

US government sites reach 40% of Americans but lag behind overall internet growth

RESTON, US: comScore, Inc, a leader in measuring the digital world, has released an analysis of traffic to federal government sites, which showed a decline over the past year despite attempts to make the government more digital-friendly. In July 2011, the National Institutes of Health (NIH.gov) ranked first with 9.6 million unique visitors.



In July 2011, 87.6 million Americans visited a government site, representing 40.7% of the total US online population. Although today's audience represents an 11% increase in visitors vs. five years ago, this number is significantly lower than the 24% growth in the total US Internet population over the same period of time.

"In recent years, the US government sector has taken significant steps to expand its digital presence to align itself more closely with the routine behaviours of its citizens," said comScore senior director Gillian Heltai. "However, comScore data show that many government sites still struggle to sustain citizen visitation and engagement levels in an increasingly fragmented digital world. Despite current efforts to improve their online offerings, government agencies have been unable to keep pace with rapidly-changing consumer expectations and distinguish themselves through their use of technology. The challenge for the government sector moving forward will be to determine the best ways to creatively leverage their resources to stay ahead of the digital curve."

Top federal sites show declines from 2010

An analysis of visitation to top federal sites in the government category showed growth in the industry between July 2009 and July 2010, followed by a marked decline among many sites the following year. However, as these sites continued to serve as valuable sources of primary information, visitors spent upwards of 10 minutes on average engaging with content in seven out of the top ten federal sites.

In July 2011, the National Institutes of Health (NIH.gov) ranked first with 9.6 million unique visitors, buoyed by a partnership with Google that enabled the listing of NIH pages as the first unpaid search result for pharmaceutical searches. Other agencies leading the online government sector were the Department of Education (ED.gov), Department of Commerce (which includes properties such as Weather.gov and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA.gov), Internal Revenue Service (IRS.gov) and Social Security Administration (SSA.gov). All but four of the top federal sites were unable to sustain the growth in visitation they gained the previous year.

Growth Across Top Federal Government Sites July 2009 - July 2011 Total US - Home and Work Audience
Source: comScore Media Metrix

	Total Unique Visitors (000)				
	Jul-09	Jul-10	Jul-11	Annual Percent Change from 2009	Annual Percent Change from 2010
NIH	6,968	8,882	9,630	28%	8%
ED.gov	7,008	8,672	7,831	24%	-10%
Department of Commerce	7,058	8,547	6,901	21%	-19%
IRS.gov	4,226	4,349	4,651	3%	7%
SSA.gov	3,308	4,135	4,007	25%	-3%
USAJobs.gov	2,652	3,304	2,903	25%	-12%
State.gov	2,277	2,760	2,397	21%	-13%
USCIS.gov	1,601	2,130	2,320	33%	9%
NPS.gov	2,253	2,412	2,135	7%	-12%
NASA.gov	2,933	1,853	2,105	-37%	14%

USAJobs.gov competes with commercial career sites despite sole focus on government jobs

As job creation takes centre-stage in the domestic policy arena, it is interesting to note that government recruitment site USAJobs.gov, which ranked sixth among top federal Government sites, places prominently among the top Career Services sites. With US unemployment remaining high over the past few years, the Career Services category experienced a 16% increase in visitation from two years ago. A look at top Career Services sites reveals USAJobs.gov attracting a sizeable audience (2.9 million unique visitors) and competing with other mainstream job search sites, in spite of the fact that its sole orientation is toward government job listings. Out of the top Career Services sites, USAJobs.gov also enjoyed the highest average engagement, with visitors to the site staying an average of 18.7 minutes in the month.

Selection of Top Career Services Sites July 2011 Total US - Home and Work Audience Source: comScore Media Metrix

	Total Unique Visitors (000)	Average Minutes per Visitor
CareerBuilder LLC	24,406	14.0
Monster, Inc.	22,646	11.6
Indeed	13,038	14.1
SimplyHired, Inc.	6,733	7.2
SnagAJob	5,209	12.4
USAJobs.gov	2,903	18.7

"In certain industries, such as Health and Career Services, a few top Government sites have performed as well as other commercial sites and garnered a respectable share of these markets," added Heltai. "This performance reflects the unique value of information delivered directly from government agencies to US citizens and highlights the potential for agencies to become relevant players not just in the Government space but also in their complementary industries. With the right understanding of their digital audiences and a better approach to showcasing content that they already have, government sites can play a more prominent role in the digital landscape."

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