sector Branch Structure.[6] As conceived of in 1995-96, this was to be undertaken by distributing disks, CDs, and (to a lesser extent) encouraging the use of on-line information. The ultimate goal was to replace the broad range of products (e.g., capability guides, statistical publications) already provided by Industry Canada with value-added information, delivered primarily on-line. The goal of Industry Canada was to add value to information and services by transforming data into performance diagnostics and business climate diagnostics to help firms determine their competitiveness, in addition to providing the most comprehensive source of quality, accurate, on-line business information in Canada .[7]

As of the end of 2001, Strategis had achieved a rapid growth in the number of visits since its launch. Data from the Strategis Management Information System (MIS) shows that until 2000-2001, annual growth has been between 50 and 100 per cent. Strategis receives approximately nine million visits per year, representing an estimated two to three million different users. Since its launch, Strategis has received 28 million visits and 171 million documents accessed. However, of late, Strategis' growth has shown signs of stagnating. The popularity of some products is declining, and newer and more innovative products (such as high impact e-commerce products) have yet to be adopted by users in sufficient numbers to pick up the decrease in growth. In 2000-2001, the number of visits grew by 9%.[8]

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[6] Indusrty Canada. "World Class Information Products: Insight Presentation". Undated (estimated 1996-97).

[7] Industry Canada. "Indusrty Canada's Word Class Diagnostic Services and Products -- The Business Case". IMC Report, Feb 21, 2001.
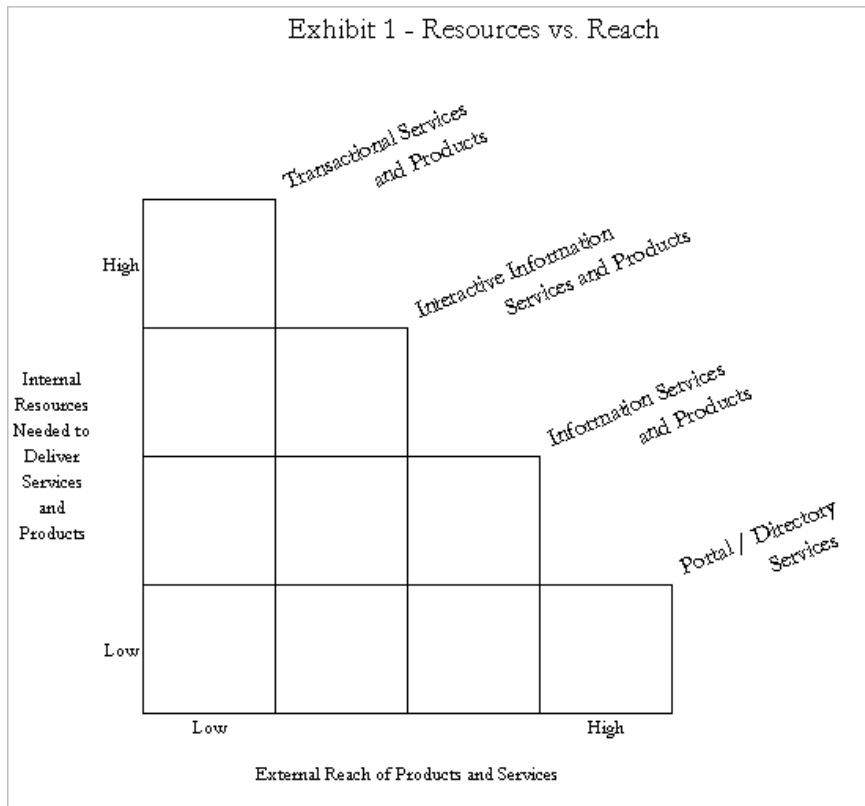
[8] Based on Strategis MIS data and Industry Canada. "Progress Report". From PowerPoint slides provided by Bob Hawkins, April 12, 2002.

2.2   Roles of Strategis Products

Strategis can be considered to have four distinct sets or categories of services, each with its own unique relationship between the internal resources needed to deliver each category and the external reach of that particular service. The following exhibit illustrates how the amount of resources required to develop and maintain a service or product increases with the level of complexity of each tier or grouping of services offered.[9]

Please note that the cost and reach relationship shown in the Exhibit 1 diagram is for illustration only. This chart does not represent actual cost and reach data

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[9] Steve Montague, The Three Rs of Performance: Core concepts for planning, measurement, and management, Performance Management Network Inc., 1997, p 120.

Exhibit 1 - Resources vs. Reach

Transactional Services and Products

Interactive Information Services and Products

Information Services and Products

Portal / Directory Services

High

Internal Resources Needed to Deliver Services and Products

Low

Low   High

External Reach of Products and Services

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More specialised products, such as electronic transactions and interactive advice, consume more resources per user than non-interactive guides, information sources and portals. Specialized products should in turn be expected to produce a higher value-added benefit per user than the more basic information and portal services. In addition to their differing use of resources, the reach of each service type differs.

Generally speaking, the more specialised the service is, the smaller the audience. It is important to note that this model does not represent a hierarchy. The sum of a small benefit to many users may

exceed a large benefit to few users, especially with the reach potential of knowledge economy

products like Strategis. The inclusion of simple reference or hot links, for example, has the

potential to open up whole markets, especially if the timing is right, as has been documented by

the success of various online newsletters and information services. Each category of products and

services serve a role and fulfill different aspects of the Industry Canada mandate and Strategis

Objectives:

► Strategis as a Portal or Directory Service: Strategis' role as a portal is its most basic service to users. As a major starting point for users when they connect to the web, Strategis has organised its information in such a way as to be useful to specific target groups. Users are then able to use Strategis as an anchor site, re-visiting it when needs for similar information present themselves. The goal of this service is to help build a fair, efficient, and competitive marketplace through the dissemination of beneficial information to Strategis users. In this form, Strategis is intended to make a unique contribution to its clients by providing products and services that are neutrally presented, have been screened for appropriateness and are packaged with specific users and their needs in mind. Examples of Strategis products in this category include the Canadian Consumer Information Gateway and the Biotechnology Gateway.

► Strategis as an Information Service: Beyond offering a portal or directory service, Strategis provides specific information services, such as guides and consumer information, to help its target users, including businesses, consumers, educators, economists, investors and job seekers, to gain knowledge and to make informed decisions. These information services principally take the form of guides and advice on specific areas of interest to these groups of users; for instance, human resource and e-commerce guides in the case of businesses, and credit card cost information for consumers. These services have a broad reach, and consume relatively few resources to update and maintain. The intent is for information services to build on the portal by not only providing users with unique, credible information, but by helping users learn what they can do with this information; hence, this service helps users to build the capacity to use information to create knowledge. Examples of information services on Strategis include Sources of Financing, e-biz.enable, and Corporations Database Online.

► Strategis as an Interactive Information Service: Beyond the one-way provision of information to users, Strategis also provides advice and information that can be interactively tailored to a user's particular needs. This requires a more complex level of

engagement on behalf of the user and Strategis as the supplier of services. The goal of these services is to directly influence the behaviour of the user in terms of taking a particular course of action. Examples of interactive tools include the Lease or Buy Calculator and the E-retailer Evaluator.

► Strategis as a Transactional Service: In addition to using interactivity to provide advice, Strategis helps to promote the use and integrity of transactional services that require an exchange of money or information between two groups of users, usually between businesses or consumers and the government. For instance, businesses can register on-line to incorporate themselves as federal companies, as well as registering intellectual property, setting up mergers, and several other services, including license renewals for bankruptcy trustees.

By providing these layers of services both by product type and user type, Strategis promotes a "one-stop-service shop" for government services. The intent is to provide the improved delivery of services which are beneficial not only to the users, who are able to find the information that they need to conduct their affairs quickly and efficiently, but also to the providers of these services, as they are trying to find more cost-effective ways of serving their client base.

In summary, some Strategis services are intended to reach widely and offer limited incremental information or value. In contrast, other services are intended for a narrow segment of users, but are intended to add significant direct value.

2.3   Adapting to New Trends in Website Use

Strategis, like many other web services, is faced with changing external pressures. In its first generation, electronic commerce has been a "landgrab". Space on the Internet was claimed by whoever got there first with enough resources to create a credible business. It took speed, a willingness to experiment, and a lot of cyber savvy.

In a recent article in Harvard Business Review,[10] Philip Evans and Thomas Wurster contend that we are entering the second generation of e-commerce, and it will be shaped more by strategy than by experimentation. This second generation will shift from claiming territory to defending or capturing it. Service and goods providers will be forced to focus on strategies to achieve a competitive advantage. Success will go to the businesses that get closest to consumers, the ones that help customers navigate their way through the Web. Indeed, Evans and Wurster argue, navigation is the battlefield on which competitive advantage will be won or lost.

An essential organizing idea of the Strategis evaluation framework and study has been the view that Strategis offers fundamentally different services according to a reach versus results (the number and diversity of users versus the value added to each user) and resources (the cost of the offering) continuum. This continuum model, shown in Exhibit 1, above, can be further elaborated using the ideas of *richness* and *affiliation*, as well as the ideas of *complexity*, and *divergence*. These dimensions are explained below:

► *Reach*: In terms of Internet services, this concept relates to access and connection. It means how many customers a business can connect with and how many products it can offer to those customers. Reach is the most visible difference between electronic and physical enterprises, and it has been the primary competitive differentiation for the businesses in the early development of the e-commerce phenomenon.

► *Results*: The idea of results in this case refers to the results accruing to users of a service. Such results involve the value added in terms of allowing a user to do something which he/she was unable to do before, or to do it faster, more cheaply or with higher quality - leading to some type of tangible benefit, including the resolution of a problem and/or the meeting of a need. Two closely related concepts for the provision of Internet services involve the ideas of richness and affiliation, described below.

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[10] Philip Evans and Thomas S. Wurster, "Getting Real About Virtual Commerce" in Harvard Business Review - OnPoint Enhanced Edition

▸   *Richness:*   Evans and Wurster describe this as the depth and detail of information that the
         business can give it can customers, as well as the depth and detailed information it collects
         about the customer. They suggest that richness holds enormous potential for building
         close relationships with customers in any future dominated by e-commerce.

▸   *Affiliation:* Evans and Wurster suggest that there is another dimension of competitiveness
         beyond reach and richness quoted above. They call this dimension affiliation, or whose
         interests the business represents. The notion is that the provider of e-services, especially
         navigational services, gradually develops an affiliation away from the supplier of
         information and towards the *consumer* of information. In the case of Strategis an
         affiliation with users of information has always been a key intent.

In addition to these *new-economy* service dimensions, we can consider two dimensions of services

which have been discussed for at least 20 years. These two dimensions are complexity and

divergence[11]:

▸   *Complexity*: Complexity relates to the steps and sequences that constitute a service
         process. In other words a service with a high number of steps would be more complex
         than a service with only a few steps.

▸   *Divergence*: Divergence relates to the potential deviation which can occur in the conduct
         of each of the steps in a service process. High divergence typically coincides with a highly
         divergent user population.

In summary, internet strategies have evolved from basically adding value by widening reach into

the improvement of richness and affiliation (adding unique value- increasing results) as markets

and system mature. The concepts of complexity and divergence provide another lense with which

to look at products on Strategis and to understand the user experience. For example, a

transactional product may be highly complex (e.g., a large number steps required), but have low

divergence (e.g., users follow the steps in a similar sequence). This has implications for

understanding how easy it is for a user to master a process.

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[11] Lynn G. Shostack, "Service Positioning Through Structural Change". Journal of Marketing, Vol.. 51, January
1997, pp. 34-43

3.   Introduction to Findings

Evaluation research is guided by the evaluation issues determined at the start of the work. In most cases, the report is then structured according to the main categories of issues: relevance, objectives achievement and cost-effectiveness/alternatives. In this case, the findings are structured by major theme:

> ▸   relevance and vison of Strategis;
> ▸   impact of Strategis;
> ▸   governance issues and shared accountability; and
> ▸   design and delivery of Strategis.

Exhibit 2, on the next page, shows a schematic of the report structure. Appendix A, at the end of the report, shows the linkage between the evaluation issues and the major themes.

Exhibit 2 - Major Report Themes


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                    Future
                    Vision of
                    Strategis

                Impact of Strategis

            Governance and Shared
                 Accountability

         Design and Delivery of Strategis
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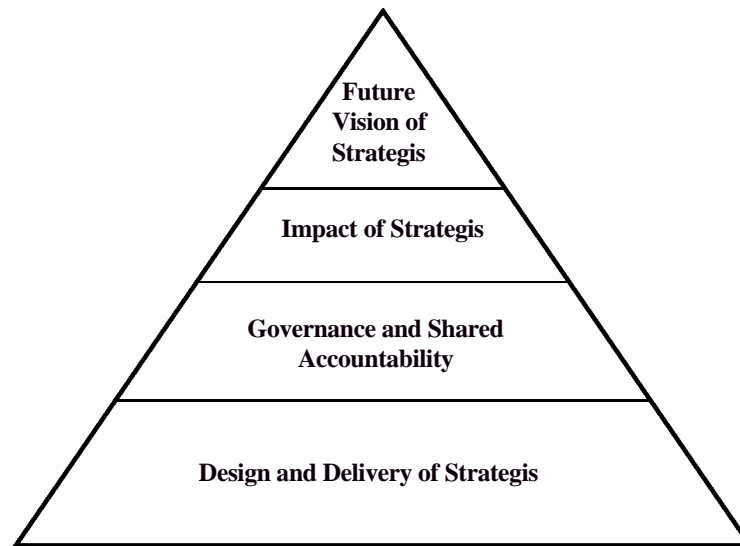
3.1   Profile of Strategis Clients

Before discussing the in-depth findings from this evaluation, this section provides some background information on the profile of Strategis clients or users. Quantitative information on Strategis clients was collected for this evaluation through the online survey. In addition, online surveys of Strategis clients were conducted on the Spring of 2000, 1999 and 1998. Where applicable, similar question wording was used so that year-to year comparisons could be made. In some cases, new questions were added.

Demographics

Strategis users responding to the Client Survey in the Spring 2002 were typically older. Just over one quarter of respondents (29%) were between 40 and 49 years old and another third (32%) were over 50 years old. Clients of Strategis were also more likely to be male (63%) than female (37%). Similar to previous surveys of Strategis, clients were typically well educated. Almost three-quarters of Strategis clients responding to the 2002 Client Survey (71%) had a university or college degree or diploma or higher. Exhibit 3 provides more detail on the survey results.

Exhibit 3 - Demographic Characteristics of Strategis Clients

Demographics	Percentage of Respondents		
	2002 Client Survey	**Spring 2000 Survey**	**Spring 1999**
Age			
Under 20 years	2%	1%	-
20 to 29 years	13%	24%	-
30 to 39 years	24%	28%	-
40 to 49 years	29%	27%	-
50 to 59 years	23%	16%	-
60 years and older	9%	4%	-
Gender			
Male	63%	59%	-
Female	37%	41%	-

Demographics	Percentage of Respondents		
	2002 Client Survey	**Spring 2000 Survey**	**Spring 1999**
Education			
High school or less	8%	8%	7%
Some college/university	18%	18%	16%
College/university degree	34%	40%	45%
Some post-graduate	13%	11%	10%
Post-graduate Degree	24%	22%	21%
No answer	3%	1%	1%
Language[12]			
English	88%	-	-
French	12%	-	-

Employment Characteristics

Results from the 2002 Strategis Client Survey show that users are most likely to be either full-time employees (45%) or a business owner/partner/president (26%). In addition, a significant number of respondents were working for others on contract or as consultants (12%). Strategis users are also typically from small organizations. Over half of the respondents (56%) worked for organizations with fewer than 20 employees. Exhibit 4 provides more detail on the survey results.

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[12] Indicates the language in which the respondent completed the questionnaire

Exhibit 4 - Employment Characteristics of Strategis Clients

Employment Characteristics	Percentage of Respondents		
	2002 Client Survey	**Spring 2000 Survey**	**Spring 1999 Survey**
Employment Status			
Business owner/ partner/ president	26%	23%	-
Consultant/on contract	12%	11%	-
Full-time employee	45%	43%	-
Part-time employee	3%	2%	-
Student	5%	12%	-
Unemployed	2%	4%	-
Other	4%	3%	-
No answer	3%	2%	-
Size of Firm			
One-person (self-employed)	20%	18%	17%
2 to 4 people	18%	18%	17%
5 to 19 people	18%	18%	18%
20 to 99 people	13%	17%	18%
100 to 249 people	5%	9%	9%
250 and over	27%	20%	21%

Frequency of Strategis Use

Roughly one-third of respondents to the Strategis Client Survey were regular users of Strategis.
One in ten respondents to the Strategis Client Survey (11%) indicated that they used Strategis
daily. Another fifth of respondents (20%) used Strategis several times a week. It is important to
note that there is also a significant proportion of users who so not regularly access Strategis.
According to the survey, one fifth of clients (21%) indicated that they rarely visited Strategis.[13]
Exhibit 5 displays the survey results.

Exhibit 5 - Frequency of Use

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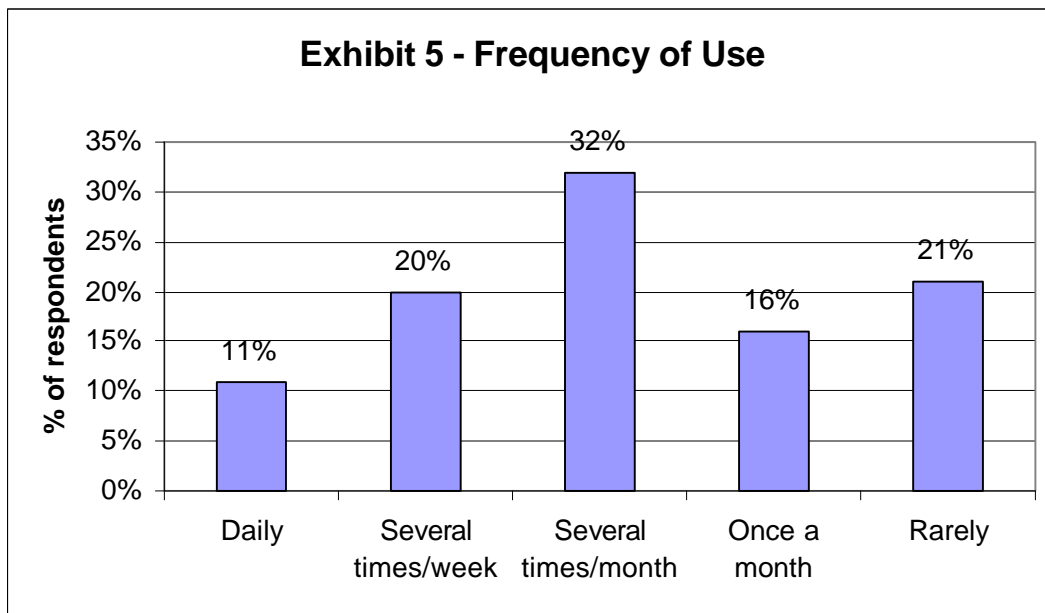
[13] "Rarely" is defined as less than once a month.

Services Sought

Clients participating in the Strategis Client Survey were most likely to be looking for statistics, analysis or industry profiles (35%); company directories or contacts (32%); domestic or international market research (29%); information or support to small or new businesses (28%); and consumer or marketplace news and alerts (27%). One in ten respondents (9%) indicated that they were browsing and were not looking for anything specific. More details on the information or services sought by survey respondents is shown in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6 - Services / Information Sought

What information / services are you hoping to find on Strategis? (Please choose all that apply)	% of respondents
Statistics, analysis or industry profiles	35%
Company directories or contacts	32%
Domestic or international market research	29%
Information and support to small or new businesses	28%
Consumer and marketplace news and alerts	27%
Links to related sites	20%
Industry events and topical business developments	20%
Business Support and Financing	20%
Trade and Exporting	19%
Regulations	16%
Electronic Commerce	15%
Legal or regulatory research	14%
Intellectual property matters	13%
Human resource issues	12%
Nothing specific, just browsing	9%

What information / services are you hoping to find on Strategis? (Please choose all that apply)	% of respondents
Environmental topics	9%
An online transaction with an Industry Canada office	8%
Information for foreign or domestic investors	8%
Financial services calculators	7%
Other	8%

Category of Services Sought

As described in the previous chapter, Strategis products and services can be segmented into four categories (portal, information, interactive and transactional). It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusives. For example, a product or site can provide both links and information.

Clients responding to the survey were asked to indicate all of the services or products they were seeking in their visit to Strategis. It is possible to then map these services against the four categories of service. Because survey respondents were able to indicate more than one choice of services sought for the visit, individual respondents can appear in more than one category.

As Exhibit 7 shows, there are some differences in frequency of use according to product category. Of particular note, users of transactional products are much more likely to regularly visit Strategis (24% visit daily and 27% visit several times a week).

Exhibit 7 - Frequency of Use by Product Category

Frequency of Use	Product Category			
	Portal	**Information**	**Interactive**	**Transactional**
Sample Size	518	912	399	107
Daily	13%	10%	6%	24%
Several times a week	23%	20%	20%	27%
Several times a month	38%	37%	43%	31%
Once a month	15%	16%	18%	9%
Rarely	11%	17%	13%	9%

4.   Findings - Relevance and Vision of Strategis

As described earlier, the original vision of Strategis was to provide direct access to Industry Canada's extensive expertise and information resources. The initial intention was to gather information, add value to it through analysis and organize it into products that businesses could use, delivering it to businesses using electronic communication. Information was to become one of the core products that Industry Canada would deliver to its clients, in order to further its microeconomic policy agenda. One of the questions posed by this evaluation was whether Strategis is meeting the needs of the relevant businesses, consumers, and other users in providing them with a source of secure, affordable, accessible, user-friendly, credible, well-packaged, unique information products and services, in order to promote competitiveness and efficiency.

Throughout the interviews with Industry Canada managers and staff, two prevalent views of Strategis emerged. One group felt strongly that Strategis remains a valuable, well-used tool that serves an ever-growing number of Canadians. The second predominant view was that Strategis is a mature product that has stagnated and no longer meets the needs of users and Industry Canada. Each of these views is discussed in more detail below.

▶   *Finding - Strategis remains a popular, relevant site*

The first opinion expressed by slightly less than half of the Industry Canada managers and staff interviewed for this evaluation was that Strategis is a valuable tool for Industry Canada and its clients. Strategis is viewed by these Industry Canada managers and staff as a comprehensive source of business and consumer information. This view was supported by a large number of

intermediaries[14] who commented that one of Strategis' strengths was the large quantity of information that was available on the site. For example, one intermediary commented in an interview, "people are elated that someone took the time to put it all together....they think that they have hit a goldmine".

The volume of traffic visiting the Strategis site was commonly cited as one proof of the success of the website. Strategis receives, on average, 30,000 visits a day and 9 million visits a year.[15] Exhibit 8 shows the growth of visits to Strategis since its launch in 1996.

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[14] For the purposes of this study, intermediaries are defined as organizations who either represent the interests of a sector or a group of businesses (e.g., an association) or who provide information or services primarily to small and medium sized businesses (e.g., Canada Business Service Centres, Chambers of Commerce, Entrepreneurship Centers, etc.).

[15] Strategis MIS

Exhibit 8 - Monthly Visits
April, 1996 to March, 2002
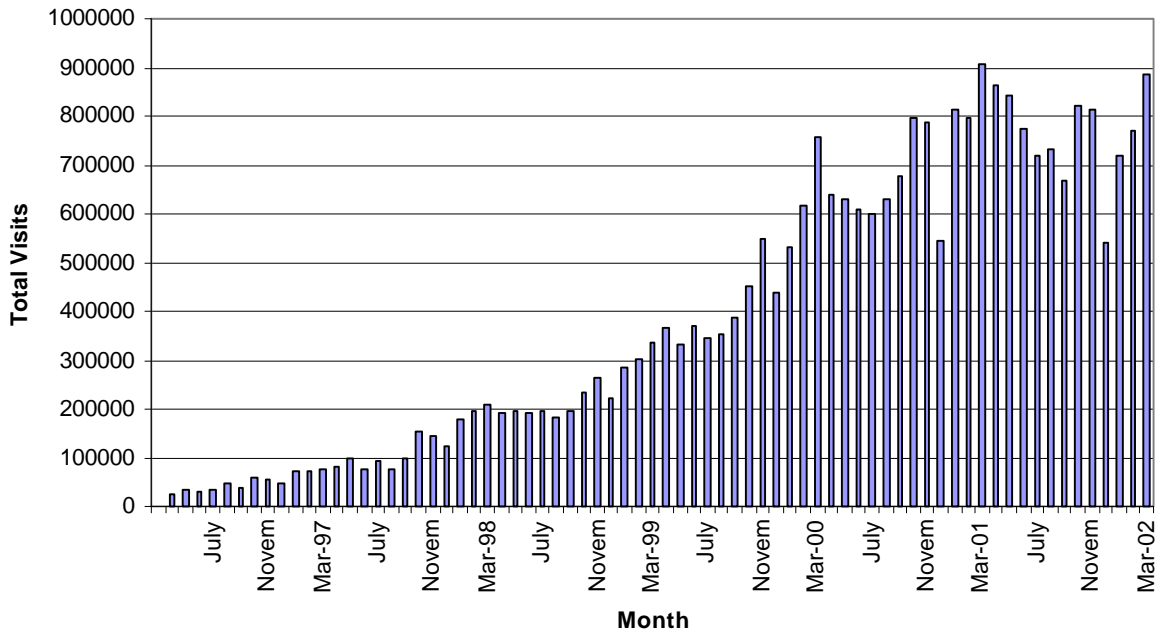
Source: Strategis MIS

As can been seen in the graph, visits to Strategis have ranged between 1.9 million and 2.5 million visits per quarter for the last two years. Visits are defined as a collection of requests that represent all the pages and graphics seen by a particular visitor at any one time.

It is important to note that the number of visits to a site is but one measure of its success. Merely counting the number of "hits" does not provide information on user satisfaction or the impact of the information on users. Repeat or regular use can also be used as a measure of performance. We can assume that users who return to a site regularly are finding information or services that are useful to them. The Strategis Client Survey asked respondents how often they visited

Strategis, as shown in Exhibit 5, in the previous section of this report. As the results show, over one third of respondents (31%) reported that they visited Strategis daily or several times a week.

In addition, the Strategis Client Survey asked respondents to indicate if they found Strategis to be an important business tool. Three out of ten clients surveyed (29%) strongly agreed that Strategis was an important business tool.[16] Frequent users were more likely to strongly agree that Strategis was an important business tool than rare or monthly users. Exhibit 9 shows a comparison according to the frequency of using Strategis.

Exhibit 9 - Important Business Tool

"Strategis is an Important Business Tool"	
Frequency of Use	**% Strongly Agreeing - Rating Strategis a 10**
Daily	44%
Several times a week	36%
Several times a month	27%
Once a month	18%
Rarely	25%
Total	29%
1 - Strongly Disagree 10 - Strongly Agree	

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[16] When asked if Strategis was an important business tool, rated Strategis a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means 'strongly agree' and 10 means 'strongly disagree'

► *Finding - Strategis is viewed internally as a mature product that has grown too large and stagnated*

The second and contrasting opinion offered by Industry Canada managers and staff is that Strategis was a mature product that had stagnated in recent years. Typical comments were that Strategis was coasting on past successes or drifting. This view was held by slightly more than half of the Industry Canada managers, officers and content providers interviewed for this evaluation. Strategis was referred to as a"juggernaut" or a "behemoth" by a number of senior managers during the interviews.

This group of Industry Canada managers, officers and Strategis content providers thought the that Strategis had out grown itself, describing Strategis as "beast that has outgrown its holding pen." These interviewees saw the key weaknesses of Strategis as structural flaws requiring either a major overhaul of the site, or in the most extreme response recommended that "it should be scrapped and redesigned as a completely dynamic site, or several dynamic sites."

This view was also supported by the case studies. Many case study interviewees (internal to Industry Canada) believed that Strategis had reached its potential in its current form and needs to be rethought.

▸   *Finding - Strategis does not have a common, unifying vision*

Many Industry Canada interviewees felt that Strategis lacked a common purpose or vision. They commented that the lack of focus or vision for Strategis has had a number of significant impacts in recent years:

▸   a decrease in the emphasis placed on Strategis as an innovative product for the department has resulted in lowered management attention;

▸   without a vision, Strategis has become a "dumping ground" for material without clear thought placed on the rationale for adding new material to the site; and

▸   without clear direction or focus, there has been little thought to removing documents from Strategis or implementing a document management strategy. As a result, the site has become "bloated" with out of date products.

In absence of any concerted vision, individual sites have taken on the responsibility for their own marketing and planning. This has contributed to the continued and varied growth of Strategis without a strategic focus.

The document review showed that a commonly cited set of objectives for Strategis does not exist. In 1997, a set of objectives were proposed in the evaluation framework document. However, as Strategis continued to evolve, other objectives or priorities are mentioned in presentations and documents.
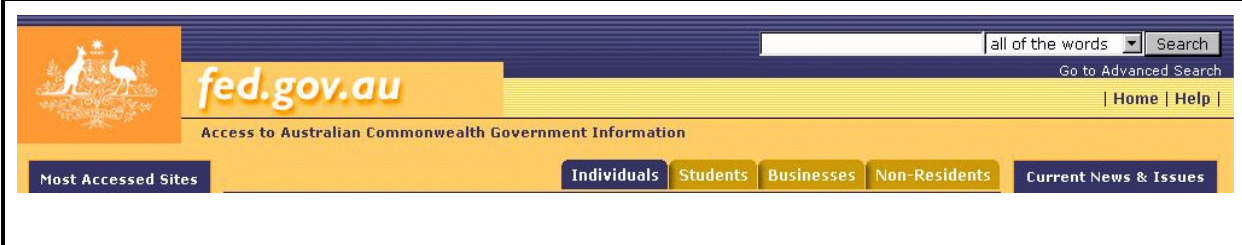
In the case studies, site sponsors held widely different visions of what Strategis should be and who the target users should be. In most case studies, interviewees were unable to describe the vision of Strategis or the means by which it could benefit either the clients of the case study site, or the officers themselves. Some of these differences can be explained by the varying function and activities of the case study sites.

In place of a viable vision for Strategis, Industry Canada managers and officers commented that a Common Look and Feel has been imposed on the site. While Strategis may have the appearance of a cohesive web site, it is not considered by managers and officers within IC as having a direction that will guide it towards the future.

A review of similar government sites in other countries shows that many of these post their vision on their sites, allowing users to better gauge the sites and providing focus for development efforts. These visions and a description of the site are outlined in Exhibit 10.

Exhibit 10 - Visions of Comparison Sites

Description	Operating strictly as a portal, FirstGov.gov links users to state, federal and combined jurisdiction sites. On its front page users are directed to one of three broad doors, "Citizens, Businesses, Governments" from where users are able to focus their own needs. The site includes information posted by US government sources, links to private or non-governmental sites, as well as links to international sites that carry information which may be of benefit or interest to domestic users.
Vision	"FirstGov.gov, the official U.S. gateway to all government information, is the catalyst for a growing electronic government. Our work transcends the traditional boundaries of government and our vision is global - connecting the world to all U.S. government information and services."

Description	UKonlineforbusiness is a highly targeted and more narrowly focussed site. There are no services for consumers or citizens on this site, these groups are served by the broader based UKonline site. The 'forbusiness' site operates in two levels, one for registered members, the other for non-members. To obtain access to the members portion of the site, users may register for free and may include a UK based postal code. This is later used to customise the resources of the site to the needs of the user. For example, the "contact us" link will direct clients to their local Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) officer, not a generic helpdesk line. Members are provided with a more detailed site map, interactive tools and resources that are not available to non-members. These include contact names for their local DTI officers, an interactive "Be online 4 Business" tool that allows businesses to develop complex business plans which can be downloaded or received by email. If requested, the local DTI officer will do a follow-up call to the business, answering questions and providing additional support based upon the developed business plan.
Vision	"UK online for business is a programme that offers expert, impartial, jargon-free help, information and support on the best use of technology for small and medium-sized business (SMEs). Our vision is to make the UK the best place in the world for e-commerce."

Description	Fed.gov.au is a pure portal, similar to that of the FirstGov.gov. Similarly, there are four tabs within the front page, "Individual, Students, Businesses and Non-Residents," focussing users towards the information that they need. It does not store information, rather it directs users to information created and maintained by individual Commonwealth agencies and organisations. Fed.gov.au also 'harvests' and makes available metadata records from all Australian Commonwealth Agencies, under the Government Electronic Resource Network (GOVERNET) initiative of the Ministerial Online Council. One can find a concentrated body of Australian Commonwealth Government information through this site. www.fed.gov.au currently signposts over 500 Federal Government web sites, indexes more than 1,000,000 pages and uses both metadata and free text indexing to ensure it is a comprehensive government portal.
Vision	Its mission is to provide access to Commonwealth Government information, and it does so through a variety of discovery paths, including search, subject trees and indexes. www.fed.gov.au, the Commonwealth Government Entry Point, offers comprehensive and integrated access to Federal Government information.

▸   *Finding - Strategis is viewed as providing a credible, trustworthy source of information*

Regardless of the impact of the lack of vision and other issues related to the design and delivery of Strategis (described later in this report), Strategis is still perceived as providing a valuable, credible source of information. There was little doubt that among the intermediary organizations that Strategis is providing a valuable service to its users, even though the front-line users have found some shortcomings in the site. Intermediaries believe that one clear benefit of the information provided via Strategis is the inherent level of credibility given the source of the information (i.e., government).

Indeed, it appears as though there is a continuing role for the federal government to play with respect to the provision of business-related information. Many of the intermediaries commented that they liked using the site because of the government's perceived independence. For example, one intermediary user referred to Strategis as the "Neutral Switzerland" of business-related information, citing the credit card calculators on the sites as being more trustworthy than the similar calculators provided on the web site of the major banks.

The vast majority of the Strategis content providers felt that users inherently trust information provided by the Canadian federal government. The "trustmark" of Strategis was believed to be quite strong. Respondents went on to comment that this implied an increased level of responsibility on themselves and their colleagues to ensure the information posted on Strategis was relevant, accurate and up-to-date.

Respondents to the Strategis Client Survey also rated the trustworthiness of the information on Strategis highly. Survey respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statement describing different aspects of Strategis (where '1' signified 'strongly disagree' and '10' represented 'strongly agree')[17]. The table in Exhibit 11 provides the mean or average ratings given to these statements. As Exhibit 11 shows, respondents rated the trustworthiness of the information found on Strategis as fairly high (a mean of 8 out of 10).

Exhibit 11 - Aspects of Strategis

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[17] The 10-point scale used in the Strategis Client Survey corresponds to the scale used in the American Service Quality Index. The American Service Quality Index (ASQI), originating at the University of Michigan, has been used to measure service quality across all manner of services in the U.S. and several other countries. In general, quality ratings for most services average between 6 and 8.

	Statement	Mean
Trust	I trust the information that I find on Strategis	8.1
Uniqueness*	I can easily find the information offered on Strategis on other Internet sites	4.6
Currency of Information	The information provided on Strategis is up-to-date and current	6.9
	Scale: 1 - Strongly Disagree 10 - Strongly Agree	

* Unlike the other questions, this question has a scale where the lower rating is better than a higher rating

▸   *Finding - Other online products are perceived to offer similar products to Strategis*

Many Industry Canada managers and officers, as well as intermediaries, commented that the number and scope of online offerings has changed dramatically since Strategis was launched. When Strategis was first developed in the mid 1990's, it was a unique information tool. At that time, no other web site offered a similar range of information products and services to a Canadian audience. However, in recent years, the number and scope of other online services directed to businesses has increased. These online products are offered by government (federal and provincial) and by private sector sources. For example, the government of Canada has three initiatives that are seen by some to compete for the attention of small businesses (Canada Business Service Centres, BusinessGateway, and Strategis). More details on these initiatives are provided below.

▸   BusinessGateway is part of the Federal Government's Government On-line initiative, managed by Industry Canada.   Business gateway is a portal that directs users to business-related information from the Government of Canada, including information that is offered on both Strategis and the CBSC sites. Within Industry Canada, the Business Gateway is managed by the CIO.

▸   The CBSC online sites provide information to small businesses as well as use content already on Strategis in fulfilling their goal to " provide business people in every part of

Canada with access to accurate, timely and relevant information and referrals and to reduce the complexity of dealing with various levels of government by serving as a central resource for Canadian business information." With its provincial partners, the CBSC websites offer information that is focussed on the distinct business environment in each Provinces and Territories. Responsibility for the CBSC initiative is also falls within the CIO.

In addition, a corporate website (www.ic.gc.ca) is maintained by the Communications and Marketing Branch. This website includes information on Industry Canada's programs and services, contact information, publications and media releases.

In particular, a significant number of interviewees were confused by the perceived overlap between BusinessGateway and Strategis. Although BusinessGateway is strictly a portal, many interviewees saw the two online products as similar and significantly overlapping. Officers in the regions commented that Business Gateway and Strategis appear to be competing with one another for a common clientele. This is viewed to be confusing for on-line users, due to the perceived overlap of products and information.

Ostensibly, these three web presences are currently competing with one another for the traffic of users seeking out business information. Of the three, BusinessGateway operates like a true portal – it does not produce any original content, but directs a specific group of users (businesses and those wishing to start a new business) to pre-existing bundled content, including that offered on Strategis and the CBSCs. The CBSCs act as both a portal and content provider. However, the information is even more focussed, as the CBSCs are classified by province and territory.

Strategis has a very broad reach for its potential audience, including businesses, consumers, students, teachers and economists, as well as Industry Canada's own employees. While Strategis does function, in part, as a portal, it is considered by many within Industry Canada, including

senior managers and officers within the department, as having been organised according to departmental lines, rather than according to user needs.

The uniqueness of the information that is provided by Strategis is also generally supported by intermediaries, although Strategis is not the only source for business-related information. Intermediaries also used CD-ROMs and databases from private sources for some specific information that is not provided by Strategis. However, no intermediary commented that there were any redundancies with respect to the business-related content.

Respondents were less likely to see the information provided on Strategis as unique. Strategis users did not strongly disagree with the statement "I can easily find the information offered on Strategis on other Internet sites." As seen in the graph in Exhibit 12, clients did not perceive Strategis to be providing unique information.

Exhibit 12 - Can Easily Find the Information Elsewhere
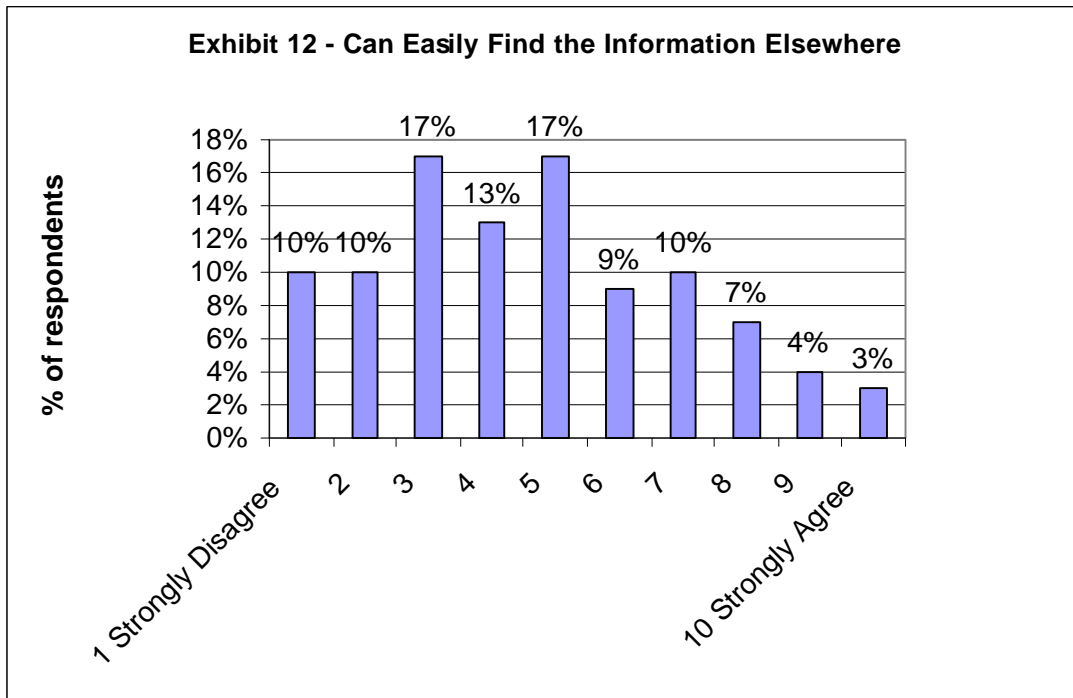
5.   Findings - Impact of Strategis

One of the purposes of this evaluation was to determine the impact of Strategis on internal and external users. Strategis was designed with the goal of providing information and services that would be useful to as broad a range of users as possible. This includes users who are both internal and external to Industry Canada. The evaluation probed whether Strategis was a vehicle for transformation and whether it had changed the way the Department and its clientele communicate and work.

Impact on Users

As stated earlier, the initial objectives for Strategis were to improve the international competitiveness of Canadian business; foster productivity growth; encourage businesses to make better use of information technology; and, enable businesses to make more informed decisions about new markets by providing relevant information in a timely and accessible manner.

▸   *Finding - The majority of clients report that Strategis has had a positive impact on their business or organization*

The Strategis Client Survey asked respondents if Strategis had had a positive impact in their business or organization. As shown in the graph in Exhibit 13, over one quarter of respondents (26%) reported that Strategis had definitely had a positive impact on their business. Two-fifths (39%) stated that Strategis had had a somewhat positive impact on their business. It is interesting to note that one in six of respondents (16%) were unable to determine if Strategis had had an impact on their business.
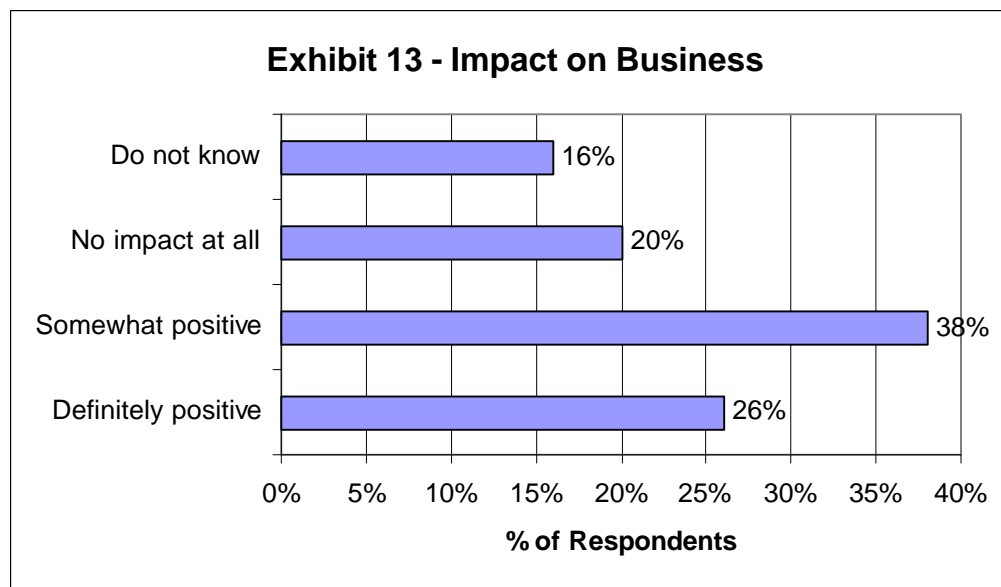
Exhibit 13 - Impact on Business

The most common impact was time savings. Of the total number of clients who answered the question on impacts 41% reported that Strategis had saved them time. This represents 61% of the clients reporting that Strategis had either had a definitely positive or somewhat positive impact on their organization. Other impacts reported included:

▸ helped to identify new markets for products or services (34% of clients answering the question);

▸ financial impacts such as new contracts, new sources of financing (13%); and

▸ enabled the creation of new jobs (7%).

The proportion of clients who reported positive impacts varied by the type of service that they were seeking (e.g., transactional, interactive, information or portal). Clients seeking to conduct an online transaction with Industry Canada when they came to Strategis were the most likely to

report a definitely positive impact on their organizations (32%). More detail is provided in

Exhibit 14.

Exhibit 14 - Impact of Strategis by Type of Product

Impact	Total	Type of Product			
		Transactional	Interactive	Information	Portal
Definitely Positive	26%	32%	26%	25%	28%
Somewhat Positive	38%	37%	41%	41%	39%
No Impact	20%	18%	17%	19%	18%
Don't Know	16%	14%	17%	15%	15%

Other impacts of Strategis on clients are varied but difficult to quantify. The impacts on clients

vary by the nature of the various products and services. The case studies provide examples of the

impacts of specific products and services on user groups. Case study interviewees found it

difficult to quantify the impacts of their products and services on users. However, in most cases,

they were able to provide anecdotal information on the impacts on their target users. The most

common of these anecdotal impacts included: broader reach, marketing and promotion

opportunities, improved access to information and faster and more efficient services. These

impacts are described in Exhibit 15.

Exhibit 15 - Impacts on Clients - Case Study Examples

Case Study	Impacts on Clients
Bankruptcy (Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy - OSB)	Faster and more efficient service - Trustees, lawyers and others searching for names can control the process (e.g. they can specify and adjust the database search parameters on their own without the intervention of OSB staff). Online searches can be conducted 24 hours/day. Telephone service is limited to 8 am to 5 pm Ottawa time. Ease of accessing information - The website has made it much easier for clients and users to get information related to bankruptcies and credit, particularly when compared to the old bankruptcies listings in the Canada Gazette. Providing service in the form requested by clients - The OSB has received many requests from clients (e.g. credit bureaus, credit card companies) for new online products: e.g. lists of discharged debtors.
Biotechnology Gateway	Ease of finding information: The portal format makes it easier for clients to find the information that they need. For example, the BRAVO site guides users through the very complex biotechnology regulatory environment. Other information products help reduce the amount of time it takes to find patent information (BioBix), and give an overview of the biotechnology sector in Canada (Canadian Biotechnology Clusters). Comprehensive source of information: An independent review of a few science-related web sites conducted by *Biotechnology Focus* magazine gave a very favourable review to the Gateway. This is especially important to the many small and medium enterprises that form the core of the Gateways'' clients, as smaller companies benefit greatly from being able to quickly find information that they cannot find themselves, owing to a lack of time and / or resources. Education: By educating one group of the Gateway''s users (i.e. consumers), the Gateway is able to build confidence among the general public in the biotechnology industry; by dispelling consumers'' uncertainty and ignorance, industry gains by having a more informed consuming public. Promotion and visibility opportunities - The Canadian Biotechnology Clusters page on the Gateway provides visibility for the industry by providing a geographic and sectoral guide to the sector in Canada, providing information for those interested in research, company profiles, support mechanisms and investment opportunities for cities across the country.

Case Study	Impacts on Clients
Canadian Companies Capabilities Database (CCC)	Broad reach (high participation/large number of users) - The CCC has about 50,000 registered companies. About 50,000 users visit the site each month. Marketing and promotion - The CCC provides a large number of companies with an inexpensive way to promote their products and services. The CCC has been used by industry associations to create directories of their members for marketing purposes Access to federal procurement opportunities - Users can register information that can be used by IC to match them with procurement opportunities. Users also provide links to other procurement opportunities (e.g. textile auctions). Market research and other uses - Company listings in the CCC are used for market research, networking, business analysis, and competitive intelligence.
Canadian Environmental Solutions (CES)	Increased reach through greater language options - In addition to English and French, the addition of Spanish allows a greater number of international clients, most notably South Americans and others to view information and access CES services. Increased reach through options in format of information - The choice between the website and the CD-ROM means that clients in more remote regions need not go online to search the database, while clients with Internet access can do so. Unique directory of information - The CES database is unique within Canada, collecting more kinds of data than that of the CCC. This allows environmental companies to list and sort through a greater number of criteria. Containing over 1 980 environmental problems and 1 920 solutions and their descriptions, along with profiles of over 872 Canadian companies that can provide these solutions. Federal statutes and regulations are also part of this unique database. As well, biotechnology and climate change solutions have been incorporated into the CES. Inexpensive marketing and promotion - The CES provides a large number of companies with an inexpensive way to promote their products and services. Access to federal procurement opportunities - Users can register information that can be used by IC to match them with procurement opportunities. Users also provide links to other procurement opportunities (e.g. textile auctions). Market research and other uses - Company listings in the CES are used for market research, networking, business analysis, and competitive intelligence.

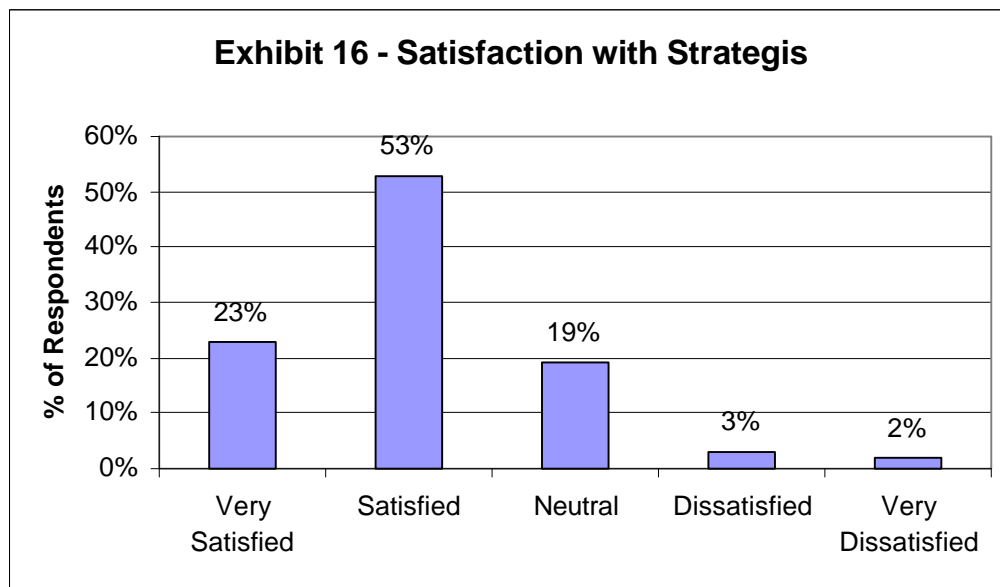| Case Study	Impacts on Clients
Consumer Connection	Improved access to information - CC managers believe that the website has greatly improved access to consumer information. In addition, its financial calculators provide a unique opportunity for users to access quick and competitive information about bank charges, credit card charges, and mutual fund rates. Changing the way banks do business - CC managers have been able to determine that their Annual Financial Report has changed the competitiveness of bank charges. In addition, since blowing the whistle on credit card charges, a government enquiry has been held and consumers have saved an estimated $200 to 300 million. Increased reach and awareness - By providing information and various tools on the website, CC has increased its reach and consumer awareness and has gained new clients and partnerships.
ebiz.enable	Marketing and promotion opportunities - Links enable private sector partners to market their services to SMEs looking for e-commerce services. Similarly, the site provides industry organizations with opportunities to promote reports they have produced, many of which are available on the site (or through their links). Dissemination of knowledge - Increased distribution of information about e-commerce (e.g. reports produced by different organizations, academics, and experts). Support to businesses interested in e-commerce - Users give positive ratings of the benefits of the site. Support to intermediaries and service suppliers - The site provides valuable information to consultants and companies providing e-commerce services to SMEs.
MEPA	Broadened reach - The website has broadened the reach for MEPA documents beyond IC and their external network of 3,000 academics and experts. Improved access to information - The website has made access to MEPA information faster and easier for both the expert-specialist network and the public. Access to free information - Information on MEPA is available at no cost, something that MEPA managers consider to be a significant advantage to users over most other sources.

Case Study	Impacts on Clients
Solutions for Advanced Manufacturing	Provides a unique service - As most Advanced Manufacturing Companies identify themselves with their client groups, SAM is providing a unique forum for the community to research technologies and develop business opportunities. Unique directory of information - The SAM database is unique within Canada, collecting more kinds of data than that of the CCC. This allows advanced manufacturing technologies companies to list and sort through a greater number of criteria. Partnerships - A successful partnership has been forged with Advanced Manufacturing Magazine, furthering the promotion of Canadian AMT companies. Links to other related sites - As the AMT community is still very small, providing links to other Canadian and international sites is still an essential service. Inexpensive marketing and promotion - SAM provides a large number of companies with an inexpensive way to promote their products and services.
Spectrum Management and Telecommunications Technologies	Faster and more efficient service - Online research and payments can be conducted 24 ours/day. Telephone service is limited to 8-5 Ottawa time. Ease of getting information - The website has made it much easier for clients and users to get information related to Spectrum technologies, particularly when compared to the old listings in the Canada Gazette. Limited adoption of online payments - Although online payments our available, a small percentage of clients are currently using the feature. This is attributed to navigation difficulties.

It was difficult for the intermediary organizations to assess the impact that Strategis has had on their clients, as none of the organizations interviewed collected follow-up information from their clients. Almost half of the officers did comment that they felt that they were being successful in satisfying the needs of their clients because these clients did not complain about shortcomings in the information that was given to them. Several interviewees suggested that for the clients that they serve, Strategis would not necessarily have a great impact because "the actions undertaken by people would not be based solely on the site." That is, Strategis is but one of a number of tools that businesses use to help them make decisions.

Several intermediaries suggested that Strategis does have an impact on the competitiveness and efficiency of their clients, because quick access to the information that they need helps them make more informed decisions more quickly than they could without Strategis. As one officer commented, her clients are better able to prepare and customize their business proposals by researching the information that they need.

▸   *Finding - The majority of Strategis clients report that they are satisfied with Strategis*
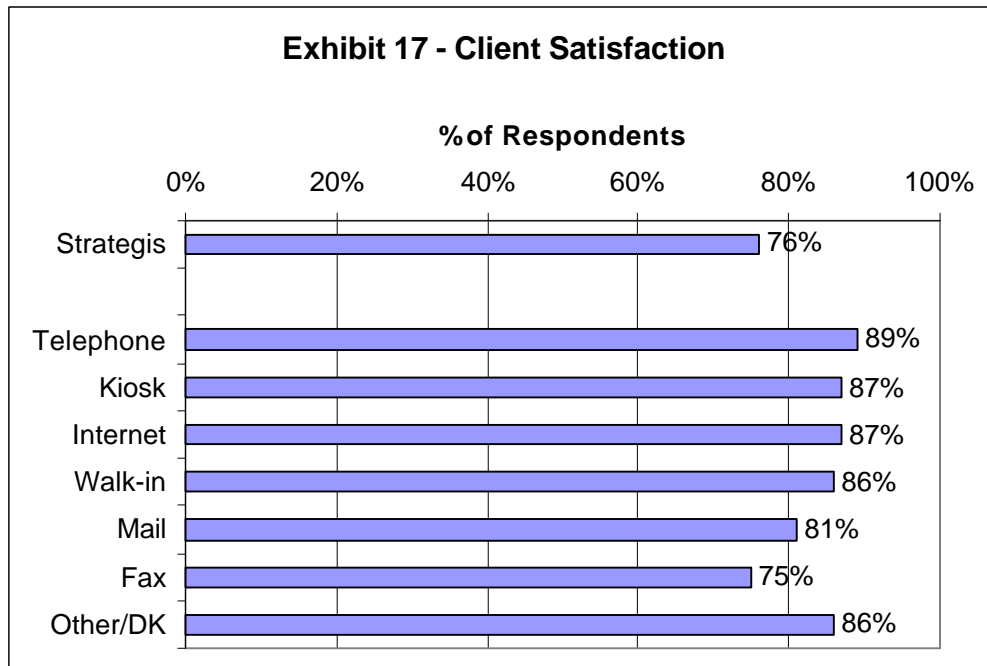
Almost one quarter (23%) of Strategis clients responding to the survey reported that they were very satisfied with the information that they had found on Strategis. As shown in the table in Exhibit 16, in total, over three-quarters (76%) of survey respondents replied that they were satisfied (very satisfied or satisfied).

Exhibit 16 - Satisfaction with Strategis

Category	% of Respondents
Very Satisfied	23%
Satisfied	53%
Neutral	19%
Dissatisfied	3%
Very Dissatisfied	2%

A recent survey conducted on behalf of the Public Sector Service Delivery Council and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada examined the use of "single windows" for different government services (federal, provincial and municipal).[18] This survey used a similar scale to the one used in this evaluation when examining client satisfaction with services and, as a result, provides useful benchmarks for the Strategis data. It is important to note that some of these services are delivered using higher resources per reach than Strategis (e.g., telephone, walk-in, mail services). However, other services benchmarked below (e.g., kiosk and Internet) represent a similar delivery channel to Strategis.

As shown in the graph in Exhibit 17, the level of satisfaction by channel of service ranged from 89% for telephone service to 75% for fax service. The level of satisfaction reported by Strategis users (76%) is towards the low end of the benchmarked services. In comparison, satisfaction with Internet services was rated at 87%.

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[18] R.A.Maltest and Associates Ltd for the Public Sector Service Delivery Council and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, "Client Speak - A Report on Single-Window Government Services in Canada", Summer 2002.

Exhibit 17 - Client Satisfaction

%of Respondents

Strategis	76%
Telephone	89%
Kiosk	87%
Internet	87%
Walk-in	86%
Mail	81%
Fax	75%
Other/DK	86%

▸   *Finding - More frequent users are more likely to report that they are very satisfied with Strategis information*

As shown in the table in Exhibit 18, more frequent users (38%) were more likely to report that they were very satisfied with the information found on Strategis than other users (23% of all survey respondents). On the other side, clients who reported that they rarely used Strategis were more likely to report that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (37%).

Exhibit 18 - Satisfaction with Strategis by Frequency of Visits

Satisfaction	Frequency of Visit				
	Daily	Several times a week	Several times a week	Once a month	Rarely
Very Satisfied	38%	30%	21%	19%	11%
Satisfied	49%	58%	59%	52%	40%
Neutral	10%	9%	16%	24%	37%
Dissatisfied	2%	2%	3%	5%	3%
Very Dissatisfied	1%	1%	1%	0%	9%

Impact on Industry Canada

▸   *Finding - Strategis is the current choice as a publishing tool*

One function of Strategis is to provide specific information services, such as guides, reports and consumer and sector-specific information. The implicit purpose of this information is to help target users, including businesses, consumers, educators, economists, investors and job seekers, to gain knowledge and to make decisions. These services have a broad reach, and consume relatively few resources to update and maintain. The intent is for information services to build on the portal by not only providing users with unique, credible information, but by helping users learn what they can do with this information. Hence, this service helps users to build the capacity to use information to create knowledge.

For those areas of Industry Canada focussed on providing information, Strategis is seen primarily as the publishing arm. Most areas of Industry Canada no longer publish hard copies of their reports and studies and use Strategis sites instead to provide access to their material.

It should be mentioned that intermediary organizations, when asked if IC should publish information that is on Strategis in another media (e.g. pamphlets, booklets), generally responded that the electronic format was the preferred format. Hard copies of information could be printed off for clients who could not do so themselves.

One of Industry Canada's Strategic Objectives addresses the issue of sustainable development. The objective is "to enhance the capability of Canadians, industries and firms to develop and use eco-efficient practices, tools, technologies and products that contribute to increased productivity and environmental performance."[19] Although this issue was not specifically addressed by the formative evaluation, it is possible to assume that, as a result of using Strategis as a channel to publish information, the Department has reduced the amount of printing carried out. Many of the officers and document product teams interviewed for the evaluation commented that they no longer print glossy hard copies of their reports and publish to Strategis instead.

▸   *Finding - Publishing information online has increased the reach of Industry Canada products and services*

The strength of having an online publishing tool is the increased reach of these information products. Senior managers and officers pointed out that the number of clients and users with access to this information is dramatically higher than Industry Canada could afford to reach through any other publishing mechanisms.

According to the vast majority of Industry Canada interviewees, the information published to Strategis is available to a much broader range of users than through other publishing mechanisms. For example, many of the Branches within Industry Sector commented that with an online

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[19]   Report on Plans and Priorities, 2002-03 Estimates, Industry Canada

presence, their reach has extended beyond their traditional users. They felt that their information was now available to groups that they may not have been able to serve in the past.
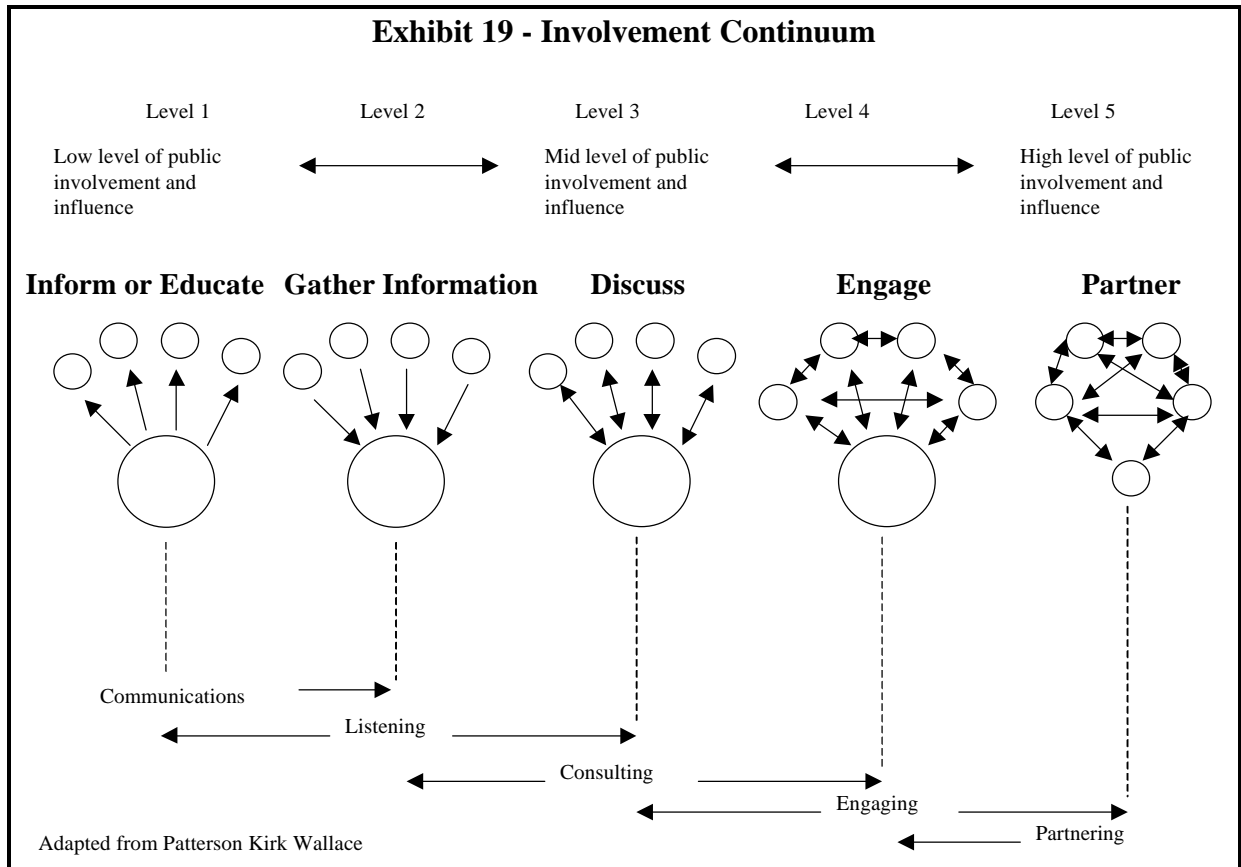
▶   *Finding - Strategis is not perceived to have significantly changed the way Industry Canada interacts with client groups*

During the interviews and case studies, the evaluation explored whether Strategis had been a vehicle for transformation and if it had changed the way in which the Department and its clientele communicate and work. The vast majority of interviewees stated that Strategis had not had a significant impact on the way in which they interacted with their client groups. The case studies provide several examples of this:

▶   Although it is possible for Spectrum license renewals to be completed entirely online, only a small percentage of clients do so. This is attributed in part to the "maze-like" structure of Strategis, with interviewees pointing out that even clients who know the services and the site well are unable to find the payments page.

▶   Officers with Environmental Affairs reported that they had experienced an increased demand for communication, but that the nature of the information sought and assistance provided has not changed.

Involvement and interaction with clients can take a number of different forms as illustrated in the following exhibit. This involvement continuum was used in interviews with managers and staff as a discussion prompt. The involvement continuum describes the complexity of the relationship between a public institution and individuals or groups, and the way in which they exchange information.   The relationships between the parties and the way in which they exchange information becomes progressively more interactive along the axis of the continuum.

Furthermore, the level of interaction describes the level of public involvement not only between

Exhibit 19 - Involvement Continuum

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Low level of public involvement and influence		Mid level of public involvement and influence		High level of public involvement and influence

Inform or Educate   **Gather Information**   **Discuss**   **Engage**   **Partner**

Communications

Listening

Consulting

Engaging

Partnering

Adapted from Patterson Kirk Wallace

groups and public institutions, but also between groups themselves. The more complex the relationship between the institution and the public, the narrower the public audience. For instance, the first level might constitute the provision of information or a survey to a broad audience, while the fifth level involves an on-going exchange of information among an informed public and public institutions.

▸ The first level of the continuum is Inform or Educate, in which the public institution provides information to the public for the purpose of raising awareness (for instance, an advertising campaign or running an on-line survey). This level represents a one-way communication, and therefore has a broad reach (any one can receive the information) and low level of public influence and involvement.

▸ The second level of the continuum is Gather Information, in which the public institution listens to, or acquires feedback from, the public. This level is also a one-way communication and is characterized by a narrowing of the communications reach to those members of the public that have responded to a communications effort (for instance, respondents to an on-line survey).

▸ The third stage of the continuum is Discuss, which represents the first stage of an exchange of information between an institution and the public. This level represents a consultation between the institution and members of the public; it is, therefore, more narrow in reach than the previous stage (e.g. only those willing to further discuss their answers to a survey will participate), and represents a growing level of public involvement and influence.

▸ The fourth stage of the continuum is Engage, which is a more complex form of discussion than the previous stage. At this level, there is public discussion in addition to the discussion with the public body.

▸ The final stage of the continuum is Partner, which is the highest level of public involvement and influence possible. In this stage, the public institution is an equal participants in the information exchange with an engaged public.

The majority of interviewees from Industry Canada pointed out the interaction with clients has not changed significantly as a result of Strategis. For example as pointed out earlier in this section, many groups use Strategis primarily as a publishing tool. Most of the Industry Canada managers and officers interviewed thought that Strategis, as a tool, was primarily used to inform or educate or to gather information. Some officers representing products on Strategis were able to cite limited examples of using Strategis as a vehicle for discussion or consultation with clients. The key limitation of using Strategis to communicate with clients in a different manner was thought by most officers to be the readiness of clients to interact via the Internet.

It is important to note that a more detailed examination of impacts on clients conducted through the case studies did show that Strategis has had some impacts on Industry Canada. These are explained in more detail under the next finding.

▸   *Finding - The case studies illustrate a number of internal impacts of Strategis*

The specific impacts of the case studies provide a window on the types of impacts the various products and services have had internally. The impacts of the case studies are described in Exhibit 20.

Exhibit 20 - Impacts on Industry Canada - Case Study Examples

Case Study	Impacts on Industry Canada
Bankruptcy	Increased revenue - $1.3M in revenue last year from name searches, about 10% of their budget. This money supports the development of new products. Increased volume - The number of searches has increased since the service has been available online. Efficiencies and cost savings - Telephone calls to the OSB have been reduced by75%; 75% of the name searches and contacts with trustees are now online. They are now renewing trustee licences online: "It is going well." Communications - The OSB is using email and the website to inform clients of new services, initiatives and policies. They have stopped producing the "Insolvency Bulletin". It is available on the website. Consultations - The OSB has dropped all paper consultations with trustees (their key clients). They are also using email and the website for broader consultations with all clients. However, at this point the OSB recognizes that online consultations have some limitations (e.g. "clients aren't used to this") and they see these methods as a supplement and not a substitute for conventional methods of consultations. Moving services and transactions online - Because of the initial successes and client demand, the OSB is planning to move all of its transactions online. Legal processes (1M transactions/year) are complicated. The process will be incremental; it is a multi-year process.
Biotechnology Gateway	Partnerships - The work to support the Gateway has promoted the growth of numerous partnerships between Industry Canada and other government departments, industry associations and consumer associations. These partnerships principally take the form of collaborations established to share information and obtain feedback on the development of content. These collaborations also help to prevent duplication of products and services.

Case Study	Impacts on Industry Canada
Canadian Companies Capabilities Database (CCC)	Efficiencies from having a consolidated directory - The CCC provides a consolidated directory that replaces most of the hundreds of directories used by different branches in IC. This has resulted in large efficiencies in the important function of identifying and tracking companies in specific sectors. Variety of other uses - The CCC is used by staff throughout the Department for various purposes such as communications and matching companies with procurement opportunities. Awareness/promotion of Strategis - As the most visited site, the CCC provides an entry point into other Strategis sites (e.g. partner sites like SourceCan). Support to other Departments - The CCC is used by other Departments: for example, DFAIT has used it to identify companies for Team Canada trade missions.
Canadian Environmental Solutions	Support the EAB officers - The CES is used by staff throughout the Department for various purposes such as communications and matching companies with procurement opportunities. Support to other Departments - The CES is used by a number of other Departments, including: DFAIT; Trade Team Canada Environment representatives use the CD-ROM and website to show foreign clients Canadian companies from the trade show floor; Environment Canada, in particular, the Environmental Technology Advancement Directorate (ETAD) Awareness / promotion of Strategis - Through international promotion of Trade Team Canada and visits to trade shows like Globe 2002, the CES site draws users to Strategis
Consumer Connection	Increased efficiency - By providing information online, internal efficiencies have increased exponentially since officers have more time to gather information and prepare documentation rather than answering phone inquiries. Expanded distribution - The website makes the information readily available to everyone in the Department. Support to other Departments and countries - CC's financial calculators are being shared with the Bank of Canada and the Public Interest Advocacy Council and its fraud quiz is being shared with the Australian government.

Case Study	Impacts on Industry Canada
ebiz.enable	Partnerships - Successful partnerships have been forged with: 1) major businesses such as AT&T Canada, Cisco Systems Canada, IBM Canada; 2) major organizations such as Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Electronic Commerce Council of Canada. Distribution of information in one of the Department's priority areas - ebiz.enable provides a vehicle/portal for posting many information products on a priority topic for the Department (i.e. electronic commerce). Limited internal use - ebiz.enable does not directly serve many clients within Industry Canada.
MEPA	Little overall impact -At this stage, the website has had little impact on Branch operations or on the policy-making process. Convenience - Key people in the Department still receive printed copies of MEPA documents as they always have. The website provides an alternative for quick and easy reference to the information. Expanded distribution - The website makes the information readily available to everyone in the Department. Consultations - MEPA is beginning to use the website for some consultations: e.g. the new Innovation policy. Increased risk of duplication - The Internet has expanded the marketplace for economic information, with more data online from organizations like Statistics Canada, economic think-tanks, major financial institutions, and private companies. This expanded information marketplace means that MEPA has to be more aware of the risk of duplication in their work and reports produced. Possible cost increases - There is a potential for higher production costs (e.g. translation, printing) if the website stimulates demand for MEPA information products. A shift from PDF files to html will increase Branch costs.
Solutions for Advanced Manufacturing	Support the IC officers - SAM is used by staff throughout the Department for various purposes such as communications and matching companies with procurement opportunities. Awareness / promotion of Strategis - Through international promotion and visits to trade shows like National Manufacturing Week in Chicago, Il., SAM draws users to Strategis. Limited use by other government departments - SAM does not directly serve many clients outside Industry Canada.

Case Study	Impacts on Industry Canada
Spectrum Management and Telecommuni- cations Technologies	Revenue - $1.6 Billion in revenue last year from a single online auctions of radio spectrum. Moving services and transactions online - Most of the information that was previously provided in print format is now provided online allowing for ease of updating and time savings in publications. Support to other Departments - Spectrum counts Health Canada, Transport Canada, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, the Canadian Radio Telecommunications Corporation, the RCMP, NAVCAN, and the Department of National Defense as client users.

Impact on Intermediaries

► *Finding - Strategis products have become an integral tool for business intermediaries*

Strategis has had an impact on the intermediary organizations interviewed in several different ways. For example, several officers at various Canada Business Service Centres commented that Strategis has helped them serve their clients better because they can find the information that they need more easily. In many cases, they simply bookmarked the sites that clients need the most and either direct them to it or print off the relevant material. A number of intermediaries commented that people have come to visit their Service Centres because they want to talk about specific things that they have seen on Strategis or know is on Strategis. Other intermediaries commentated that although they mined a number of websites for information, Strategis was more often cited to their clients, as the information was perceived to be unbiased.

All but one intermediary organization interviewed could list a number of Strategis products that they were in the habit of using. Although the number, variety, and the intensity of use of Strategis products differed significantly from organization to organization, the interviews reveled

that on the aggregate, the complete range of Strategis' products and services were used by the officers from across the country. In this light, Strategis' products have become an integral part of the way in which the intermediary organisations serve their clients.

6.   Findings - Governance and Shared Accountability

The third group of findings relate to the governance and shared accountability for Strategis. Currently, the overall responsibility for Strategis lies with the CIO. However, individual groups are responsible for the content that they deliver and maintain.

► *Finding - There is some lack of senior management interest and commitment to Strategis*

While senior executives supported the continued development of Strategis, a cohesive, single vision of how Strategis should fit into Industry Canada did not emerge from our review of documents and interviews with Industry Canada managers, staff and content providers. It was also mentioned in a significant number of interviews that the initial push and vision for Strategis came from a single senior executive who left Industry Canada in the years following the initial emergence of Strategis. These interviewees commented that commitment and support for Strategis was waning.

The suggestion was made by a number of managers that when Strategis was first implemented, executives and managers pursued their on-line strategies with vigour and enthusiasm. In part, Strategis was perceived to be a "hot issue" and it was good to be seen supporting a shining star. However, as the novelty and the impetus of on-line initiatives began to wane, so to did interest in Strategis by executives, who focussed their attention on other burgeoning initiatives.

A significant number of officers, Strategis content providers and publishing staff commented that there was little management support of a vision for an online client service strategy in their organizations. In some of the case studies, a manager with responsibility for the online product or service had not been identified. Indeed, in a number of organizations, officers working with

online products commented that senior managers did not view working with websites as a competency for professionals, instead viewing it as a junior role.

►   *Finding - Currently there is no department-wide management committee for Strategis*

In previous years, the Information Management Committee (IMC) Fund, later the Industry Canada Management Committee (ICMC), provided an opportunity to fund emerging products and initiatives under Strategis. Funding was allocated to new business cases the qualified under negotiated priorities. For example, in 2000-2001, the two priorities were:

►   projects supporting IC's Government On-line agenda, and the refurbishment of Strategis and its electronic products through the use of advanced technologies, including multimedia; and

►   infrastructure development projects required to support Government On-line and Strategis refurbishment and which build the network infrastructure to support next-generation business applications.

Last year that IMC fund was discontinued.

The Strategis Content Providers Committee is used as a vehicle for sharing information about common initiatives with officers and others working with client sites. However, this committee addresses technical rather than strategic issues.

One of the critical issues facing Strategis is the need to engage senior management of Industry Canada in the governance and ongoing management of Strategis. While the overall responsibility for Strategis lies with the CIO, individual groups are responsible for the content that they deliver and maintain. Currently, there does not exist a department-wide forum or committee at which to discuss strategic issues, priorities or overall direction for Strategis.

► *Finding - There is a lack of shared accountability for Strategis*

There were mixed answers to the question "who owns Strategis?" Content providers and groups maintaining products and services on Strategis tended to see the individual sites as responsible for their own areas. Being accountable implies taking responsibility for fulfilling client and user needs with the services provided. This requires knowledge of user needs and some action plan to fulfill those needs. Yet few site managers have any methods or data for assessing the usefulness to clients of the information or services on their site. Furthermore, some site managers do not seem to have any plans for collecting user feedback in the future.

The accountability for ensuring that the sites under Strategis adhered to Treasury Board guidelines for accessibility and Common Look and Feel was seen to rest with the CIO. The CIO is perceived to be the enforcer of these requirements as well as fulfilling a quality assurance role. In addition, the CIO is seen as the provider of technical support and services through the Shop Floor.

The Strategis Content Providers Committee meets roughly monthly. This committee is used as a vehicle for sharing information about common initiatives (e.g., Common Look and Feel, accessibility requirements, changes to the search engine, etc.) with officers and other working with client sites. However, a mechanism for making decisions about Strategis at the senior management level does not exist. For example, if a new vision were to be developed for Strategis, an existing committee at a management level is not already in place. This absence of a governing body for Strategis appears to have contributed to the lack of shared accountability for this Industry Canada-wide initiative.

► *Finding - Site planning and management is ad hoc*

Much of the site planning and management seems to be ad hoc and informal with uncertainty as to the overall objectives of some sites. Some interviewees and several case studies pointed out that there needs to be a better process for site management and content management. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

To provide a much more useful service, it was recommended by a number of interviewees and Strategis content providers that a greater degree of rigour should be applied to clearly define the site scope, content selection, inclusion criteria, information indexing and classification. One suggestion was the process for site management could be something as simple as a checklist of responsibilities and timing for site management. A small, but significant, number of interviewees and case study participants stated that standardized protocols and procedures across Strategis would facilitate decision-making about site maintenance. However, they and others were careful to caution that they would not want procedures that are too rigid as they liked having the flexibility to deal with different situations and circumstances. Another suggestion was to share best practices across Strategis (e.g., what are the characteristics of a well managed site?).

7.   Findings - Design and Delivery of Strategis

The final set of findings have been grouped under design and delivery of Strategis. These issues generated a great deal of discussion and debate, particularly among officers, publishing teams and Strategis content providers. Intermediaries and clients also contributed to this discussion. Issues addressed in the design and delivery of Strategis include defining user needs, navigation, maintenance and development of online products, the relationship with the Shop Floor and the use of Strategis MIS data.

•   *Finding - Understanding online client needs and behaviour is difficult for online products such as those on Strategis*

Many Industry Canada organizations interviewed as part of this evaluation felt that they had a limited understanding of online user needs and online user behaviour. They were unable to describe their online client service strategy. It is important to note that Industry Canada managers and officers interviewed were not saying that they do not understand the needs of their clients or sectors. Rather, they were pointing out the difficulties in gathering useful information from their online users.

In contrast, some organizations had a solid understanding of their online user profile and user needs.   These organizations typically had a well-defined group of users and provided a specific on-line service (as opposed to information). In some cases, organizations have segmented their online user groups into tiers. Several IC organizations viewed their clients in tiers (e.g., primary audience, secondary audience and peripheral users) and stated that they worked with different groups of clients through varying mechanisms. Strategis is one of several tools available to them to reach their clients.

In some instances, interviewees stated that they were working to gather more information on their online clients or users. One source of information used frequently was the Strategis MIS which provides information on accesses or visits. Client sites included as case studies talked about receiving a "shopping list" of MIS and other data, which they could choose to receive on a regular basis. However, these managers pointed out that the information that they are lacking is related to who uses their sites and for what purpose.

Industry Canada officers and content providers reported that they were finding it more difficult to gain a good understanding of the characteristics and behaviour of clients using their online products and services. Products and services provided through the Internet and Strategis are typically self-serve. That is to say, clients can access these products and services with little or no interaction with an Industry Canada officer. On one hand, this has the impact of broadening the reach of products and services and typically reducing the level of effort required from the officer in terms of direct service. On the other hand, officers reported that this lower level of interaction also "distances" them from the users of their online products and services.

Lynn Shostack, in the *Journal of Marketing*, describes a process of blueprinting the complexity and divergence in service systems.[20] In this process, she utilizes a concept called a "line of visibility" to denote the points at which a service organization interacts with its clients. 'Lowering of the bar' in terms of the line of visibility has the effect of increasing user involvement and control, while at the same time insidiously having the potential to reduce an IC officer's ability to influence the interaction of users with IC or even to get feedback on how well the department is meeting client needs. Thus the change in client-supplier relationship which may defacto take place in an almost unconscious way. For example, clients who Industry Canada

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[20] Lynn Shoshck, "Service Positioning Trough Structural Change" in Journal of Marketing, Vol 55, January 1987, pp 34-43.

officers have never met are using their information and pronouncing on their relevance and usefulness. This can effect client relationships whether the officers see it or not.

The idea of a line of visibility can be applied to the case studies in illustration. For example, as noted in the Consumer Connection case study, one of the services offered by the Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) is information on product recalls. Exhibits 21 and 22 demonstrate how users can obtain information on product recalls from the OCA and how much or little influence they have on the process. These two service blueprints also provide visual representations of the steps required to locate product recall information and provide the line of visibility for each case.

As can be noted in Exhibits 21 and 22, the level and type of customer interaction varies depending on the communication source. In Exhibit 21, officers have more direct interaction with users and can better ascertain user needs and requirements (for example by asking questions at the time of the initial call). Another benefit of this method is the ability of officers to fulfil the needs of the user by providing a direct service. In contrast, and as demonstrated in Exhibit 22, when users search Consumer Connection's website they are not required to interact with OCA officers. In addition, the OCA has no ability to control the manner in which information is obtained by the user (other than by the mere fact that it has provided that information) nor can it directly influence where the user will search for further information on the topic they are investigating.

Other defining characteristics of Exhibits 21 and 22 are the location of the line of visibility and the time required to fulfil the various steps in the process. In Exhibit 21, the user can not see nor directly influence the steps required by OCA officers to produce information on product recalls, whereas in Exhibit 22 users have direct influence over the process. The position of the line of visibility in both cases ultimately represents these degrees of influence. In terms of time required to fulfil each step, it can be estimated that it would take anywhere from a few minutes to a few

hours to provide the information over the phone whereas it may only take a few minutes over the Internet. It should be noted that time requirements are influenced by a number of factors (including officer competency, client clarity, availability of the information, accuracy of search engines, speed of the Internet connection, etc.) and are therefore unpredictable.

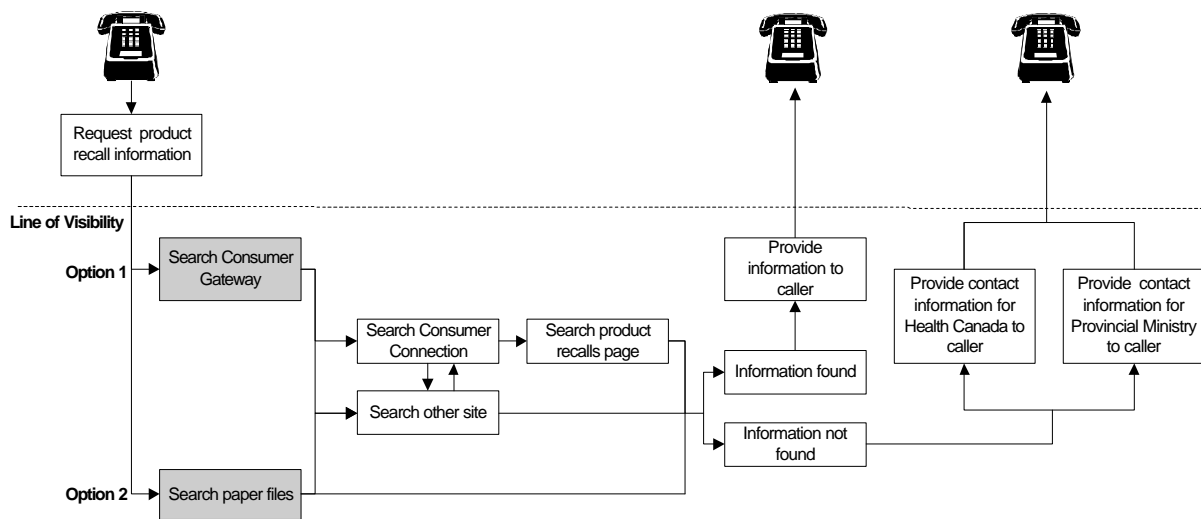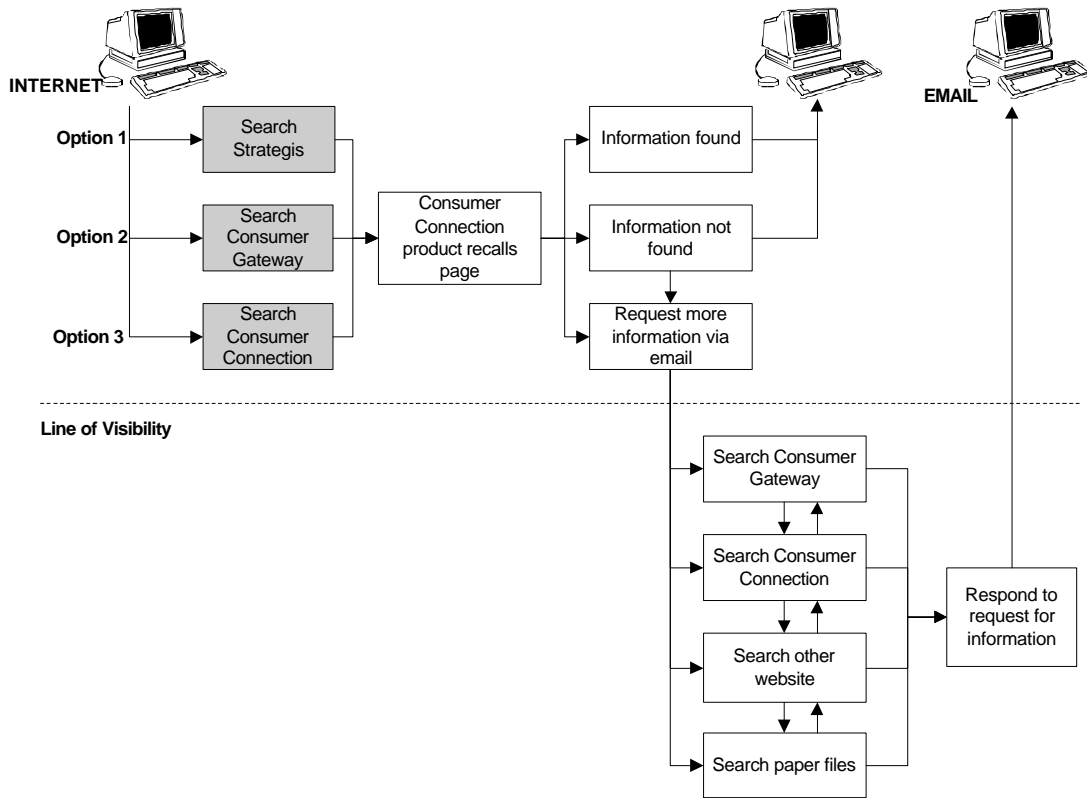**Exhibit 21 - Line of Visibility - Service without Strategis**

Exhibit 22 - Line of Visibility with Strategis

In general, site developers were struggling to obtain meaningful feedback from clients specific to their products and tools. Ideally, they would like to know who are their key online clients are and how best to communicate with these groups. Because the online client groups and services provided vary considerably across the range of Strategis products and services, this is seen by the client sites as an activity best carried out by the individual product groups and tailored to meet their specific needs and client groups.

▶ *Finding - Strategis is perceived internally to be difficult to navigate*

Difficulty navigating Strategis was identified by Industry Canada managers, officers and Strategis content providers and intermediaries as one of the biggest weaknesses of the site. The difficulty in navigating was attributed to a number of factors, primarily the sheer size and scope of Strategis and the structure of the site.

Anecdotal feedback from clients provided by Industry Canada interviewers and intermediaries is that navigation through Strategis is the biggest complaint of users. This anecdotal feedback came from calls from users, feedback from the Help Desk, association meetings, conferences and Info Fairs. Many of the officers and managers interviewed spoke of being called by industry members with questions about finding something within Strategis.

Most officers identified the need to structure Strategis from a client-centred perspective as paramount. The belief was that Strategis continues to reflect the organizational structure of Industry Canada and is not designed from the user's perspective. A comment made numerous times was that a user must have a good understanding of government to be able to effectively navigate Strategis.

Almost all of the Industry Canada interviewees commented that they personally found Strategis difficult to navigate and that they often found it difficult to find a document or tool that they knew was on Strategis. The Strategis search engine is seen as weak and many interviewees were more likely to use an external search engine (specifically Google) to find products on Strategis.

Strategis content providers criticized both the structure of the site and the nature of content. For example, respondents felt that the site is too big and too complicated. They explained that the information provided includes both departmental information and business tools without distinction, which is believed to confuse users. Multiple respondents also referred to the site as a maze, serving to hide rather than provide information. In addition, the navigability of the site through the massive amounts of information was questioned. It was also pointed out that Strategis has duplicate information, in addition to duplicate of pathways to the information. This duplication is seen to add layers of confusion to users.

Intermediaries cited navigation as an area where Strategis could improve, with several types of suggestions being offered. One group of suggestions was made with respect to having tutorials or guidance on the site to help users learn how to find information, and to teach them basic research skills. Another group of suggestions addressed the lay-out of the site in general, with officers recommencing dividing the site into smaller categories, a handful of options at the beginning that give users more direction, for example, "Strategis for Small Businesses" or "Strategis for New Users."

▸   *Finding - Frequent users are more likely than infrequent users to be able to find what*
         they are searching for on Strategis

In the domain of websites and other software interfaces, learnability is defined as the ability of a
user to competently operate a system or navigate a website within a certain period of time. It also
refers to the ability of infrequent users to relearn the system or website after a period of
inactivity.[21] In the Strategis Client Survey, over one-quarter of users (27%) reported that they
were always able to find what they were looking for. Over half of the respondents (61%) were
sometimes able to find what they were searching for on Strategis. However, one in ten
respondents (12%) said that they infrequently or never found what they were searching for.
Analysis of the data shows that more frequent users are more likely to report that they were able
to find what they were looking for on Strategis. For example, almost half (43%) of daily users
were always able to find what they were looking for. In comparison, one in five (20%) of users
who visited Strategis once a month or less reported that they rarely or never found what they
were looking for. The results of this question are shown in Exhibit 23.

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[21] Jeffery Rubin, *Handbook of Usability Testing*. Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1994, page 19.

Exhibit 23 - Have You Been Able to Find What You Were Searching For?
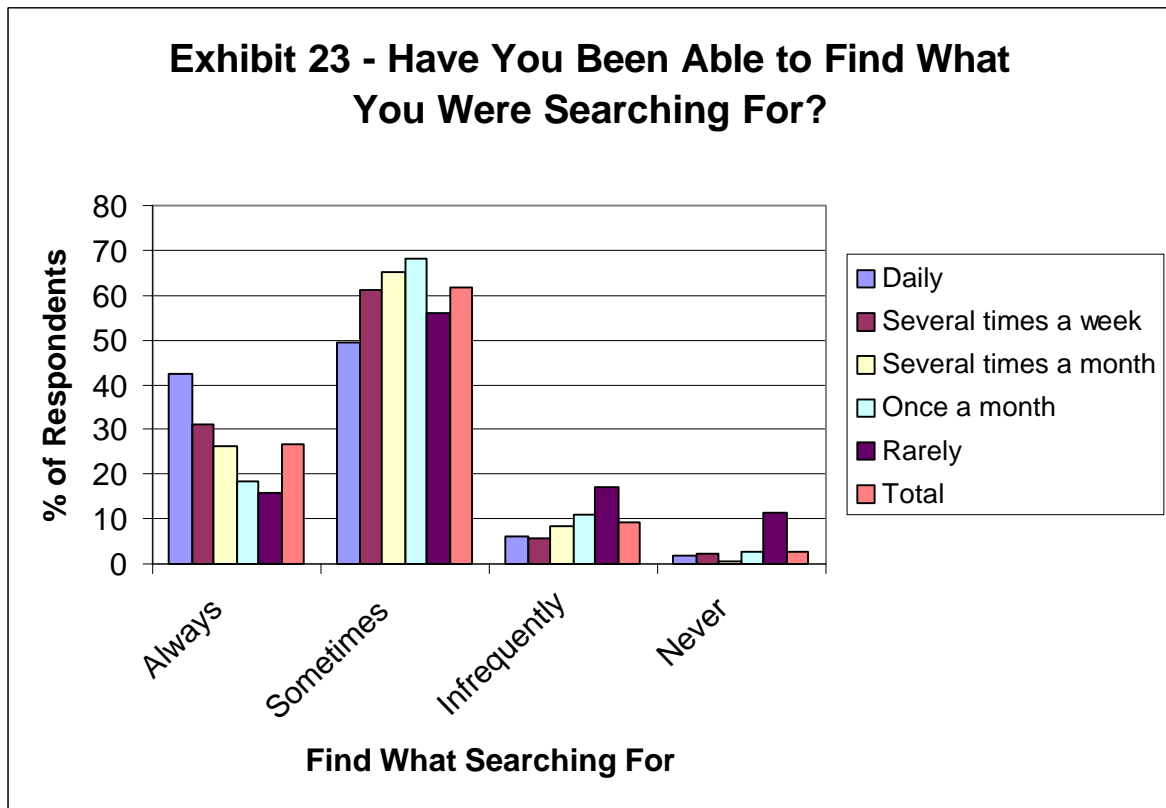
Navigation was addressed in the comparison of international sites. The UKonline for business website provides an example of navigation and explanation. The site map lists the contents and provides and explanation of the site features. The following screen shot is provided in Exhibit 24 for illustrative purposes.

Exhibit 24 - UKonline for Business
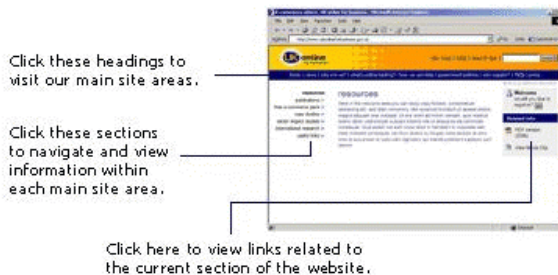
▸   *Finding - Maintaining the site is a critical yet often overlooked task*

Maintaining a site that contains relevant, up-to-date information was seen by Industry Canada

interviewees as a critical function of supporting Strategis. However, this is a challenge and

interviewees and respondents to the Strategis content providers questionnaire all agreed that there

is out-of-date information available on Strategis.

For the most part, officers, publishing teams and Strategis content providers felt that updating

information products was a time and resource intensive task and a constant challenge. All

respondents felt that keeping information up-to-date and maintaining information that is still

relevant were important to providing credible, reliable online services.

Challenges associated with maintaining an "evergreen" site included:

▸   lack of resources - this was a commonly cited as a barrier to updating a site. For example,
         documents may not have been updated despite the availability of information.

▸   no long-term commitment to ensure the information is updated -this is closely related to
         the view that resources are directed toward new sites, at the expense of maintaining
         existing sites.

▸   changing Government or Departmental priorities - in these cases, there is no intention of
         updating a document or information holding.

▸   responsibility for updating the site assigned to junior resources - responsibility for
         reviewing expired documents is sometimes assigned to junior officers or co-op students.
         Interviewees pointed out that those with the responsibility of reviewing the inventory of
         expired documents may not have the content expertise to make a judgement on the
         document.

▸   employee turnover - the original owner of the document or website is no longer with the
         organization. In these cases, the expiry date of the 'orphan' website continues to be

updated, in the absence of someone to make a decision on whether or not to remove the website or document.

▸   using volume as a measure of performance - some branches measure their "contribution" by volume and rarely retire information.

▸   no uniform information management policy - there is a lack of a uniform policy to coordinate the various information offerings from different branches of the department and to provide guidance around how to manage content and when to remove documents or archive them.

▸   sites where users provide the information - developing rules and procedures for maintaining sites where users self-register and provide their own updates (e.g. CCCD) present a special challenge. Update requirements or prompts to registrants that are too frequent risk alienating the users. On the other hand, the risk of updates that are too infrequent is that the information base can become out of date and less useful.

The expiry dates for documents maintained on the Lotus Notes Publishing System is used as a proxy measure for the currency of documents on Strategis. However, in some cases, the expiry date is changed without a review of the continuing relevance of the document. In several organizations interviewed, a macro is run periodically to extend the expiry date by a full year. In other organizations, the document expiry date is updated by hand without reviewing the relevance of the document.

One concern expressed was that if new documents and products are added to Strategis and relatively few are removed, the holdings will continue to grow. Without a common vision for Strategis, it was seen as inevitable that the inventory would increase and navigation for users would become increasingly difficult.

One key challenge of maintaining online products cited by many officers was the focus on the development of new products as opposed to the maintenance of existing products. The development of new products was seen as the exciting work that attracts funding while the

requirement for maintenance is often ignored in the initial planning. In addition, some interviewees felt that the development of new products diverts resources from maintaining existing products that are still relevant, albeit in need of some updating.

A number of interviewees and Strategis content providers commented that one-year funding cycles don't allow new products to be built with long term sustainability plans. For example, one respondent to the Strategis Content Providers Questionnaire commented that the allocation of resources was an issue, specifically, "a culture of constantly creating new modules on Strategis" was given preference over "resources devoted to maintaining existing products."

▸   *Finding - Views are mixed on the support provided by the Shop Floor*

Throughout the interviews with Industry Canada managers and officers and the survey of Strategis content providers, different experiences and levels of satisfaction with the Shop Floor were described. While some groups reported positive experiences when working with the Shop Floor to develop and launch products, others reported a far different experience. The most frequent complaints about the shop floor included:

▸   the long technical development cycles of the shop floor are a major obstacle to the development of new products. As one officer commented, going the internal development route is such an "obstacle riddled painful process, people hesitate to develop new products at all";

▸   requests for changes or updates for sites are submitted to the shop floor but take many weeks or months to be implemented;

▸   there appears to be little communication between groups or individuals on the Shop Floor;

▸   high turnover of Shop Floor employees; and

▶   rules from the Shop Floor that prevent publishing staff and others from downloading useful publishing tools such as free HTML editors that alert users to insert alt tags, script editors and W3C.org developed link checkers.

In addition, a number of interviewees responsible for larger, more complex sites (e.g., involving transactions or large databases of information) noted that they would like to see the Shop Floor provide information architectural services.

Many Industry Canada interviewees (content providers and officers) and case study participants noted that the Shop Floor should be more proactive in its relationship with in-house clients. They commented that the Shop Floor should work with in-house clients to identify and promote a set of core services.

Many of the case study groups had specific ideas and plans for their sites, but had been unable to receive the resources or technical support to implement these changes. Other Industry Canada interviewees commented that due to the perceived disorganization of the Shop Floor, they were not confident that ideas or concerns of client sites were shared more broadly within the Shop Floor.

It was clear in talking to Industry Canada clients of the Shop Floor and with representatives of the CIO, that there is a lack of familiarity on the part of the Shop Floor clients of the roles, responsibilities, and time requirements for the development of new products or updating of existing products. This leads to frustrations and to unmet expectations. There is currently a move within the Shop Floor to compile a listing of checklists. A number of Strategis content providers and document publishing staff commented that they would like the CIO / Shop Floor to provide one central Intranet site where all relevant policies, directives, procedures etc. as well as technical information, contact names etc. are provided (and kept up to date) for online product management.

8.   International Comparisons

The previous chapters have provided a discussion of the findings for the formative evaluation. The conclusions and recommendations for this study will be based on these findings. Before introducing the conclusions and recommendations, this chapter provides a discussion of the key best practices emerging from the comparison of international sites.

A number of other countries maintain websites, portals and other online services for their citizens. An international comparison of the sites of three somewhat similar organizations was conducted as part of the formative evaluation. While the comparison of a small number of similar organizations alone cannot be considered representative, they are valuable to describe trends and highlight alternatives. Also, by viewing closely the work of peer organizations, it is possible to gain a better understanding of other options. It was therefore important to choose comparison sites that share enough similarities with Strategis.gc.ca to allow for ideas to be borrowed, and to ensure that the chosen sites demonstrate alternatives.   The international comparisons sought to gain a better understanding of other nations' approaches to providing business information and services through the Internet.

It is interesting to note that, during the course of the formative evaluation, each of the comparison sites underwent dramatic changes during the course of the evaluation. The online presence of the sponsoring departments and ministries was significantly altered. Consequently, the comparison was then expanded to include before and after aspects of the three sites.

8.1   Description of Comparison Sites

To explore best practices and determine possible models for future changes, three international sites with a business-information focus similar to Strategis.gc.ca were chosen for comparison. Sites were selected from three other Anglo-American countries: Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Through discussions with steering committee members, sample sites were chosen from the United States (http://www.firstgov.gov/) and the United Kingdom (http://www.UKonlineforbusiness.gov.uk/). It was later decided to add an Australian site (http://Fed.gov.au/) given the similarities in population size and government structure.

Australia - Fed.gov.au

Fed.gov.au is the Commonwealth Government Entry point established in 1998. It's mission is to provide access to Commonwealth Government information, and it does so through a variety of discovery paths, including search, subject trees and indexes. Last year Fed.gov.au received 13 million hits from 1.6 million discreet users. Fed.gov.au differs from Strategis in that it does not store information, rather it directs users to information created and maintained by individual Commonwealth agencies and organisations. Fed.gov.au also 'harvests' and makes available AGLS metadata records from all Australian Commonwealth Agencies, under the Government Electronic Resource Network (GOVERNET) initiative of the Ministerial Online Council.

Recently, responsibility for government information (including Fed.gov.au) was transferred from the Department of Finance and Administration to the Communications, Information Technology and the Arts portfolio. The Governance Policy and objectives of the Fed.gov.au web site remain unchanged, however the site will continue to respond to user need/demand through development release cycles with releases consolidating requirements from stakeholders, delivering an integrated release strategy.

Recent changes to the Fed.gov.au website (September 2001) were made as a result of two specific developments. Firstly, the introduction of a more refined search tool and results page through the harvesting of AGLS Metadata across the Commonwealth; and, secondly, the re-organisation of the browse content in direct response to usability testing and collaborative design with real users. No content was removed in this development. It should be noted that Fed.gov.au does not hold information on its site, but as a portal, directly links users to a comprehensive assembly of Australian Commonwealth Government resources held and maintained externally to the site.

Recent changes to the site have made some significant changes to the management of the site. Harvesting of updated information on external Commonwealth Government department and agency websites has decreased from a 3 month refresh harvesting process to a one week process, therefore ensuring more up to date information for users.   Monitoring issues for inclusion in the 'news and issues' panel, has increased the Fed.gov.au teams awareness of other Commonwealth Government initiatives and assists in a strong awareness and knowledge base for the preparation of responses to topical feedback.

United States - FirstGov.gov

FirstGov.gov is a public-private partnership, led by a cross-agency board and administered by the Office of FirstGov.gov in the General Services Administration's Office of Government-wide Policy. During the coarse of this evaluation, the format of FirstGov.gov changed. The portal features have been revised fully and are more user friendly. Accessibility has greatly improved.

The Office of FirstGov.gov was created to be the catalytic force behind transforming traditional government into the age of customer-centric e-government through intergovernmental collaboration at the Federal and state levels. It also works to develop cross-agency Internet portals by convening and managing several inter-agency working groups.

The Office of FirstGov.gov continues to address issues related to security, privacy, new technologies, online search capabilities, taxonomies, information processing and sharing, marketing, and customer relationship management, as they relate to the Federal Government's presence on the Internet.

United Kingdom - UKonlineforbusiness.co.uk

In February 2002, UKonlineforbusiness.co.uk launched an updated version of their site, hosted on a new platform. There were a number of technical reasons for this change, but essentially the site was changed to improve scalability and robustness. The haphazard development of the previous site meant that the first wave of migration from one platform to another brought out the inconsistencies in content and presentation across the earlier platform. The new platform avoids many of those issues through its database structure and exploitation of template features. This accommodated the belief that the look and feel needed freshening up as it was getting too cluttered and a bit out of date. The new platform is better suited to the expanding needs, particularly on data management.

A number of weaknesses were overcome with the changes:

▸ lack of control over the corporate branding;

▸ lack of data-capture about customers;

▸ lack of identity between the owners of the content and the need to maintain it;

▸ lack of scalability;

▸ robustness of the platform was in doubt; and

▸ contractor limitations for the earlier site in terms of continuity.

The new site incorporates an extensive partners' extranet and a very active intranet for advisers and others. When launched, it included a number of technical improvements to their experience of the secure area including several new databases for their reference when advising small companies in the UK about their ICT adoption. Early indications from these internal users, (the network of 300+ advisers around the UK whose extranet is hosted on the site), is entirely positive. For the external user, a wide range of improved services to the customer-base is anticipated, but until the core website /database is fully commissioned, these will not be fully realised.

Passwords are now used, providing different levels of services to registered members vs. non-members. The registration allows UKonlineforbusiness to track user profiles and while users receive a tailored experience of data / downloads / graphics etc. based on their interests.

8.2   Summary of Best Practices

Exhibit 25 provides highlights of the best practices emerging from the international comparison. In particular, best practices related to some of the challenges facing Strategis are highlighted.

Exhibit 25 - Highlights of the International Comparison

Dimension	Site	Description of Best Practice
Accessibility	Fed.gov.au	The four compared sites are all implementing many of the W3C recommendations. Fed.gov.au lists its accessibility standards and goals, the means by which accessibility has been sought, the decisions made and invites users to comment directly on the accessibility of the site. Site managers are thereby able to communicate with their users and manage for on going improvements to access.
Appropriateness of information and organization	FirstGov.gov	Before changes, FirstGov.gov was formatted in a single list format, with one site map covering a number of printed pages. After changes were made, the three tabbed areas were introduced, as well as a colour-coded site map that is organised by topic and then alphabetically. Information is current, with most contributing pages applying dates to articles and front pages. Like Strategis.gc.ca, older sites with information that will not be updated are identified as a permanent electronic archive of information to the user.
Assistance to domestic users and contact information	UKonlinefor business.co.uk	The contact information is a slightly different feature on this site. Like Strategis.gc.ca, the help page lists a call centre number users can call with questions or for clarification. Upon signing in, the Contact Us button changes to direct users to an individual rather than to a generic help desk. This reduces the chance that users seeking additional information will be bounced from helpdesk to content provider to another content provider. Featured throughout the site are links to personal advisers and both national and regional contact information. The site also includes an improved search engine, icon map and jargon glossary.
Assistance to international users and contact information	FirstGov.gov	There are areas dedicated specifically to the benefit of the international user, including links to customs and immigration information, and assistance in finding US business partners. This site references a number of international sources side by side with US sources. There is a front-page link to International government sites, including some US government appraisals of foreign governments. This section leads to information about other countries, U.S. foreign policy and assistance, and more.
Breadth of information	FirstGov.gov	One can search more than 51 million web pages from federal and state governments, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. FirstGov.gov has the most comprehensive search of government business information anywhere on the Internet. Operating as a true portal, FirstGov.gov has the largest selection of sites available for business use, and includes a large number of international sites.

Dimension	Site	Description of Best Practice
Business financing, customs and trade	Strategis.gc.ca	The front page of the site has a Financing link, which was the easiest to find and the most direct route to information on government financing. Strategis.gc.ca also provides quick links to ExportSource, information for trade-related governmental departments and agencies. There is also information on sound business practices in the same page, providing additional information.
Customization features	UKonlinefor business.co.uk	This is the only site that offers true customization. UKonlineforbusiness.co.uk site has a log in feature, where users may register free to access the member's portion of the site. Included in the basic registration is a package of e-business news updates as well as access to a broad range of studies, tools, and event listings and local information. Members are provided with a more detailed site map, interactive tools and resources that are not available to non-members.
Inclusion requirements	FirstGov.gov	This site has the most comprehensive list of inclusions and exclusions to the site Additionally, when leaving a FirstGov.gov site a message is presented on a buffer page, so that users can recognize the limits of the site.
Industry sectors and markets highlighted	FirstGov.gov	FirstGov.gov provides links to commercial guides for exporters, broken down by country, providing a full notebook on each nation from the US Commercial Service export.gov site and market indicators for domestic businesses, including labour statistics. There are links to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which contains national, international and regional economic figures and the Small Business Administration, which provides market and industry information specific to small business needs.
Information Technology / Information Services focus	UKonlinefor business.co.uk	This site has been designed to provide an extensive resource for UK companies to find out how information and communication technologies can improve competitiveness. The vision of the site is to make the UK the best place in the world for e-commerce.

Dimension	Site	Description of Best Practice
Response time to inquires	Strategis.gc.ca	This is the only site to provide an indication of the expected response time. The three ghost client requests all received responses. a. When asking for information provided on the WebPages and not found, the ghost client was provided a detailed description of what search terms to use when looking for information, a brief description of the resulting search and the links to the information. This emailed response was returned within 10 minutes of the email being opened. b. When asking for information not available on web page, but available through another government site the ghost client was emailed within 24 hours. The reply indicated that the ghost client had contacted the wrong service, and referred the client to an appropriate service. c. When asking for information not available through a government source, but rather through the private sector the ghost client was directed to the Canada Business Service Centres (CBSCs) within 24 hours of the initial email.
Services to clients	FirstGov.gov	In its portal function, the site offers Electronic World Marketplace for Businesses. The electronic marketplace connects suppliers of U.S. products and services together with international companies outside the United States, giving both groups the services they need to conduct business worldwide. There are also a large number of interactive tools available throughout the FirstGov.gov linked sites. Some highlighted services include the US postal service, where it is possible to buy stamps, calculate business postal rates, and pay bills online. Much of the emphasis of this section of FirstGov.gov is to allow companies to do business with the government online.

9.   Conclusions and Recommendations

A formative evaluation examines both the design and delivery of an initiative and provides
considerations for future directions. A number of models and concepts are discussed in this report
as part of the introduction and the findings. These models address concepts such as resources
versus reach, diversity and complexity, line of visibility and the continuum of involvement. The
intention is to use the results of this evaluation to inform the discussion on future directions for
Strategis and these models provide a framework for this discussion

This final section of the Strategis Formative Evaluation Report provides a discussion of the key
conclusions and recommendations based on the research. High level conclusions and
recommendations that are likely to be of most interest to senior executives, senior managers and
the CIO have been grouped under the title *Strategic*. Those conclusions and recommendations
that will be relevant to individual product managers and the CIO are grouped under *Operational*.

9.1   Conclusions

Strategic Conclusions

▸   *Conclusion - Strategis continues to be a highly visited, relevant site*

Although the growth in traffic to Strategis stabilized this year for the first time since its launch,
Strategis continues to receive, on average, 30,000 visits a day and approximately 9 million visits a
year. Over one third of respondents (31%) reported that they visited Strategis daily or several
times a week. In addition, almost one quarter (23%) of Strategis clients responding to the survey
reported that they were very satisfied with the information that they had found on Strategis.

Strategis is also seen to be an important business tool among users. Three out of ten clients surveyed (29%) strongly agreed that Strategis was an important business tool.

► *Conclusion - Strategis has a high "trust-mark"*

Information originating from the Government of Canada is highly regarded by consumers and businesses as being accurate and impartial. Of all the Strategis characteristics that clients were asked to rate in the Survey, the trustworthiness of the site was rated the most highly. This is a core added value that Strategis provides. Because content and not structure is the benefit to users, the trustworthiness of the information is of paramount importance. A key component of this trust is the accuracy and currentness of the information. Therefore, it is critical that Strategis address the issue of updating and archiving information on the site. Currently, there is has been little consistent consideration to removing documents from Strategis or implementing a document management strategy. As a result, the site risks becoming "bloated" with out of date products.

► *Conclusion - Strategis no longer offers a unique value proposition to clients*

When Strategis was first launched, there were few, if any, similar services provided by the private sector or other government sites. This no longer true. For example, company directories and industry specific information are available on private sites. There is also an internal perception that Industry Canada itself has a number of competing or similar web products (e.g., Strategis, Business Gateway, Canada Business Service Centres and the Industry Canada corporate website). Information and services on Strategis that are unique include department-specific initiatives as well the delivery of mandated and legislated services.

▸   *Conclusion - A common, unifying vision for Strategis is needed*

Many Industry Canada interviewees felt that Strategis lacked a common, unifying vision to provide overall direction to the site. This lack of vision or focus was believed to have contributed to the decrease in the emphasis placed on Strategis as an innovative product for the department and the resulting lowered management attention. In addition, in the absence of any concerted vision, individual sites have taken on the responsibility for their own marketing and planning. This has contributed to the continued, yet varied, growth of the site without a strategic focus.

There were divergent views about Strategis within Industry Canada. For example, there was some disagreement over the continuing relevance of Strategis. One group felt strongly that Strategis remains a valuable, well-used tool that serves an ever-growing number of Canadians. The second predominant view was that Strategis is a mature product that has stagnated and no longer meets the needs of users and Industry Canada. In addition, there were differing opinions between those who perceived the value of a common department-wide website or Internet presence and those who valued the independence of the individual products.

▸   *Conclusion - The breadth and scope of information and services offered on Strategis is unique*

The amount of content provided on Strategis is unique. According to Industry Canada interviewees and proxy organizations, much of the value of Strategis stems the scope of the information and services provided. However, it is the content (e.g., breadth and scope of the information) that is seen as the strength rather than the packaging (e.g., that it is all housed on one site with a common look and feel).

▸   *Conclusion - There is a need to engage senior management in the department around the governance and maintenance of Strategis*

One of the critical issues facing Strategis is the need to engage senior management of Industry Canada in the governance and ongoing management of Strategis. While the overall responsibility for Strategis lies with the CIO, individual groups are responsible for the content that they deliver and maintain. Currently, there does not exist a department-wide forum or committee at which to discuss strategic issues or overall direction for Strategis. The Strategis Content Providers Committee is used as a vehicle for sharing information about common initiatives with officers and others working with client sites. However, this committee addresses technical rather than strategic issues. If a new vision were to be developed for Strategis, an existing committee at a management level is not already in place. This absence of a governing body for Strategis appears to have contributed to the lack of shared accountability for this Industry Canada-wide initiative.

A significant number of officers, Strategis content providers and publishing staff commented that there was little management support of a vision for an online client service strategy in their organizations. Indeed, in a number of organizations, officers working with online products commented that senior managers did not view working with websites as a competency for professionals, instead viewing it as a junior role.

Operational Conclusions

► *Conclusion - Difficulty navigating the site poses a barrier to new and infrequent users and limits their ability to access information and services*

Difficulty navigating Strategis was identified by Industry Canada managers, officers and Strategis content providers and intermediaries as one of the biggest weaknesses of the site. The difficulty in navigating was attributed to a number of factors, primarily the sheer size and scope of Strategis and the structure of the site. One in ten respondents to the Client Survey (12%) said that they infrequently or never found what they were searching for. However, analysis of the data shows that less frequent users are more likely to report that they were unable to find what they were looking for on Strategis. One in five (20%) of users who visited Strategis once a month or less reported that they rarely or never found what they were looking for.

► *Conclusion - The information and services on Strategis has had an impact on clients*

Over one quarter of respondents (26%) reported that Strategis had definitely had a positive impact on their business. In addition, another two-fifths (39%) stated that Strategis had had a somewhat positive impact on their business. The most common impact was time savings. Of the total number of clients who answered the question on impacts 41% reported that Strategis had saved them time.

In some respects, the nature of Strategis impacts appears to correspond to the maturity of the internet services marketplace. As of 2002, it appears that the biggest impacts occur when Strategis saves time in the processing of (somewhat complex) transactions. As time goes on, it may be expected that Strategis and internet services will show greater impacts in terms of serving needs with greater *richness* of information and to accommodate higher *diversity* (see Section 2.3

of this report). Such future impacts will, of course, also depend in Industry Canada's management of these services.

▸   *Conclusion - Shop Floor is not currently meeting the needs of all internal clients*

Confusion over the role of the Shop Floor and requirements for developing and launching a new product is causing a great deal of friction and frustration among internal clients. The Shop Floor is not seen as a client-service oriented organization and is seen by many to be a barrier.   One suggestion made by numerous interviewees was that the Shop Floor should become a service organization that tries to facilitate the work of the content providers rather than be a hindrance as they are currently perceived to be. Rather, it was suggested that they should adopt the role of facilitator rather than "police." Individual staff are well regarded, but internal clients see the structure and process of the Shop Floor as significant barriers to client service.

9.2   Recommendations

Strategic Recommendations

▸   *Recommendation - Review the future vision and form for Strategis*

There is a need to develop an updated guiding vision for Strategis. It is clear that this is an opportune time to pose some key questions about Strategis and its role within the Department. Suggested questions include:

▸   What does Industry Canada wish to achieve with its online presence? What role should
           Strategis play?

►   What is the value proposition for Strategis? (i.e., What unique value does it seek to continue to deliver, build-on or develop with key client communities? What should be the relationship between Strategis and other Industry Canada websites such as Business Gateway, CBSC.org, and the corporate website?)

►   What is Strategis' role in promoting the use of new technologies?

►   How does Strategis help Industry Canada implement its legislative mandate and achieve the Strategic Objectives? What role should Strategis play in supporting the Portfolio?

►   What is the measure of success for Strategis beyond visits?

A number of conceptual models are discussed in this report. The intention is to use the results of this evaluation to inform the discussion on future directions for Strategis and these models provide a framework for this discussion. These models address concepts such as resources versus reach, diversity and complexity, line of visibility and the continuum of involvement.

A significant proportion of Industry Canada participants questioned the future of Strategis as one site. One suggestion was to divide Strategis into a number of smaller "more manageable sites" or clusters with Strategis playing a role as a high-concept guide and pointing to more in-depth sites. Another suggestion that was made was to position Strategis as a single door or portal to Industry Canada services. Strategis, in this suggestion, should be a portal and allow the content sites to address the needs of specific client groups.

►   *Recommendation - Reconvene a senior management committee with responsibility for overseeing Strategis*

This committee would be responsible for providing overall governance to Strategis and would provide a mechanism for making decisions about Strategis at the senior management level. This committee would be tasked with the development of a new vision and directions for Strategis as well as developing clearer accountability around site management.

Operational Recommendations

▸   *Recommendation - Strategis as a whole must work to ensure a client-centred focus*

The uneven client focus across Strategis was a theme that emerged strongly from the fieldwork. This issue is closely related to the development of a new vision for Strategis. Indeed, the need for a strong focus on the client may be addressed by a new vision that includes a client-centred philosophy.

Groups developing tools, information or other products for Strategis should be able to identify the primary audience for their site (e.g., For whom are we developing this product? What need(s) will it meet? What change(s) would we like to effect as a result of the tool/information that we are developing?). In many cases, there are secondary audiences for the product as well as peripheral users.

In addition, Strategis continues to be difficult to navigate for new and infrequent users. Although there has been some usability testing of the site conducted in the past and changes made, additional work is required to structure Strategis following client centred principles.

Recommendation - Review the role of the Shop Floor

In order to better meet the needs of internal clients, the Shop Floor should:

▸   review the needs of internal clients;
▸   assess the role that the shop floor should play to best meet these needs;
▸   revisit the client relationship (e.g., proactive as opposed to reactive);
▸   analyze the required skills and training required for staff; and

▸   promote the exchange of best practices among products and services.

In addition, the Shop Floor should communicate the menu of services available to internal clients. This review of the role of the Shop Floor would be dependent on decisions made with respect to the vision and future form of Strategis.

▸   *Recommendation - Develop site management protocol or tools*

Strategis should develop site management protocol or tools. To provide a much more useful service, it was recommended by a number of interviewees and Strategis content providers that a greater degree of rigour should be applied to clearly defining the site scope, content selection, inclusion criteria, information indexing and classification. Common site management protocol or tools could be developed.   One suggestion made a number of times was for a simple checklist of responsibilities and timing for site management. Another suggestion was to share best practices across Strategis (e.g., what are the characteristics of a well managed site?).

In summary, the vision for Strategis will set the context for governance and client orientation. Design and delivery issues will then be informed or affected by decision made around the vision and governance. The four levels of issues, conclusions and recommendations are inextricably linked.

Formative Evaluation of Strategis

Appendix A

Evaluation Issue By Report Section

Submitted to:

Industry Canada

Submitted by:

Performance Management Network

May 2002

Appendix A - Evaluation Issue By Report Section

Evaluation Issue	Findings Section			
	Vision	*Impact*	*Governance*	*Design & Delivery*
Issue 1- Relevance - Is Strategis meeting the needs of the relevant businesses, consumers, and other users in providing them with a source of secure, affordable, accessible, user-friendly, credible, well-packaged, unique information products and services, in order to promote competitiveness and efficiency?				
1.1 Is Strategis appropriately meeting the needs of its full spectrum of users, including businesses, consumers, and the knowledge community?		✓		✓
1.2 To what extent do the individual providers of information and services to *Strategis* who are users internal to government satisfied that Strategis is meeting their internal information needs for timely access to a broad range of information?		✓		✓
1.3 How relevant are the activities carried out by the individual contributors of information and services in meeting the needs of individuals and groups of users along the full spectrum of information products and services offered by Strategis?		✓		✓
1.4 What is the nature and extent of cooperation and consistency between the groups collaborating and contributing to Strategis?	✓		✓	
1.5 Is the guidance, services, and information provided by Strategis relevant to the promotion of competitiveness and efficiency amongst users?		✓		
Issue 2 - Objectives Achievement - To what extent is Strategis achieving its intended objectives?				
2.1 Is Strategis extending itself beyond its original vision with the breadth and reach of information products and services that it is providing?	✓	✓		
2.2 Has Strategis established IC and its Strategis co-deliverers as providing credible information and useful, unique services to its users?		✓		

Evaluation Issue		Findings Section			
		Vision	*Impact*	*Governance*	*Design & Delivery*
2.3	Are users gaining awareness of full range of products and services being offered, and are they using this information to alter their behaviour for the better?		✓		✓
2.4	Are users demonstrating an improved ability to manipulate and utilize the information and services found on Strategis?		✓		✓
2.5	Has Strategis affected the competitiveness or the use of information by businesses and other users?		✓		
Issue 3 - Cost Effectiveness/ Alternatives - Is Strategis well designed and implemented , or are there significant modifications which need to be made to increase its efficiency and effectiveness ?					
3.1	What changes can be made to improve Strategis' performance and likelihood or level of success?	✓		✓	✓
3.2	Is adequate progress being made in clarifying and gaining acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of the various groups of users?			✓	
3.3	Are the human, technological, system and financial resources used to deliver Strategis effectively being used to deliver the initiative and to achieve its objectives? (Are there major resource gaps or redundancies?)			✓	✓