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The customer experience, avoidable contact, and channel shift:

why improving council websites should be a priority

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socitm insight

Today I want to persuade you that……

- **Very large numbers** are now using the web

- Although benefits of shifting customers to 'self-service' are acknowledged, if the web doesn't work well enough, it can ***add significantly to*** avoidable contact and fail customers

- For '*better service to the customer and a better deal for taxpayers*', phone, web & F2F must be **joined up** in an integrated channel strategy and management plan

A statement of the obvious?

Socitm **research** on web and other channels says, even if understood,
this is not generally happening

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Socitm *Insight* Website take-up service

- Launched 2004
- Current subscriber sample of c100 covers all types of council
- Pop-up exit survey of 1 in 5 visitors collects info on:
  - info and services sought
  - whether satisfied/will return
  - freetext feedback
- From it we also know who's visiting and how many

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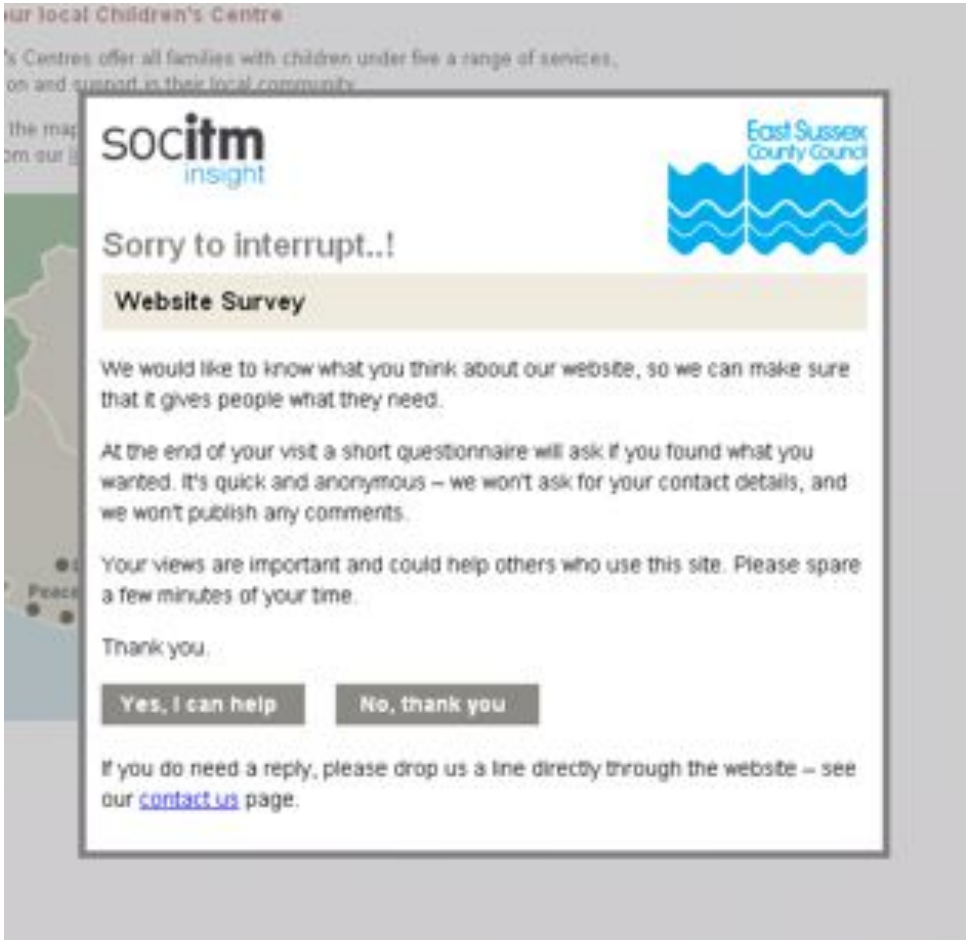
Website take-up service



Sample pop-up from East Sussex CC …….

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Key questions (out of 16)

Q1	How did you find out about the website?
Q3	Your main purpose for coming to the website today?
Q4	If not by website how would you have contacted the council?
Q5	Did you find what you were looking for today?
Q7	Rate your satisfaction with key (5) features of this website?
Q8	Likelihood of your returning to this website?
Q9	Overall satisfaction with your visit today?
Q10+	Optional info about visitor: age; sex; postcode; ethnicity; difficulty in using internet
Q16	Free text comments: - over 25,000 comments received across 79 councils in typical month in 2008

Lots of people complete the survey

In September 2008:

- Nearly 30,000 surveys completed from nearly 5m visitors to 81 council websites
- ie c.380 per participating council
- Over 25,000 free text comments received c.320 per council)
- sample is very large – each council has well over sample size needed to extrapolate/predict

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Survey tells us who's using council websites

I live in this area	61%
I work in this area	24%
I work for the council	6%
I am planning a visit/visiting	5%
I am planning to move here	2%
I am a councillor	0.7%

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It tells us why they came this time

• Find out about job vacancies	13.96%
• Find out about schools	6.75%
• Find out about/book leisure facilities	5.71%
• Find out about bin collection / recycling	4.38%
• Find out about local history	4.33%
• Renew/reserve library book	4.13%
• Find out about housing	3.37%
• View/make planning application	3.33%
• Find out about libraries	3.10%
• Make payment	2.94%

continued >>>>>

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It tells us why they came this time

• Report a problem	2.66%
• Find out about adult / further education	2.47%
• Find out about policy / strategy /committee meetings	2.15%
• Find out about social care	1.81%
• Book an event or leisure activity	1.80%
• Obtain council form	1.20%
• Apply for licence	0.47%
• Other - please specify	35.44%

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The web likely to be creating significant numbers of avoidable contacts

Web failures: best results Sept 2008
(answered 'No' to 'Did you find it?')

Bracknell Forest 10.53%
Salisbury DC 12.00%

Rest of councils

48 under 20%
25 between 20% and 25%
11 over 25% (up to 31%)
Some months up to 44%

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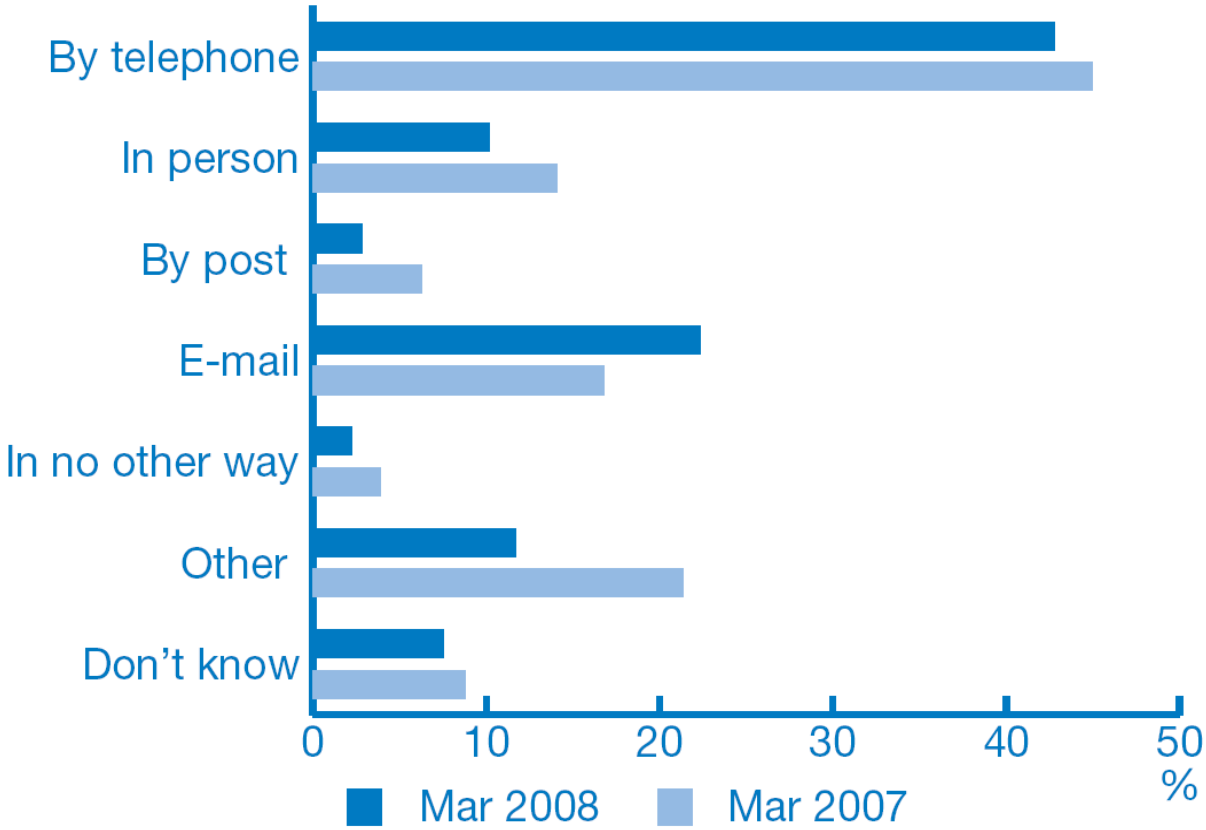
If they can't find it on the web they'll most likely hit the phone



Q: How would you contact the council if not by the web?

Web volumes and comparison with phone, face to face and other channels

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Preference for the phone is a myth

- Most managers probably continue to believe that customers prefer the phone
- This idea supported by eg AT Kearney research published this summer in the Guardian
- Is their research based on what people ***say*** they do?
- Socitm, GovMetric and Tameside figures based on what they ***actually*** do

No new lines of inquiry

How many are using council websites?

In September 2008 website take-up data shows:

- 20.2m visitors came to council websites
- Up from 8.7m visitors per month in 2004
- Sample of 59 councils had 7% increase in visitors over 12 months
- March 07 to 08 showed 28% increase in visitors

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Channel volume figures from Tameside

	Back office	Customer services	Totals
Phone	431,000	272,143	703,143
F2F	9,350	83,463	92,813
E-mail & post	294,352		294,352
Totals	533,722	355,606	1,090,328

Self-service contacts = 1,984,500
more than **2x** total volume of all other channels

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Its not just Tameside…….

Tameside's web volumes are very near the WTS average for metropolitan districts (154,317):

154,317 x 12 months gives annual figure of c 1.9 m

September's unique visitors by council type

Type of council	No of councils	Average visitors
Shire county	15	91903
Shire district	26	22110
London borough	7	87387
Metropolitan district	17	154317
Unitary (E)	8	48057
Unitary (W)	3	43235
Unitary (S)	5	40927
Total	81	

Relative take-up and performance of phone and web channels

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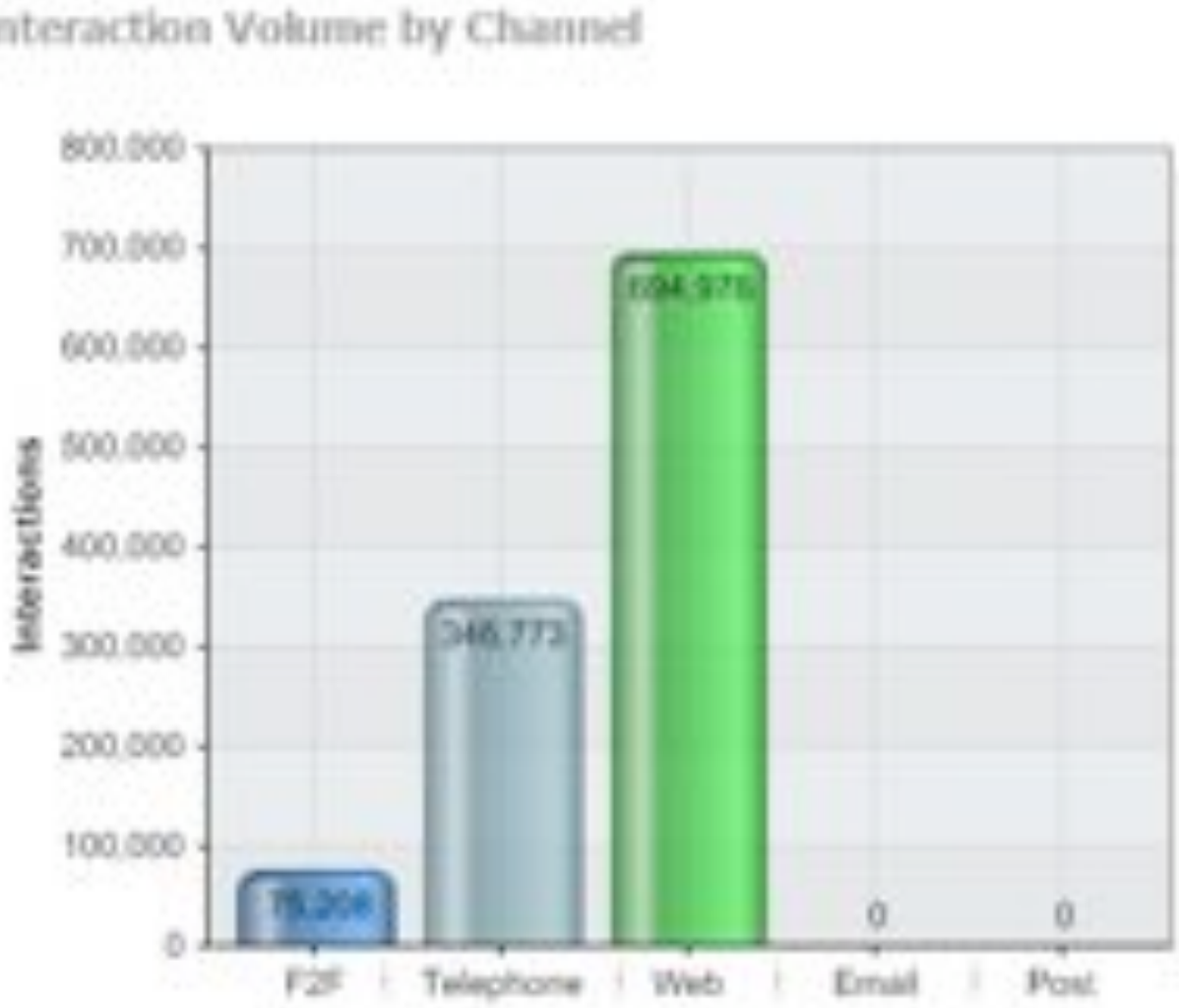
The web is the biggest channel

32 councils (July 2008)



Source: GovMetric

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The web is the worst performing channel

	Good	Average	Poor
Phone	89%	9%	2%
F2F	67%	10%	23%
Web	13%	49%	38%

Source: GovMetric

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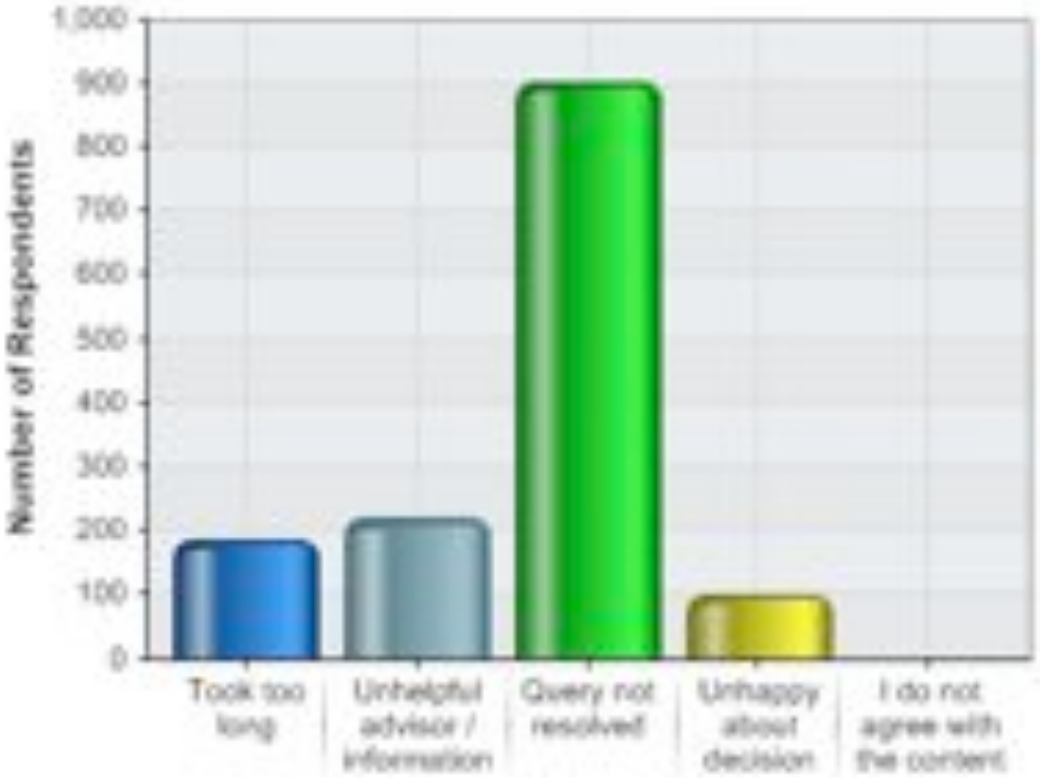
Reasons for dissatisfaction with the web

Reason for Dissatisfaction: Web



Reason	#
Took too long	187 (7%)
Unhelpful advisor / information	218 (8%)
Query not resolved	902 (32%)
Unhappy about decision	98 (3%)
I do not agree with the content	0 (0%)
No Reason	1407 (50%)
Total	**2812 (100%)**

Some final thoughts……..

Greater priority must be given to improving the web channel

- If it doesn't work well enough, the web ***adds to*** avoidable contact and fails customers
- Improvement requires **better understanding** of customer needs/wants from the web
- Tools like Socitm's *Website take-up service* reveal **problems**, help define a **quality experience** and support **improvement**
- Web also needs to be better integrated with **customer service/insight** work

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Better answered – showed phone channel poorly joined up with the web

- Callers often passed on to other individuals or organisations, or called back, when information being sought was available on the website
- Only 1 in 5 councils' out of hours message referred callers to the web

Hardly anyone knew they had all the information I needed on their website.

Reviewer

Recent evidence of un-joined-up-ness from poll at 5 Dec Customer Access Improvement Service event

- **Is your Director of Customer Service in overall control of all channels of service delivery?**

  Of 30 councils polled half had a Director of Customer Service: of these, 6 were responsible for all channels

- **Authority has an explicit strategy for encouraging self-service?**

  7 of 30 attending said yes

- **Web & contact centre managers meet regularly about how to divert phone enquiries to the web?**

  Just 6 of 30 said such meetings were held – and only half had contact centres

More evidence of un-joined-up-ness

- **Are call/contact centre staff encouraged to suggest to callers that they can find information on the web**?

  18 said yes. 6 said there was no policy

- **Does your 'we are experiencing high levels of traffic' message suggest people go to the web?**

  6 said yes

- **What proportion of your phone enquiries *could* have been answered on the web?**

  Just one delegate thought their council doing work on this

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Contact

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Thank you for your time