

# AGIMO

## Web-Publishing Guide Research

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# Research Context

# Research Objectives

- TNS Social Research was commissioned by the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) to inform further development of the online Web-Publishing Guide produced by the Department of Finance and Deregulation.
- The Guide is intended to provide assistance on website design, marketing, policy and legal issues for web-developers in government agencies. The aim of the project was to explore the information needs of government agencies looking to develop websites.
- Specifically the study sought to investigate:
  - drivers and barriers to accessing the Web-Publishing Guide
  - key content requirements
  - perceptions of the existing guide, including perceived benefits and shortcomings in terms of content and usability
  - response to potential additional features such as templates and examples, and
  - suggested improvements.

# Research Method

- The research was conducted with Australian Government and non-Australian Government staff, with group discussions moderated by a researcher at TNS offices in Canberra.
- In total, one mini-group and two group discussions were conducted with web publishing staff from a range of Australian Government agencies. A further mini-group was conducted with non-Australian Government agency stakeholders (ACT Government staff, a consultant/academic, and a policy advisor for an Australian Labor Party senator).
- In recruiting participants, TNS contacted people who had registered their interest in response to an email sent by AGIMO to members of a web publishing mailing list. Given the positive response to the email, and in order to maximise the breadth of agencies included in the research, attending agencies were asked to nominate up to two representatives. A list of participating Australian Government agencies is included in the Appendices.
- Discussions commenced with a review of the information needs of the web-developers, including specific areas that they see as pertinent, and the level of information they would like to see in a guide of this nature. Unaided perceptions of the website, and the drivers and barriers to accessing site were then explored before presenting the website to participants and briefly assessing the perceived usability and functionality of the website. Finally, participants were asked to make suggestions for enhancing the usefulness and usability of the website.



# Information needs of web-developers

# Information needs of web-developers

## Overview

- Federal government participants in the study represented a range of roles in the online presence of agencies, primarily web publishing and content managers, as well as web masters.
- Key issues impacting on participants in their roles were focused on:
  - Balancing the demands and requirements of senior internal staff, with web publishing standards and guidelines
  - Balancing the needs of key stakeholders – internal clients, target audiences, and technical/ IT staff
  - Struggling to be ‘compliant’ – putting web publishing standards and guidelines into practice to ensure online accessibility, and
  - Knowing where to go for help.
- Each of these issues is discussed in the following slides.

# Information needs of web-developers

## Support for the role of AGIMO

- Overall AGIMO is seen as an authority for government online issues, making it an important resource when web publishing staff are lobbying for change or certain practices within their agencies.

*I think a lot of managers are quite willing to listen to it. My experience is that if AGIMO says it's okay, then it's okay.*  
(Group 4, Federal government)

*AGIMO solved my branding problems. I could say 'AGIMO think it's good', and they said 'okay then'.*  
(Group 4, Federal government)

- However, a small number of participants considered awareness of AGIMO and the Web Publishing Guide to be low amongst senior government and other non-web publishing staff, highlighting the need for further awareness raising of AGIMO's role.

# Information needs of web-developers

## Key issues

- Balancing the demands and **requirements of senior internal staff**, with web publishing standards and guidelines was frequently raised by participants. This is a challenging issue impacting on web publishers' roles, and some expressed frustration at the situation.

*A lot of the time you get thrown content – ‘this needs to go up on the web’ – and there is no plan at all related to who the target audience is or why is it going on the website. There’s no real reason except that someone up there said it needs to go on the website. (Group 3, Federal government)*

- Several agencies had developed **protocols to manage these issues**, however this appeared to be the exception rather than the norm.

*Just recently we’ve finalised a quality assurance and compliance document for our websites to help our business areas understand what our role is and how we can help them. It’s not just ‘we’ll design your website’ but we’ll help you determine the content, write it properly and provide usability and accessibility advice. (Group 2, Federal government)*

*Everyone [in our Department] who contributes, maintains, writes, publishes needs to go on an internal course called Writing for the Web which uses the AGIMO publishing guide as a foundation. (Group 3, Federal government)*

# Information needs of web-developers

## Key issues

- Another issue impacting on web publishers' roles appeared to be the pressure of **balancing the needs of stakeholders**, including internal clients, target audiences, and technical/ IT staff. A key aspect to this is ensuring that information meets the needs of end users/ audiences.

*If you're a web developer you're looking at three sets of stakeholders, especially in government. The first is the client and that's where you run against problems, the second equally important is the audience – you should always know your audience, the third set of stakeholders are people sort of like me – the guardians of the web standards for your organisation.  
(Group 1, non-Federal government)*

- Many participants expressed a concern about their ability to ensure a compliant online presence for their agency, given current accessibility requirements. Across all groups there was an emphasis on this issue and in some cases participants expressed fear of 'getting it wrong' according to the guidelines. This issue appears to require stronger assistance and support from AGIMO, in the form of standards or benchmarks to be set.

*We want our sites to be accessible but we want to keep up with the latest trends and that doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be accessible... I find it quite complicated, how many steps do you take... Do you meet the minimum standards or move beyond that? Having some kind of benchmark for all of government to work towards – you know what you're creating your product for... if there was a combined effort that would be great. (Group 2, Federal government)*

# Information needs of web-developers

## Key issues

- Throughout the recruitment process and across all groups, there was an enthusiasm evident amongst participants at being given the opportunity to connect with other government peers. Most participants expressed a desire to **collaborate and promote the sharing of knowledge** and resources across agencies rather than acting as ‘silos of information’.

*If there was a forum, I think, linked with this where everyone was raising issues or came across a problem then created topics and then AGIMO looked at that and thought there's an issue that everyone's dealing with, what can we do to solve that. (Group 3, Federal government)*

- A number of resources beyond the Web Publishing Guide were used by participants, primarily for technical and other related information. Taking this idea further, participants were keen to see AGIMO act as more of a conduit to facilitate a cross-agency ‘virtual team’ which would maximise the breadth and depth of skills across agencies. This was also suggested as a solution to more ‘technical’ issues which are sometimes perceived to not be adequately addressed by AGIMO.

*I guess one thing that AGIMO could think about doing is perhaps, because they are across everybody, to start picking up those people with those skills... mentoring might be one way, but also creating almost like a virtual help desk or a virtual team. So that if I've got problems with PDF and nobody in my organisation can help me, I can place a call to AGIMO and they say actually we know of somebody who's a bit of a ninja at that, they're from Immigration or ABS, what we'll do is we'll organise for them to come out, is next Tuesday good and you can workshop it and we've also heard that someone from DEEWR needs a bit of help. (Group 3, Federal government)*



# Web-Publishing Guide Feedback

# Feedback

## Overall findings

- In general, feedback on the Web Publishing Guide was centred on the desire for AGIMO to make a greater emphasis on setting rules rather than stating guidelines, and providing **practical**, ‘best practice’ **examples** of how these might be achieved or adhered to.
- Several participants suggested that AGIMO should be **more authoritative** in their approach, which in turn would aid web-publishing staff in their roles in balancing the needs of senior internal clients, etc.
- Across all groups participants expressed a view that the Web Publishing Guide provides a useful **starting point** for information, but lacks sufficient ‘how-to’ or guidance required by users when determining how to go about something. As such, it was often the case that participants had not visited the Guide for long periods of time.
- Amongst some users there was a view that the Guide is **difficult to locate** online and that AGIMO needs to provide an easier searching mechanism to assist users to find the resource.
- Layout and navigation of the Guide are felt to be acceptable, with more concern being raised by the issue that it appears to be a **‘static’ resource** with little sense of currency. This was perceived to be evidenced by a lack of changes in the Guide witnessed by participants over time.
- There was strong support for AGIMO to use the Guide as a forum to harness the knowledge and experience of users by engagement through a **feedback mechanism** (suggestions, solutions, etc).

# Feedback

## Usage of the Web Publishing Guide

- Usage of the Guide appeared to be strongly linked to the web-publishing experience of individual staff. For those newer to their roles, it is seen as useful. Across most participants the Guide was most commonly used as a **starting point** or for **gap analysis** (i.e. how does our site compare to the guidelines?), but users often require more definitive 'how to' guidance.

*I (used it) when I was putting together our guide. Especially with new technologies out there there's a lot of people who are keen to use it and because we have no central area I point people to the Guide instead. At least if we've got something hopefully they won't get into too much trouble. (Group 2, Federal government)*

## Authority of the Web Publishing Guide

- Overall, participants were unanimous in their feedback that they would prefer AGIMO to provide a more authoritative role in setting online requirements, rather than providing guidance. This is linked to the fact that the role of AGIMO is considered to be to 'set clear standards', and without this clarity, the roles of government web-publishers is often challenged.

*If we had it as an overall rule and not a guide, it would make life so much easier. (Group 3, Federal government)*

*If you make them standards, not guidelines, people will listen to you. Put it up there on your intranet and make sure that every public service government department has it on their internet or intranet. (Group 3, Federal government)*

# Feedback

## Practical examples required

- Overwhelmingly, participants were emphatic in their feedback regarding the need for clear, practical examples within the Guide. Suggestions included scenarios, a pattern library, and checklists.

*I would like to see AGIMO put it into a scenario – it could be all hypothetical – just to see how they work things out or what they're talking about so you can look at it and go 'ah, this is what you mean'. (Group 2, Federal government)*

*They need a pattern catalogue or a pattern library – a guide that shows you how you do something on your website. A lot of organisations have pattern libraries so that new developers don't have to go through a lot of information when they do something new. They just pull a pattern down, and they can see it in action. (Group 4, Federal government)*

## Feedback mechanism

- In addition to seeking an opportunity for a discussion forum or network to increase cross-agency collaboration, some participants were also keen to see the Guide broadened to include a feedback mechanism to harness the views and experiences of users, in the form of suggestions, solutions, etc.

*I think it's push and pull as well. It's great that AGIMO can push out some information and maybe they can do that better, but in doing that pushing they need to sort of open up the shop a little bit so that people who are having informal discussions or communities of practice can actually say 'we've come up with this solution to a potential problem with PDFs, please consider it, let us know if you like it and we can have it' – let's do a dialogue instead of reading guidelines and going, well that doesn't tell me anything, I have no answer. (Group 3, Federal government)*

# Feedback

## Content issues

- Amongst most participants the Guide was viewed as a static resource, with infrequent changes. However there was a clear sense that users would prefer a dynamic resource providing an opportunity to contribute views or opinions, or examples where possible.

*It's not surprising [that the Guide doesn't change very often], but it's disappointing. Especially with all the accessibility stuff that's been happening lately and the push towards that and there's no new contact... (Group 3, Federal government)*

- With regard to alerts about changes to content, a choice between RSS feed and emails were the most preferred options suggested by participants.

*An alert would be very useful... the more important the change is the more useful it would be.  
(Group 1, non-federal government)*

- Overall, for some participants the classification/ordering of content under certain headings in the Guide was seen as confusing, and some found this concerning. This was particularly the case for some information contained under 'Technical'.

*The thing that doesn't fill me with much confidence is some of the headings used and some of the classification, like putting information architecture, navigation and search under 'technical development' drives me crazy!  
(Group 3, Federal government)*

# Feedback

## Layout and other design issues

- In addition to seeking an opportunity for a discussion forum or network to increase cross-agency collaboration, some participants were also keen to see the Guide broadened to include a feedback mechanism to harness the views and experiences of users, in the form of suggestions, solutions, etc.

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- Minor issues were raised with the title/heading of the Guide, with some participants indicating that this is missing a title, and others suggesting the title is misleading.

*What I was going to say was the actual heading itself, the web publishing guide, I think it's really misleading because web publishing to most people is the actual publishing of the content. There's a hell of a lot more in here than content. It's more a web management or web – it's not even development. It's more than development. I think it's really, really misleading. (Group 3, Federal government)*

# Feedback

## Navigation

- Several participants suggested that the Guide would benefit from user-centric navigation tailored to different audiences, e.g. management, design and technical users

*This guide is aiming at a whole bunch of people and one way you could address that is to say ok from a management point of view these are the important chunks, if you're designing, these are the things that you should be looking at more seriously and if you're the bunch of people who might be writing these pages then these are the sorts of things you should be across. So it would be a user-based way of structuring the guide. (Group 1, non-Federal government)*

## Semantic web development – user-tagging, micro formats

- Varied feedback was received about preferences regarding information on semantic web development, but generally this was only seen as important by a few.



Australian Government

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Australian Government Information Management Office

# Suggestions for improvement

## Suggestions for improvement

- Finally, participants were tasked with providing suggestions for enhancing the usefulness and usability of the Web Publishing Guide. These have been grouped and classified into key areas, and provide a checklist for AGIMO to understand the issues of most currency for users of the Guide.
- These mirror key findings emerging from the discussions, and the main suggestions include a need for:
  - stronger standards and guidelines, providing a source of authority for users
  - practical examples to provide a sense of best-practice
  - a discussion forum for collaboration among government web-publishers
  - a Guide which has currency by providing a feedback mechanism for users
  - the provision of further information and clear direction on accessibility issues.

# Suggestions for improvement

## Federal government feedback

- **Stronger guidelines** desired most:
  - Provide a clearer framework to be used across all agencies. Make the Guide a set of standards and/or rules. Give it authority
  - Make the Guide more specific and make the framework standards rather than just guidelines – detail exactly how departments should be publishing content
  - Provide a strong statement encouraging departments to conform to AGIMO standardised practices/processes
  - Make the minimum requirements obvious, e.g. ‘must’ versus ‘should’
  - Provide firm standards for areas of legal issues – publication, archiving and preservation
  - Support the Guide with compliance requirements, procedural tips and also have the CIO forum support the guidelines
  - Obtain executive endorsement from all departments – web publishing is normally low on the agenda but it is also the main form of information dissemination/education!
  - Provide answers rather than suggestions.

# Suggestions for improvement

## Federal government feedback cont...

### ■ Practical examples:

- Provide examples of how things are best implemented
- Share current examples of what departments are doing e.g. CMS purchases, designs, testing processes and results, etc.
- Provide links to 'mock up' examples of how it must/should be done
- Consider providing more whole of government resources e.g. templates, CMS
- Provide a standard 'legal disclaimer'
- Use Wiki to encourage expert consultation and practices/examples
- Better Practice checklists – update these and make them 'law'
- Provide a tool to test that your site complies – checklist/questionnaire
- Include real-life examples and case studies including State Gov sites (with their permission) as these sites are often perceived to be slightly ahead of the Australian Government sites
- Publish in PDF as well, so content can be printed off and read. PDF and HTML pages would need to be dated with the publication/review date
- Concentrate on issues specific to the Australian Government. General information can be found elsewhere.

# Suggestions for improvement

## Federal government feedback cont...

### ■ Forums, collaboration, feedback:

- Develop a community practice on the subject of web publishing
- Provide a collaborative space
- Provide something that gives users a way to find out and share with others what issues they are facing and how they are responding to new technology
- Provide a space for staff to share knowledge so that each department isn't doing their own thing – a way for various web teams to get together to raise/discuss issues, standards, etc
- A site where users can enter their questions
- Make the Guide a 'Push and Pull' facility – contribute to as well as reading from
- Form a user testing pool – volunteers between departments to help with usability and accessibility testing

### ■ Currency:

- Make the Guide timely and accurate, not just focussing on emerging technologies
- Keep the information up to date, current, and include links to other information that would be useful
- Provide a list of new or updated information, e.g. from the last three months

# Suggestions for improvement

## Federal government feedback cont...

- **Detailed accessibility** information:
  - More information is required on accessibility – e.g. WCAG 1.0 and WCAG 2.0
  - Provide stronger rulings on accessibility requirements or examples of different ways to implement them, e.g. PDF-HTML requirements
  - Specific guidance on publishing submissions, and making PDFs accessible
  
- **Further information** on:
  - Standardised media accessibility
  - Process of online government consultations and most suitable tools
  - Electronic Transaction Act – better understanding is needed
  - Web management.

# Suggestions for improvement

## Federal government feedback cont...

### ■ **Contacting AGIMO:**

- Provide clearer information in the Guide on the best way to contact AGIMO for advice – currently difficult to locate these details

### ■ **Accessing the Guide:**

- Not currently able to quickly and easily find the Guide online – make it easier to find and identify
- Provide easy access from AGIMO homepage

### ■ **Notification of changes to the Guide:**

- RSS feeds/email alerts preferred

### ■ **Look/feel of the Guide:**

- Improve to add more colour and more engaging design
- Provide a nice clean layout which is easy to understand.

# Suggestions for improvement

## Non-Federal government feedback

### ■ User-centric navigation and layout:

- Identify different audiences and present relevant and role-based information, e.g. for managers, content authors, web designers
- Provide dynamic, user-orientated information i.e. user selects who they are and what they want to see
- Move user-centric items to top of page. Put technical second and legal/policy last. Remove copyright restriction

### ■ Forums, collaboration:

- Provide stronger emphasis on events, training guides, and collaboration with peers for more efficient and effective projects
- Updates should include real time online collaboration, generic enough to apply regardless of tool
- Should include how to deal constructively with conflict (e.g. <http://pipka.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/US-Air-Force-Web-Response-Assessment.jpg>)

### ■ Specifics:

- Put a title tag on homepage, fix the logos
- De-emphasise 'Policy' section, i.e. drop it out of the top spot
- Get rid of 'what's new' unless there's something new that's really important
- Email, RSS most preferred methods to communicate changes to the Guide, policies, etc.



# Appendices

# Appendix A

## List of participating Australian Government organisations

- Attorney-General's Department
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Bureau of Rural Sciences (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)
- Centrelink
- Civil Aviation Services Authority
- Commonwealth Ombudsman
- CSIRO
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
- Department of Defence
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Health and Ageing
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship
- IP Australia
- Medicare Australia
- Murray Darling Basin Authority

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