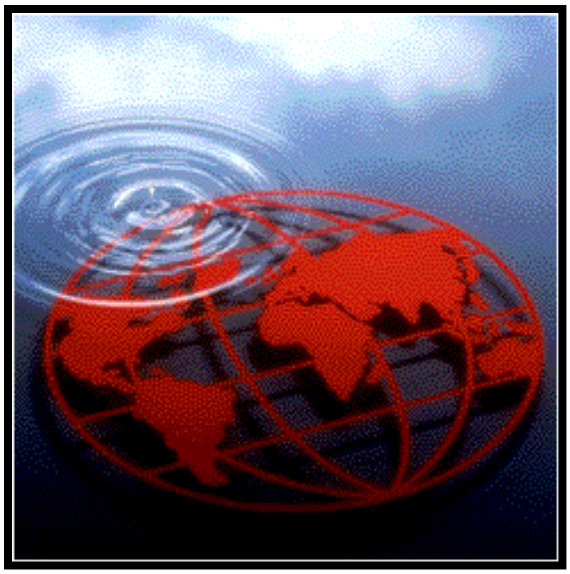
REDESIGNING THE CORPORATE WEBSITE

Results of External Focus Group Testing



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Research and Evaluation

HEALTH UNIT WEB SITE FOCUS TESTING

FINAL REPORT

MARCH, 2003

Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Methodology 2

Respondent Profile 2

Results 4
- Most Frequently Cited Uses of the Internet 4
- Most Frequently Cited Local Web Sites 6
- Most Frequently Cited Global Web Sites 7
- Most Frequently Cited Search Engines 9
- Perceptions of Existing Web Sites (Ideal) 9
- Health Unit Web Site Perceptions/Comparison to the Ideal 13
- Navigation – Revisited 22
- What Attracts Repeat Visits – Existing (Ideal) vs. Health Unit Web Site 22
- E-Newsletter Subscription 24
- Personal Information Disclosure 25
- Privacy Policy 26
- Web Site Promotion Preferences 27
- Health Unit Web Site URL Preferences 28
- The Last Word 29

Conclusions/Recommendations 30
- Broad Conclusions/Recommendations 30
- Specific, Strongly Recommended Revisions 33
- Specific, Suggested Revisions 34

Appendix A – Moderator's Guide 35

Appendix B – Pre-discussion Exercise 38

Introduction

During 2002, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit web site was significantly re-designed. In creating this new and improved web site, internal discussions were conducted throughout the spring and summer. Once those discussions concluded, the suggestions were incorporated into a prototype that was to be focus tested with the end users – the residents of Windsor-Essex County. In November, 2002, three focus groups were conducted with residents of Windsor-Essex County to understand their perceptions of the Health Unit web site and how it compares to the ideal web site with respect to content and form. Additional issues such as web site/search engine preferences, privacy, e-newsletters, URLS, and web site promotion were also examined. Respondents' perceptions of these issues, which emerged from these focus groups, are the subject of this report.

Methodology

Spirou and Associates were approached to recruit the participants for the three focus groups. Respondents were given $50.00 for their participation. Each group consisted of eight individuals. The groups were held in the evening at the Windsor Public Library (central location) in Windsor from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

The following results are based on the short questionnaire that each respondent was asked to complete prior to the focus group discussion. The guide of the focus group discussion and the short questionnaire is provided in Appendices A and B. After completing the questionnaire, focus group participants were informed of the plan of the discussion, and were asked to complete a consent form. Respondents were then led to the computer lab in the library and were asked to write down their thoughts and opinions of the Health Unit web site as they went through it. Respondents were informed that not all links were filled. After 15-20 minutes, respondents were led back to the meeting room for discussion.

Respondent Profile

For these three groups, residents of Windsor-Essex County over the age of 18 were solicited. Participants were excluded if they had participated in a focus group in the last six months, and if they worked for the Health Unit, the media, or an

advertising/market research firm. Additionally, participants had to have used the Internet at least once a month. Other criteria included the following as each group was to have:

- a 50/50 split on the dimension of gender,
- 60/40 split with residence (Windsor vs. rest of County)
- A mix of occupations, education levels, and level of Internet user (light, medium, and heavy)
- A mix of ages (18-74)

Table 1 below summarizes the various characteristics of the individuals who attended the focus groups. There were eight respondents for each group, with a total of twenty-four respondents.

Table 1: Respondent Profile (n=24)

Demographic	Categories	Number	Percentage
Gender	**Male**	11	46%
	Female	13	54%
Age	**18-24**	1	4%
	25-44	9	38%
	45-54	6	25%
	55-64	7	29%
	65+	1	4%
Residence	**Windsor**	15	63%
	County	9	38%
Level of User	**Light**	3	13%
	Medium	6	25%
	Heavy	15	63%
Occupation	**White***	10	42%
	Blue*	3	13%
	Gray*	9	38%
	Retired	2	8%
Education	**High School**	9	38%
	Undergraduate	13	54%
	Postgraduate	2	8%

Examples of white collar occupations: (management, executives, professionals)
Examples of gray collar occupations (coordinators, clerical, students)
Examples of blue collar occupations (steamfitter, autoworker, millwright)

There were slightly more females than males, and non-Windsorites and postgraduates were slightly under represented. There was a nice mix of ages, Internet users, and occupations. Respondents were likely to be: women; 25-54 years of age; Windsorites; heavy Internet users; white/gray collar workers; high school/undergraduate level education.

Results

The results are derived from the questionnaire and the focus group discussions. Select questions were analyzed from the questionnaire and all of the focus group discussions were analyzed. Some of the questions from the questionnaire were used as springboards for the discussion and, as a result, the discussion that emerged from the focus groups, not the questionnaire, were analyzed.

Most Frequently Cited Uses of the Internet

The first question on the questionnaire asked respondents to list their top three uses of the Internet. These responses were not weighted according to rank since respondents were not explicitly asked to rank their three answers in order of preference. The answers are tabulated in terms of the most frequently cited responses. Respondents (n=24) gave eighty-two answers to this question.

Table 2: Most Common Uses of the Internet (n=24; 82 Comments)	
Internet Use	**Number of Times Respondent Cited Use**
Communication: Email, Messenger/Chat/File Transfer	15
Research/School/Answers to Questions/Investigate/Job Search	13
Information – General/Common Knowledge	11
Work: Product Knowledge/Projects	6
News/Newspapers	5
Shopping	5
Travel	5
Entertainment: Movies/Books/Arts/Music	5
Banking	4
History/Family History	3
Sports	3
Health	2
Other	5
Total	**82**

The most frequently cited responses to this question were communication, particularly in the form of email, followed by research, and general information. Entertainment/leisure oriented uses of the Internet (shopping, sports, travel) were not as frequently cited. Interestingly, for these respondents, health information was one of the least frequently cited uses of the Internet.

Most Frequently Cited Local Web Sites

The second question asked of respondents was to list their top three web sites. Again, these responses were not weighted according to rank since respondents were not explicitly asked to rank their three answers in order of preference. Three individuals did not complete this question. Of the 40 web sites that were reported, only sixteen were local web sites. The remaining sites were global. The list of local web sites follows:

Table 3: Truly Local Web Sites (n=16)

Organization for Web Site	Number of Times Web Site Cited By Respondent
Windsor Star	4
University of Windsor	2
Casino Windsor	2
Windsor Public Library	1
Leadership Windsor	1
United Way of Windsor	1
IGS Windsor Kelcom	1
Windsor Regional Hospital	1
Hotel Dieu Grace	1
City of Windsor	1
CBC Radio	1
Windsor 411	1
Windsor Spitfires	1
Greater Essex County District School Board	1
Windsor Family Credit Union	1
Roseland Rotary	1
Total	**21**

Not all respondents listed three web sites for this question

The most frequently cited local web sites were the Windsor Star, the University of Windsor, and Casino Windsor. Health oriented web sites were not among the top five local web sites.

Of the forty "local" web sites reported by these respondents, a breakdown of the nature of these web sites is provided below:

Table 4: Breakdown of "Local" Web Sites (n=40)

Web Site Type	Number Listed	Number of Times Respondent Cited This Type of Web Site
Media	4	8
Email/Communication	5	5
Sports	5	5
Research	3	3
Banking/Financial	3	3
Job Search (HRDC/Personnel Listings)	2	2
Shopping	2	2
Charities	2	2
Recipes	1	2
Health	2	2
Gambling	1	2
Home and Gardening	2	2
Other	8	8
Total	**40**	**46**

Most of these web sites, with the exception of sports, provide specific functions for the user (i.e., email, research, banking). Hobby or special interest web sites were not among the most frequently cited local web sites.

Most Frequently Cited Global Web Sites

Respondents were then asked to report their top three global web sites. These responses were not weighted according to rank since respondents were not explicitly asked to rank their three answers in order of preference. Three individuals did not answer the question. Of the 49 web sites listed, only thirteen were Canadian (i.e., Volunteer Canada, TD CanadaTrust, Chatelaine).

Table 5: Breakdown of Global Web Sites (n=48)		
Web Site Type	**Number Listed**	**Number of Times Respondent Cited This Type of Web Site**
Media	7	8
Communication (browsers/search engines)	4	6
Travel/Tourism	4	5
Shopping	4	5
Charities	3	4
Entertainment	3	3
Government	2	3
Sports	3	3
Banking/Financial	3	3
Weather	1	2
History	2	2
Other	12	12
Total	**48**	**56**

Not all respondents listed three web sites for this question

The number of the type of web sites listed is slightly different than that seen for local web sites. While media and communication (email) are the most frequently cited type of web site, the entertainment/leisure type web sites abound when respondents state their most preferred global web sites (travel/tourism, shopping, charities, and entertainment web sites). This result is in stark contrast to preferred local web sites, which provided specific functions or tasks for the user (research, banking) with the exception being sports.

Most Frequently Cited Search Engines

Respondents were then asked to report their top three search engines. These responses were not weighted, rather each response was treated equally. Two individuals did not answer this question. This question yielded 55 comments. The results are displayed in Table 6:

Table 6: Most Frequently Cited Search Engines (n=55)	
Yahoo	21
Google	17
Alta Vista	3
MSN	3
Meta Crawler	2
Other Search Engines	7
Other Responses That Were Not Search Engines	2
Total	**55**

Not all respondents listed three search engines for this question

Respondents mentioned Yahoo and Google most frequently.

Perceptions of Existing Web Sites (Ideal)

Two of the questions that served as springboards for the focus group discussion were what respondents both liked and disliked about web sites. Respondents were also asked what they thought were the most/least important things a web site should have. The results of these questions mirrored each other both in terms of the nature of the comments and in the proportion of comments that related to content and form issues. What respondents liked and disliked about web sites will be divided up into issues around form (navigation, colour, layout), and content (nature of and presentation of information, advertising).

Form

Overall, issues relating to form (navigation, layout, colour, pictures) were more frequently cited than issues relating to content (nature of information) regarding existing web sites. In addition, the proportion of positive comments regarding form was far greater than negative comments. Respondents reported liking web sites that allowed one to find information easily with the help of search functions or menus:

> *"It should be user friendly, a lot of people go in and aren't exactly sure what they're looking for but keywords help them through the search engine."*
>
> *"It has a good menu and a good layout. I guess that's related to navigation . . . how to get around and find exactly what you're looking for."*
>
> *"I like menus. I like the words all on one side and you see it automatically, instead of having to read through pages and scrolling down to find the links."*

Similarly, if a web site was difficult to navigate, it proved frustrating, and more importantly, was time consuming:

> "*I can't stand it when I'm looking for something and I can't find it."*
>
> *"I get frustrated when I research something and I might go through five pages to say this information is not what I want."*
>
> *"Continuous loops, where you get down roads and you can't get back or you get links and you can't find your way home."*
>
> *"It's got to be right at my fingertips cause I don't have the time to spend . . . I don't want to have to be searching and searching."*
>
> *"I don't want to be searching and hunting . . . I want a website that's easy to find. If it's easy to find, it would be a lot quicker because time is money, let's face it."*

Fast web sites are indeed desirable. A web site with slow navigation is judged harshly:

> *"I can't stand the ones that take forever to go to the next page and you're sitting there waiting and waiting because I'm kind of impatient."*
>
> *"I want simplicity and I want speed. I don't want to sit there waiting all day to get the information that I'm looking for."*
>
> *"I'm just looking for something that is quick. When I get on there . . . I want to get on there and off of there. If I've got to wait ten seconds for something to come back to me then it's too long. I don't want to wait that time."*
>
> *"One of my biggest pet peeves is slow navigation . . . I don't know if it's because the site is busy or if it's got a lot of graphics or pictures, it takes a while. Sometimes when I'm on a site, I'm not really interested in pictures, and I just want the information.'*

The cause of slow web sites relates to another characteristic that most respondents liked about web sites – the presence of pictures and graphics. However, graphics and pictures were desirable as long as they did not slow down the site and if they were related:

> *"You want the information to be quick and you don't want a bunch of pictures that are slow to download . . . graphics are good but not too much because most computers are not as good as that [as computer at work]."*
>
> *"If pictures are used they have to be related."*

Pictures and graphics cater to visual learners. Colour and large font were also desirable qualities in a web site. Features such as printer friendly options were also well received by respondents.

Content

As observed with comments related to form, there were more positive comments than negative ones made with regard to content issues when discussing existing web sites. Most respondents liked web sites that were informative, helpful, and contained up to date information. Out of date information, superficial information (advertising) and major omissions (contact information) were undesirable for most respondents:

> *"I like websites that are up to date. If it hasn't been updated in a year, that doesn't help me."*
>
> *"One of my main pet peeves is putting something up like, the flu clinic, and then it is still up a week or two after the clinic is finished."*
>
> *"I can't stand when I go into a website and there are dates there but the dates are no longer valid. . . it makes you wonder, 'What other things are they doing that isn't on there because all this stuff is outdated?' What's going on now. . . is it going to be on there next week when it's past the date? You wonder if there's things that aren't getting on the website because it's getting updated later."*
>
> *"Another thing I hate is sites that have a lot of pop-up ads . . . it obliterates what you're looking for and sometimes you can't find a specific menu because it's covered up by a pop-up ad and so you have to wait for it to disappear or you have to constantly click and hit it. I know sometimes on my Yahoo email account it gets really annoying because all these ads keep coming."*
>
> *"The things I don't like are lots and lots of advertising so that you can't see what they are trying to say. And when you get to the site, they don't really say anything. They don't give you any information to really bite your teeth into."*
>
> *"I hate websites that have superficial information. They have all the bells and whistles but once you get there they only have one page and it's a waste of your time."*
>
> *"When there is no contact information and I want to call somebody but there is no email, no number, no name, just one page of information and that's it."*

Not only should the information be relevant and up-to-date, but it also should be presented in a clear, concise, straightforward manner so that it is easy to read.

Overall, respondents liked web sites that were user friendly, colourful, that contained fast loading pictures/graphics, and helpful, up-to-date information presented in a straightforward manner. Web sites that embodied these attributes represented the ideal for respondents.

Health Unit Web Site Perceptions/Comparisons to the Ideal

Positive

After discussing what they had written down for what they liked and disliked about web sites generally, respondents were asked to discuss what they wrote down when perusing the Health Unit web site. Table 7 compares respondents' perceptions of existing web sites and of the Health Unit web site.

Table 7: Existing/Health Unit Web Site Attributes

Existing Web Site Attributes	Existing/Health Unit Web Site Attributes	Health Unit Web Site Attributes
	Easy to Find Information	Liked Certain Content Areas (i.e., Health Tips, Privacy Policy, Travel Clinic, Healthy Living)
	Updated Information	
	Pictures	
	Colour	
	Large Font	
	Fast	
	Printer Friendly Feature	
	To the Point/Concise	

The bolded attributes in the centre column are those shared by both existing and the Health Unit web site. Those attributes in the right column are those possessed exclusively by the Health Unit web site. The Health Unit web site possesses many of the attributes desired in existing web sites especially with respect to form issues such as navigation, and look of the site.

"To me it was easy. It was laid out properly, and it was nice to find stuff."

"I like the selection box. If you clicked five times, each of your headings showed up and when you want to go back, you just click in the selection again. You don't have to back out, you just go back and click it again. I like that, it was easy."

"I like the light green on the dark green and I like that when you punched on something it went dark green. My eyes aren't the best, so when it went dark that's good for me."

"I thought the colour green was pleasant on the eyes also because I don't like something that blasts out at you. And when you go to look at the issue or the item, it bold itself in darker green, I like that, and it was easy to navigate and get around."

"A positive thing is your graphics are very good, they're very explicit . . . I look under West Nile and the mosquito you have is very realistic and I like that."

With respect to content, respondents reported particular areas of information they found useful and interesting (health tips, boil water advisories, healthy living, travel clinic, privacy policy), and also liked the amount of information given in the links that were populated. Some liked the point form format and some liked the narrative format. To please everyone, suggestions were made to have a brief on the side of the article highlighting the main points or a short description of the article with an accompanying offer for extra information:

"Perhaps some of those steps could be in point form, but I was reading the narrative and I thought it flowed quickly. I didn't think it was time-consuming."

> *"I've seen other articles in Medline and other health magazines, where the article might be lengthy and they have encapsulated on the side what that page covers, so if you want to briefly look on the side and say, 'well this is where I'm interested,' and you might want to read the article or you might just read the side and say, 'no, this doesn't cover the information that I want to read.'"*

> *"I think the people that are going to be going to these health sites already have an issue and not going for general information . . . so it shouldn't be long and tedious, I would think two short sentences or point form, something very quick and maybe some extra information . . . a resource or an article."*

Respondents also liked the title in the form of a question in articles (i.e., head lice article). Overall, respondents found the content that was available at the time of testing understandable, and "to the point." Respondents found the Health Unit web site very navigable, and was pleasing to the eye both in terms of the colour, font, and graphics used. Respondents also liked the printer friendly/email to a friend features and found this fast web site to be an improvement on the old.

Negative

Table 8 displays the negative attributes of web sites that are shared by both existing web sites and the Health Unit web site. There were far more comments associated with content than form.

Table 8: Negative Attributes of Existing and Health Unit Web Sites		
Existing Web Site Attributes	**Existing and Health Unit Web Site Attributes**	**Health Unit Web Site Attributes**
Old/Superficial Information	**Difficult to Search Information**	Have Phone Numbers on Same Line
Busy Text/Text Only	**Lack of Contact Information**	Highlight Clickable Areas/Add Click Here
Advertising	**Small Font**	More Pictures
Slow	**Fancy Graphics/Pictures**	Topic Suggestions/Omissions (mandate)
	Dislike Colour/Colour Contrast/Not Visually Stimulating	Grammar/Spelling Errors
		Lack of Content/No Links
		Repetitive Information
		Use Simple Language
		Use Point Form

Among the attributes that both existing web sites and the Health Unit web site share include difficulty searching, flashy graphics, displeasing colour/contrast, and small font. With respect to difficulty searching, the main complaint with the Health Unit web site was that some respondents prefer pull down menus instead of clicking from topic, to subtopic, to choice. Only six comments were made regarding this different method of navigation.

Two areas that proved contentious were font size and the colour green. These issues are very subjective, and the former can be fixed by a setting change on one's computer. With respect to colour green, there were more respondents who liked the colour than who did not like it. Some respondents felt that the site was not visually stimulating enough and would not be appealing to a target group such as teenagers. If any changes were made to the colour it would be to include more pictures and to adjust the background so that it is not as harsh on the eyes. Adding pictures would allow for more colour and be more visually stimulating.

"Probably a few more graphics of people and people doing stuff with kids and action kinds of shots, just to make it friendlier when you go to it."

"The white background might be better if it was a cream or ivory colour, something not as harsh."

"Insert a watermark of some sort to catch attention . . . not necessarily movement but a different type of watermark to give you some kind of background because on the background it's just white."

"I found it very hard on the eyes. I do like the green colour . . . but the white I found really hard on the eyes. ***What would be better, what would help?*** *Something off-white or something not so bright and bold. I found by the time we were leaving my eyes were sore."*

Some respondents also did not like fancy graphics and again, this issue was another contentious issue. There was only one example of Flash animation on the prototype, and most did not see it. It did not automatically appear, but instead, one had to click on the main image on the page to load it. Some respondents are not interested in the "bells and whistles" but are more interested in the information. Others possess very negative opinions of advertising, particularly pop-up advertising. Pop up advertising, a staple of pornographic web sites, has created some very negative associations with pop-up objects and windows in general, and for some, anything resembling a pop-up window or object conjures up– even if the pop-up is not advertising – negative associations and a feeling of being out of control:

"I don't care what the web site looks like because I'm going there for information. I just want everything I want there, it's not about pretty pictures or special colours."

"I see that [pop ups] instantly any time I'm on the computer and I instantly want to shut that screen because that's not what I've gone to. I feel like five of them are going to come up and I want to see what's on the screen that I went to."

"As soon as I see a pop-up, all I'm thinking is 'oh great 400 pop-ups of porn sites.' I just feel out of control when that happens and you want to feel like you're in control."

Some respondents do like animation and find that it makes the site "catchy:"

> *"I think Flash is very catchy, that's why a lot of websites use it and it is sometimes distracting but I find it very catchy when there is animation and everything."*
>
> *"If something magically sort of appears, like a beating heart, and maybe it goes through everything . . . all your headings, and all your information, just something to grab the viewer's attention like that."*

If any animation or fancy graphics are to be used, it must be voluntary. That is, the person must be given the option to load the animation or to ignore it.

Respondents also pointed out that contact information is important. There were more comments made for the Health Unit web site on this point than for existing web sites. Contact information definitely should be listed on the first page or the contact us section at the very least.

The Health Unit web site did not possess attributes such as old/superficial information, busy text, advertising, or lack of speed. However, of the attributes the Health Unit web site possessed exclusively, most of them related to content. Of those relating to form, some cosmetic changes were suggested such as keeping the phone numbers on one line, highlighting the section one is on throughout the site or inserting click here for those who are not Internet literate.

Even though respondents were told that content was missing for some areas, they still stated that in their discussions. However, the most frequently cited negative comments involved the perceived omission of certain elements/topics that respondents felt should have been in the web site. One of these omissions involved the mandate or mission statement of the organization. Many respondents were unfamiliar with what the Health Unit does or the services it provides. This omission was a recurring theme that emerged from all three discussions.

"I had no idea what the site was about because there was nothing telling me what this what and what the purpose was of this website. There is a section called about us and I went into it . . . I'm sure it just needs more content but it didn't say what the purpose of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit is, why we're here, and what the mandate is . . . why we are here and how we are going to help you . . These are our tax dollars. The very first page should say welcome to . . . and then this is what this site is for . . . these are things you can do with it, instead of trying to guess what the purpose is."

"Before we go any further, could you tell us what the purpose of the organization is? . . . What is the purpose of the organization? There is a fair amount of information there. But what purpose is the organization trying to provide to the Windsorite or the Essex county person?"

"So the first thing I did when I went in was I want to know where the mission statement, where is there mandate and that should be very easy to find . . . it should be a one clicker. We want to know what is their purpose and what is their mandate."

"It really depends on the purpose of this web site. Is it to inform people about local issues or health things in the area, like West Nile and flu shots, but to go into all of these and doing a medical dictionary of symptoms and such . . . I think that will be determined when you go into more about the website, mission, mandate, and your goals in providing this website for the local people."

It is obvious that the breadth and depth of the content of the Health Unit web site depends on resources (staff time; content contributions). However, the goals of the web site and the purpose of the Health Unit are just as important and they, along with resources, will ultimately determine the breadth and depth of the content of the Health Unit web site. The content that the web site embodies must correspond to the purpose/mandate/mission of the Health Unit itself. The content and look of the web site should reflect the mission, vision, and values of the Health Unit back to the end user.

Another glaring omission was found in the diseases section. There was nothing on heart disease. Other omissions noted included prostate health, alternative medicine, and teen health.

"How could you dare not have the heart and prostate? You mean you didn't check and double check? Shame on you, maybe you just left something out or the person who typed it had heart there and they just blew it and they didn't put it down. You've got to check for errors and omissions, especially omissions."

"I tried to find heart disease . . . I tried everything and couldn't find anything to do with the heart."

Other suggestions included a link for doctors accepting new patients, mandatory immunizations required of school children, air quality, and a list of countries for which certain immunizations are required.

Other complaints included the grammar and spelling mistakes that plagued the content in the site. Complex medical language was also cited as a problem. When the content is not perfect or understandable, then credibility is compromised.

"And you people represent an organization that is supposed to be filled with professionals, therefore, credibility is very important and what you have up there has to be up to date, current because if it's not . . . if it's filled with spelling mistakes or grammatical errors, or if there's words missing, like there are here, you need to edit that . . . Anybody can do a website and I see crappy ones all over the place, they look great and there's colour but they didn't check it . . . Anyway, this is very, very important, that whoever enters that information and puts it in, has to check it over and they'd better be damned good, otherwise it hurts your image. . . if you did not take the time to check and double check, or somebody was in too much of a hurry, then maybe I'm not going to have enough confidence in whom I'm seeing or whom you recommend . . . I want a first class effort out there, we're paying lots of money in taxes."

"It may have been because it's not finished but I found when there should have been an apostrophe or a hyphen there was a square."

"Just so you know, there's a misspelling in services, under clinics."

"What the heck is an intake nurse? Remember, I'm a commoner. I don't know what that means . . . So why don't we kinda refer to that to , you know, medical questions of a nurse. Something that keeps it simple, okay, and so the intake nurse kinda threw me off a little bit."

"A lot of people don't understand medical terms."

Other complaints included repetitive information (healthy families) and redundancy with certain health topics (i.e., diseases). Efforts should be made to ensure that the wheel is not reinvented and that information is not wasting space.

"Wouldn't it be best if we had a West Nile page built be the Ontario government, or the Canadian government in conjunction with the Americans and putting it all in one spot where we can go and key in? And we don't have to come to Windsor and have the Windsor guy do it and come to London and have the London guy doing it because West Nile there is the same as it is here. Is there redundancy and if there is, is there a way to get rid of it or is there a better mousetrap to build?"

"I did find it a little repetitive . . . I went into healthy families through the babies, pregnancy, toddlers, and children because I have a one year old but I found the information was the same for all of them."

With respect to those attributes respondents liked, those related to form - ease of navigation, overall look, functionality [search option, interactivity] - emerged more frequently than those related to content. Conversely, with respect to those attributes respondents disliked, those related to content - advertising, quality of information presented [old, misleading, too much, too little] - emerged more frequently than those relating to form. Much of the effort in re-designing the web site was dedicated to the navigation structure and it shows as many of the comments for navigation are positive with only minor changes suggested.

Navigation - Revisited

One of the questions that Health Unit web designers were curious about was whether certain health information was placed in the appropriate sections/topic areas on the web site. A series of questions was asked of respondents to test where they would go to find certain pieces of health information. Overall, the respondents' answers to the questions showed that information was indeed placed in the most appropriate areas. Information relating to feeding one's baby, disciplining a toddler, back to school information, water quality, rabies, and healthy pregnancies were all identified with ease. There were no objections to where the information was placed - only suggestions of where the information could additionally be placed. For example, some felt that safe sex could be placed in diseases as well as healthy living, that information on starting a walking program could be placed in Community Health, as well as Healthy Living, and that shots for travel could be listed in healthy living and immunization. Clinics and hospitals could also be listed in both community health and clinics.

How to Attract Repeat Visitors – Ideal (Existing) vs. Health Unit Web Site

The questionnaire asked respondents what attributes of web sites keep them coming back over and over (stickiness). In the focus group discussion, respondents were asked what attributes would keep them coming back to the Health Unit web site. Many of the comments were similar to that already discussed. Table 9 displays the results taken from both the questionnaire and the focus group transcripts.

Table 9: Attributes That Would Attract People To Come Back – Existing and Health Unit Web Site		
Existing Web Sites	**Existing and Health Unit Web Site**	**Health Unit Web Site**
Information on Maps/Recipes/Specials/Contact and Email Information	**New, Current, Updated Information**	Includes Topics on Alternative Medicine, Theme Months; Link to Windsor Star
Lots of Choices/Links	**Local Information**	Global Information
Visually Pleasing/Colourful	**Useful, Interesting Information**	Use For Information
	Easy to Use/Navigate/Access	Geared to Health Professionals
	Interactive/Entertaining, Fun	Would Not Use Everyday and Would Not Be in Favourites
	Quick	

What is interesting about Table 9 is the fact that most of the attributes that would attract users over and over is the nature of information rather than the means of getting to it (navigation). The most important attributes were that the information be local and updated:

> *". . . If they don't update information you don't need to go more than once. If there is timely information and dates, then you can go back."*

> *"The only way I'd go back is if it became known to me that it is a premier place for finding out new information."*

> *". . . It could be current news items happening or what's coming next week. You might get people who start to find and look at this every couple weeks as to what's going on at the Health Unit."*

Topics that would attract users include alternative medicine, theme months, health tips, and diseases.

"Make the health tips interesting too. . . Put something really interesting there and show it on the first page what the air quality is. That is something that I would use as a bookmark and go to that everyday."

"Maybe there could be theme months, where each month would have a theme and you would have articles around a certain them, a certain health issue . . . try to think of ways so that you would come back and have something about what's coming next month."

"Absolutely, I'm not interested in just looking at traditional medicine, that's for sure. It's my last choice."

The kernel of wisdom gleaned from this point in the discussions was that the information on the web site has to be relevant (local), and useful (current) in order to attract repeat visitors. In addition, one must make an effort to differentiate the site from other similar sources of information through interesting topics and methods of presenting the information (i.e., theme months, health tips).

The results for the next several topic areas (e-newsletter subscription, frequency of e-newsletter distribution, personal information disclosure, privacy policy, web site promotion preferences, and URL preference) were derived from the questionnaire given to respondents before discussion. Some of these topics were discussed in some of the groups (where time permitted) but not at length. As a result, the information on these topics is based on the questionnaire.

E-Newsletter Subscription

Respondents were asked in the questionnaire if they would be interested in subscribing to an electronic health newsletter. Of the twenty-four respondents, 67% (n=16) would be interested. The remaining third would not be interested. Reasons for this disinterest include referring to other sources of health information (newspapers, TV, other web sites) and the preference of looking up information on the Internet on an as-needed basis.

For those respondents who were interested in receiving a newsletter, (n=16), they were asked how frequently they would like to receive the newsletter. Two individuals did not answer the question. Of the fourteen who did, monthly was the most frequently cited response (73% n=11), followed by quarterly (27%; n=3), and then every six months (7%; n=1). To subscribe to a newsletter, certain pieces of personal information would have to be disclosed. Respondents were then asked which pieces of personal information they would be willing to disclose to receive the newsletter. The results are displayed in Table 10.

Personal Information Disclosure

Table 10: Personal Information Respondents Are Willing To Divulge To Receive A Health E-Newsletter (n=14)

Personal Information Category	Number	% (of 14 respondents)
Gender	14	100%
First Name	13	93%
Last Name	13	93%
Email	13	93%
Occupation	12	86%
Salutation	12	86%
Age Range	11	79%
City	11	79%
Province	10	71%
Postal Code	10	71%
Address	9	64%
Phone	6	43%
Income Range	4	29%
No Information (of all 16 respondents)	**2**	**13%**

*Percentages are calculated out of 14 rather than 16 since two respondents would not be willing to divulge any information.

Not surprisingly, respondents are least likely to divulge information about their address, phone, and income ranges. For these sixteen respondents, this information is private, and should not be necessary to divulge in exchange for a newsletter. The nature of the types of private information (address, phone, income) suggests that people neither want to receive direct mail, or phone calls. That income is one of the least likely is also no surprise since it is one of the most likely pieces of information to be refused on a survey or, if divulged, false. Most of the other information, however, is likely to be divulged, even occupation and age (to ask a respondent these pieces traditionally is taboo). Only two respondents stated that they would not divulge any information.

Privacy Policy

Related to the disclosure of personal information is the presence of a privacy policy on the web site. Respondents were asked if the presence of a privacy policy gave them any assurance that their personal information would be kept confidential. Figure 1 illustrates the results:

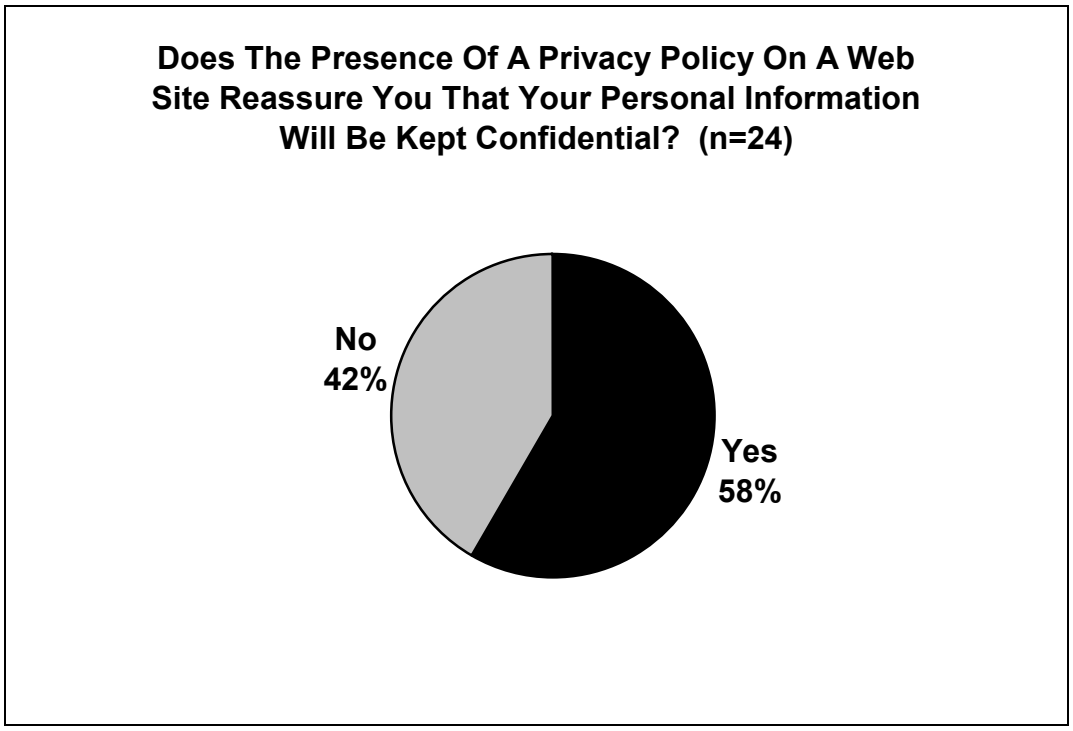

Figure 1

More respondents were comforted by the presence of a privacy policy on the web site. However, over 40% were not. That over 40% of respondents are not assured is an indicator that the words in an organization's privacy policy should always be reinforced through action (i.e., no selling of data; protection of personal information from the unscrupulous). If the information is not protected even though the privacy policy states that it is, the 42% observed here will likely increase at the very least.

Web Site Promotion Preferences

Respondents were also asked for their opinions for the best way to promote a web site. Even though only one answer was required, some respondents checked more than one answer. Three individuals did not answer the question. The results are displayed in Table 11.

Table 11: The Best Way To Promote A Web Site Is: (n=21)

Personal Information Category	Number	% (of 21 respondents)
Word of Mouth	10	48%
Other Web Sites	6	29%
Radio	5	24%
Magazines	5	24 %
Television	4	19%
Newspapers	4	19%
Billboard	3	14%
Direct Mail	2	10%
Other	1	10%

The most preferred way to promote a web site is word of mouth, followed by other web sites, radio, and magazines. The more expensive forms of promotion were among the least preferred (i.e., television, newspapers, billboards).

Health Unit Web Site URL Preferences

The last question respondents were asked involved the URL of the Health Unit web site. Respondents were asked to rank the three choices presented to them, with one being their first choice, two being their second choice, and three being their third choice. These responses were weighted since respondents were asked explicitly to rank their answers. The choices included the current URL for the Health Unit web site. Figure 2 illustrates the results.

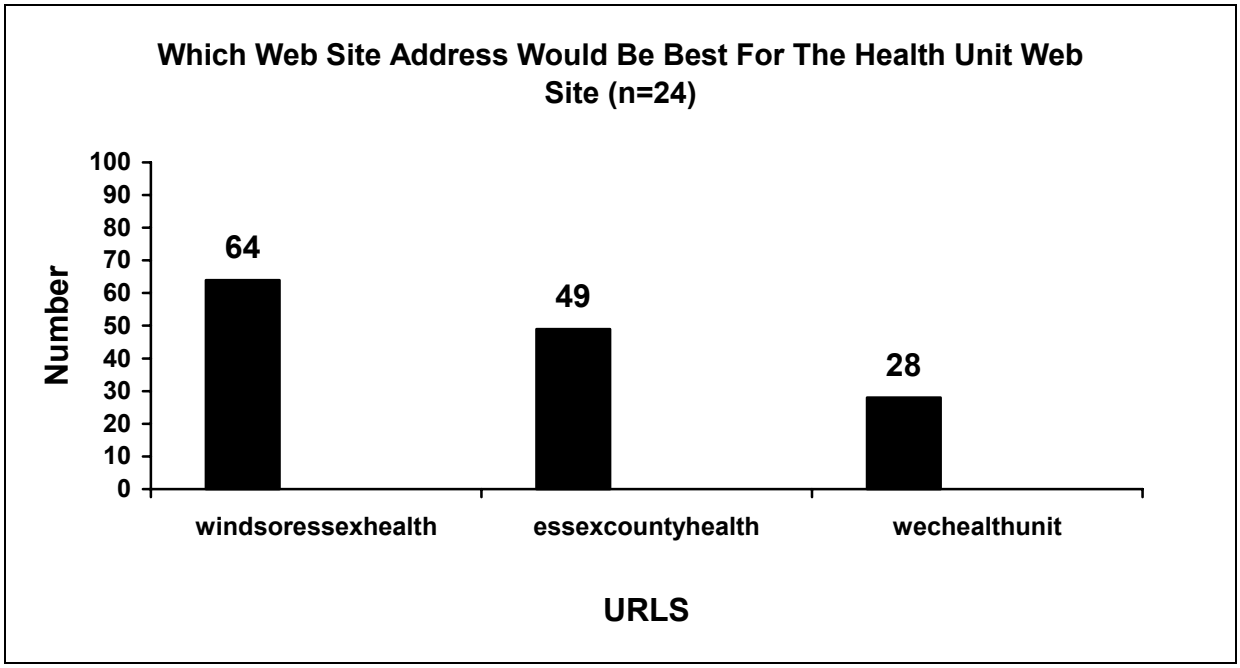

Figure 2
*These results are weighted where a 1=3, 2=2, 3=1.

The most preferred choice was windsoressexhealth, followed by essexcountyhealth. The current URL, wechealthunit.org, was the least preferred, consistently ranking third place (with four exceptions).

The Last Word

Just before the discussion was about to come to a close, respondents were asked what the one thing was that they would like to leave Health Unit staff with that would improve the Health Unit web site. The comments that emerged served to underline any issues that had been discussed earlier and to voice any last thoughts about the site. Again, more content issues came to the fore. Many were those that were mentioned earlier (updated information, contact information, updated articles, explicit mandate, editing, monthly themes) but others were embellished, such as the web site serving as a voice for current affairs:

> *"The more that I hear our director, Dr. Heimann in the press, the more it's better for all parties concerned and our children follow. The current affairs thing is very important and it's almost like the Health Unit has become or has to become a more credible voice for the common public. We have to have their credibility and their knowledge to help us as people live healthier lifestyles in this county."*

> *"For instance, West Nile Virus and I would go back to it and find out if it is relevant to this area. I would want to know if it's affecting me and my family or the residents of Windsor-Essex County."*

Suggestions for current affairs included having teasers for the next story to be posted as well as a link to the Windsor star for more other health related articles. Other issues included a more sensitive search engine, and unobtrusive community advertising.

Contact information was one of the issues discussed at length at the end of the discussion.

> *"In contact us at the bottom of the screen, when I click on that I was expecting the address or the phone number and there is a form that you have to fill out. That's not what I expected and I was kind of confused as to what that was because they asked for your information and you have to email it to them. To me contact us should say, 'Here are the ways you can contact us,' email address, phone number, and fax number, things like that."*

> *"It (the address) should always be on the home page and in contact us."*

Phone numbers for Essex and Leamington should also be posted. News archives and adding more hotlines were among the other issues mentioned during the last few moments of discussion.

The navigation of the Health Unit web site does possess many of the ideal attributes valued in existing web sites. Some changes were suggested with regard to navigation and layout, but most of these suggestions are cosmetic in nature and do not require that the underlying navigation structure be changed. Content, however, will prove to be a challenge. Many of the negative attributes possessed exclusively by the Health Unit web site relate to content issues (topic omissions, grammar) that must be corrected if the web site is to be revisited.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Broad Conclusions and Recommendations:

Below are broad conclusions and recommendations based on the information discussed in this report. Following the broad conclusions and recommendations are some specific recommendations and suggestions for revisions that are considered optional (suggested) and mandatory (strongly recommended revisions).

- The most common uses of the Internet were for communication (e-mail), research (school or work), general information retrieval, and news. To retrieve health information was near the bottom. The Internet is a medium that serves two specific functions – to provide a means of communication with others and a means of providing information.

- Favourite local web sites coincide with the common uses of the Internet. The top four local web sites, with the exception of the Casino, involved news, and research (i.e, Windsor Star; University of Windsor; Windsor Public Library). Health web sites were not among the top five. While health information was not a common use of the Internet, there exists an opportunity for the Health Unit to fill a gap that others have not yet filled – a purveyor of local, relevant health information. It could be argued that the reason why health is near the bottom of the list is because there are no well-recognized electronic sources of local health information that would be considered relevant to users.

- The most frequently cited global web sites tend to include more leisure and hobby type activities (i.e., shopping, travel) as well as media and communication. Health was not listed at all. It is safe to say that Health Canada and other similar web sites would not likely be competitors with the Health Unit web site (since health is not even listed).

- Yahoo and Google were the most frequently cited search engines. These should be referenced when improving the search function (the search engine on the Health Unit web site should mimic popularly used search engines).

- Form AND content are equally important. It is absolutely necessary to excel in both areas. One cannot be supplanted for the other. Respondents stated that they want to retrieve good, useful information easily. If they have difficulty finding the content, and encounter poor content, the web site will be judged harshly.

- The navigation was well received by the respondents overall. Of the complaints mentioned, most did not relate to the navigation itself, but instead to cosmetic issues (i.e., more graphics, colour changes, highlighting areas).

- While there were some very positive comments related to content (i.e., useful, easy to read information), the thrust of the negative comments were some perceived topic omissions, grammatical errors, and empty links. While the cosmetic aspects/style of the web site require some changes, the content component requires serious reflection in terms of what to include (i.e., topics), and greater attention paid in how it is presented (grammar and spelling). The purpose of the web site, the Health Unit's mandate, and available resources should determine the content that appears on the web site and the depth of that content (a link to another web site vs. an article written by staff). Once the scope of the web site is defined clearly, a systematic system for generating content should be implemented to ensure that content is relevant, easy to read, understandable, and bereft of grammar and spelling mistakes.

- Two thirds of respondents are interested in receiving an electronic health newsletter. Of those respondents, nearly three quarters would prefer it to be a monthly newsletter. A monthly newsletter requires more work and coordination than a quarterly or semi-annual newsletter. Before committing to distributing a monthly newsletter, key issues require examination to determine whether it is feasible to do so. Specifically, is there enough quality content available and staff resources to create a monthly newsletter? These issues need to be carefully considered before deciding on the frequency of newsletter distribution. (measure twice, cut once).

- Do not expect certain types of personal information to be divulged when one subscribes to an electronic health newsletter. Income, phone number, and address are the least likely pieces to be divulged. If mandatory fields are necessary, gender, first name, last name, and email are the safest choices.

- While most respondents are reassured by the presence of a privacy policy, over 40% are not. It is imperative that the words in the policy are acted upon. That nearly half are not reassured by the privacy policy leaves no room for error in this regard. If the privacy of a person is breached, the web site and everything on it will not likely be trusted and, as a result, not likely visited.

- Inexpensive methods such as word of mouth and other web sites were the most preferred ways of promoting a web site. If methods such as television, newspapers, and billboards are used to promote the web site, they will not only be less effective methods, but may be perceived as fiscally irresponsible ones.

- www.windsoressexhealth.org was the most preferred URL of the three choices presented. The current URL was the least preferred. Changing the Health Unit web site URL has serious ramifications. Not only would external contacts have to be notified (Ministry of Health; community partners, etc.), but also all the communications (corporate and otherwise) created to date would have to be changed. Discussions are needed to weigh the pros (more potential visitors due to a more memorable URL; break from the past) over the cons (changing communications) of such a change.

Specific, Strongly Recommended Revisions

The following is a list of strongly recommended revisions to the website based on the discussions with the respondents. These recommended changes emerged over and over again during the discussions and failing to implement them would not situate the Health Unit web site closer to the ideal discussed earlier in this report. The recommendations are ordered in terms of content and form and not in order of importance since all are important.

- Ensure that the mission, vision, values statement/mandate is listed in the about us or somewhere on the home page. It should not take more than one click to find the mandate/mission.
- Ensure that contact information (addresses, phone numbers, fax lines) for all three sites are included in the contact us or on the home page.
- Ensure that there are no grammar or spelling mistakes anywhere on the web site.
- Ensure that simple language is used.
- Ensure that information is new, updated, and factual.
- Ensure that heart information is included in the web site.
- Find creative ways of not re-inventing the wheel to decrease repetition and redundancy, and in effect workload for the web managers (links to other sites that have a more in-depth analysis of a particular topic).
- Ensure information has a local angle to it to make it relevant and useful.
- Ensure that formatting (phone numbers being on one line) is consistent.
- Ensure that the search engine is sensitive enough to find topics with ease.
- Ensure that more pictures are used to make the site more colourful and visually stimulating.

- If Flash objects are used, ensure that the option to load or not load the object is explicit on the page.

Specific, Suggested Revisions

The following lists those suggested revisions to the website based on the discussions with the respondents. These suggestions would likely improve the site but failure to implement these changes would not be catastrophic. These suggestions were very subjective and were not mentioned as frequently as the preceding revisions. The suggestions are ordered in terms of content and form and not in order of importance. Note: Some of these suggestions may or may not be feasible due to the mandate or technological or other limitations.

- Include links to alternative medicine sites.
- Include a link to the Windsor Star.
- Include theme months/current affairs.
- Include unobtrusive community event advertising.
- Provide a news archive.
- Keep health tips interesting.
- Add kids help phone hotline, suicide hotline, Aids committee hotline.
- Have a good url.
- Change contrast from green and white to green and off-white.
- Highlight section that is clicked/Include a click here mechanism for those that are not Internet literate.
- Use the space on the left hand side of the home page.

Appendix A

Web Site Focus Testing – Moderator's Guide

Have participants fill out sentence completion sheets before group begins.

Process 10 minutes

a) Purpose of the group – testing Health Unit web site with end users
b) Session will be taped – comments will not appear on radio, on TV
c) Consent form – summary report will have quotes with no identifying characteristics
d) Ground rules
    i) There are no right or wrong answers (feel free to be honest)
    ii) Refrain from two people talking at once (hard to hear on tape)
    iii) Turn cell phones off
e) Plans for the group discussion (approx. 2 hours)
f) Questions
g) Introductions

Playing with the web page for about 10 minutes 10 minutes

What we'll do now is go up to the lab and let you explore the web site. Using the worksheet provided, please write anything down that you find either positive or negative about the site. If you have any questions or problems, let Mike know and he'll assist you.

Existing vs. (Health Unit) web sites 25-30 minutes

Looking at the worksheet that you were asked to complete when you arrived, tell me what you wrote down for #5? Now what did you write down for #6?
Now what about this web site that you just played with – what characteristics did you like about it? Did you not like? Were there any problems with the buttons?

Probe for **overall** navigation, layout, graphics, colours (what should be changed/what is missing?)

Navigation/Organization of Health Unit web site – specific areas 35 minutes

One of the things that we want to ensure is that people can find what they want on the web site with ease. The next exercise that we are going to do is to go through some key areas to see if the web site is making sense in terms of where things are located. I'm going to ask you all a question, and you all are going to tell Mike where to click to find that information. Are there any questions? First, where would you go to find:

- *Information on a healthy pregnancy.*
- *Information about water quality at local beaches.*
- *Information on disciplining your toddler.*
- *Information on safe sex.*
- *Information on feeding your baby.*
- *Back to School information for parents.*
- *Information on rabies.*
- *Information on stating a walking program.*
- *Information on shots you need to travel around the world.*
- *Information about hospitals and clinics in the area.*

Content of Health Unit web site - specifics 10-15 minutes

Now we've talked about navigation and the look of the web site, what about the content? What did you think of it? Was it useful? Was it easy to understand? What would you change/what is missing?

Stickiness of Health Unit web site 10 minutes

I want you to tell me what you wrote down for #9 on your worksheet. Now, keeping these things in mind, what you would do to ensure that people keep coming back to this site? Probe for issues that have not already emerged yet.

Thanks and incentives (sign form saying they received them) 5 minutes

Total: 1:55 minutes

Appendix B

Pre-Discussion Exercise

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions:

1. Please list the top three reasons why you use the Internet (i.e., recipes)

   1._____
   2._____
   3._____

2. My top three local web sites are . . .

   1._____
   2._____
   3._____

3. My top three global web sites are . . .

   1._____
   2._____
   3._____

4. My top three search engines are . . . (i.e., Yahoo)

   1._____
   2._____
   3._____

5. I love web sites that have/are . . .

   _____
   _____
   _____

6. I hate web site that have/are . . . (feel free to give examples of web sites you hate)

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. The three **most important** things a web site should have are:

1._____
2._____
3._____

8. The three **least important** things a web site should have are:

1._____
2._____
3._____

9. I keep coming back to sites that have/are . . . (feel free to give examples)

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. Would you be interested in subscribing to an electronic health newsletter?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No Why not?

_____
_____

11. If Yes, how frequently would you want to receive the newsletter?

- ❑ Monthly
- ❑ Quarterly
- ❑ Every six months
- ❑ Other (specify) _____

12. To subscribe to the electronic health newsletter some personal information would have to be disclosed. Which of the following pieces of information would you be willing to disclose in order to receive the electronic health newsletter? **(please check all that apply)**

- ❑ Prefix – Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Dr.
- ❑ First Name
- ❑ Last Name
- ❑ Age Range - 0-9, 10-19, 20-29, …, 70+
- ❑ Occupation – Autoworker, Teacher, Doctor, Lawyer, Manager …
- ❑ Gender - Male or Female
- ❑ Income Range - $0-14,999, 15,000 - 29,999, ... 150,000+
- ❑ E-mail
- ❑ Phone
- ❑ Address
- ❑ City
- ❑ Province
- ❑ Postal Code

13. Does the presence of a privacy policy on a web site reassure you that your personal information will be kept confidential?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

14. What do you think is THE best way to promote a web site? **[check only one please]**

- ❑ Television
- ❑ Billboard
- ❑ Radio
- ❑ Other web sites
- ❑ Magazines
- ❑ Newspapers
- ❑ Word of mouth
- ❑ Direct mail
- ❑ Other (please specify) _____

15. Please rank – with 1 being your first choice, 2 being your second choice, and 3 being your third choice – which web site address you think would be best for the Health Unit web site.

_____ www.essexcountyhealth.org

_____ www.wechealthunit.org

_____ www.windsoressexhealth.org

If none of the above appeal to you, please suggest an alternative and why this address would be the best choice.

_____

_____

_____