Documents without Borders

E-Government in the English-Speaking Caribbean Nations: A Comparison of Internet Sites

T he growth of e-government services and Internet presence of governments is a global phenomenon.[1] Even though in much of the Caribbean, citizen access to the Internet ranges from 8.5 to 40.0 percent, Caribbean nations have increasingly developed a web presence.[2] E-government is well-established within the fifteen Caricom nations, which include both English-speaking and non-English–speaking nations. An assessment of the level of maturity, features, and functionality of the web presence of the Caribbean nations indicates a low level of success possibly due to lack of infrastructure.[3] In one report, the Caribbean nations that provide a web presence often failed to provide or provided minimal levels of contact information, hours of operation, email or other means of contact, and failed to offer downloadable or electronic forms.[4]

For this column, I took a look at the Internet presence and e-government accessibility provided by the English-speaking Caribbean Islands. Table 1 provides a list of the countries with their web addresses. Within the library world, we generally use content-based criteria such as relevancy, accuracy, reliability, and usefulness for evaluation purposes. For the evaluation of Government webpages other criteria are also important: layout and visual appeal, the presence of navigation menus, site maps and search tools, email or other means of two-way communication with citizens, access for persons with disabilities, ease of use, electronic and downloadable forms, internal search ability, provision of information in other languages, availability of contact information, hours of service, and the protection of privacy.[5]

Before preparing my original list of English-speaking Caribbean islands, I eliminated the US Virgin Islands as a territory and not a sovereign nation. I also eliminated the Netherlands Antilles since English was only added to Dutch as an official language in 2007. That left the list of ten island nations in table 1. From that list, I narrowed down to five countries for a comparison of seven indicators of adequate Internet presence. I eliminated Jamaica due to the lack of one official website for the entire government and Monserrat on the basis of only having a government presence on Facebook, but no official site. The final five countries were included based on a combination of factors,

Table 1. English-Speaking Caribbean Countries Official Government Websites

Country	Official Website
Anguilla	www.gov.ai/
Bahamas	www.bahamas.gov.bs/
Barbados	https://www.gov.bb/
British Virgin Islands	www.bvi.gov.vg/
Cayaman Islands	www.gov.ky/
Dominica	www.dominica.gov.dm/
Grenada	www.gov.gd/
Jamaica	http://opm.gov.jm/ (office of prime minister—unable to locate official Jamaica website)
Monserrat	https://www.facebook.com/MontserratGOV (only official site located on Facebook)
Saint Kitts and Nevis	www.stkittsnevis.net/

including maximum variation in webpages, economic status, and general geographic location and size.

I chose seven factors for the comparison based on personal knowledge and relevant research and then spent a minimum of one hour using each webpage. The factors I chose include visual appeal, which is important for citizens, but for the Caribbean islands, which depend on tourism for significant income, it is also a critical factor. The criteria of what languages are available on the webpage could indicate a measure of how much appeal there is for business and tourism as well as for residents who speak other languages. The provision of contact information, hours of service, and email communication are factors indicating a basic level of commitment to service and communication with citizens, businesses, and tourists. The availability of online forms and services indicates a deeper level of commitment to service. I added a final criteria of whether or not the webpage is balanced in its offering of service to citizens, business, and tourism since for the Caribbean islands the ability to attract business and tourisms is an important aspect.

The results of the evaluation are summarized in table 2. Each site offered adequate basic information for citizens, businesses, and tourists, including history and important information about the country. All of the sites also offered an internal search feature. Generally, the Bahamas and the British Virgin Islands offered the best overall websites, likely due to their higher economic status and extensive experience with tourism. The Bahamas site offered ease of use combined with good visual appeal and was the only site to actively promote its e-government services. The British Virgin Islands site had major visual appeal and good links to social media and was the only site to include information on public library services.

The webpage of St. Kitts and Nevis was lacking in initial visual appeal, but offers simplicity of use and numerous links for

Table 2. Comparison of Seven Indicators of Adequate E-Government Presence

Country	Visual Appeal	Languages	Contact Information	Hours of Service	Email	Online	Balanced
Bahamas	Yes	English	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
British Virgin Islands	Yes	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dominica	No	English Limited Spanish	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grenada	Yes	English	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
St. Kitts and Nevis	No	English	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

business and tourism. Grenada has a nicely balanced webpage with online forms, contact information, and a presence on social media while also providing a colorful page with information on the importance of the island in the growing and provision of spices. Finally, Dominica has a basic no frills webpage but with links to a nice selection of online government publications ranging from national policies to bird-watching. Dominica was also the only site to provide some amount of information in Spanish as well as English.

The Caribbean island nations have developed and are providing an increasing web and e-government presence for their citizens while also attempting to attract both business and tourism. There is room for improvement in the areas of providing information on hours of service, making online forms more accessible and easily transmitted electronically, and offering service to speakers of other languages.

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References

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