

GOODMAN RESEARCH GROUP, INC.
Program Evaluation • Consultation • Market Research

Evaluation of MIT World Web Site Executive Summary

Submitted to

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
School of Engineering
Professional Education Programs

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April 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MIT World is a free and open internet-based informal learning environment that provides commercial-free global access to streaming video of MIT events, such as public lectures, keynote conference presentations, and major seminars (<http://mitworld.mit.edu>). Developed by the MIT School of Engineering Professional Education Programs (PEP) in 2001, the archive now has more than 275 videos of lectures from thought leaders, Nobel Laureates, Fortune 500 executives, scientists, engineers, technologists, writers and visionaries covering a wide range of topics, ideas and trends. The Web site is aimed at a broad audience, including adults and youth in the general public as well as science and technology-oriented groups in educational, corporate, and other fields. There are approximately 30,000 new visitors to the site each month. A visitor can sign up to an email listserv to receive email updates as new videos are added to the archive; there are currently over 7,200 people on the email listserv.

In autumn 2005, Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG) was contracted by MIT PEP to conduct formative evaluation of MIT World. The purpose of the evaluation was to inform MIT about the audience, how visitors are using the site, outcomes of use, and their feedback. GRG developed and administered a web-based survey that was sent to a sample of the listserv and was posted on MIT World.

KEY RESULTS

A total of 635 people completed GRG's survey; 502 were members of the MIT World Listserv and 133 were visitors to the Web site. Most respondents were male and, on average, were 39 years old. Most respondents were born outside of the USA and slightly more than half currently live outside of the USA. Most respondents were well educated, holding either a Master's degree or 4-year college degree, and were either employed or a college student. Across the other survey results, there were often statistically significant differences based on type of visitor (Listserv vs Visitor), residency (USA vs Foreign), age (under 40 vs over 40), and gender, as described in the full report.

Most respondents found out about MIT World while surfing the Web for specific information or saw a link on the main MIT Web site. A smaller percentage saw it mentioned in a newsletter, article, book, or mentioned on another part of the MIT Web site, or heard about it from colleagues.

Respondents used MIT World for their own educational interests – to keep informed, learn something new, and for self-education – rather than because they were required to. Technology and engineering, business, physics, and biology were the general topics of most interest.

Most respondents first used MIT World during 2003 or later. Almost all respondents reported visiting the site about once a month or more often, and they accessed it using a Broadband Internet connection. Two-thirds watched an entire video from start to finish during each visit. Ninety percent searched for videos, mostly searching by topic or speaker(s) involved. Besides watching the videos,

about a third looked at information provided about the videos, such as an overview of the video, the video index list, and speakers' biographies. Respondents rated the depth of content and range of content very positively. They rated the quality of information as quite high, with three-quarters or more believing that the Web site is a good source of information, timely and relevant to current world issues, and engaging. Respondents were also satisfied with the different types of information found on MIT World, particularly the information relating to the videos.

The types of educational products and services that best met respondents' needs to learn about, or keep current in a particular field or area of interest were free web-based education and resources. This suggests that the format of MIT World is a good way to meet the educational needs of visitors.

MIT World's ease of navigation, organization of content, and the search function were considered good to excellent by at least three-quarters or more of respondents. Only about one in ten mentioned having technical problems, primarily being unable to view videos, interruptions when viewing, or slow video feed.

MIT World has had an influence on respondents; nearly two-thirds sought out additional information on the topics they viewed and just under half shared information with others by discussing it with family, friends, or co-workers or emailing about it. Most respondents planned to use information from MIT World for their own personal learning. The overwhelming majority of respondents had recommended MIT World to others. Of the third of respondents who had visited a university Web site similar to MIT World, many rated MIT as much more informative, comprehensive, useful, interesting, and scholarly. They perceived MIT World to contain a broader range of topics than other similar sites.

Respondents would like to see more videos in their areas of interest (top two were technology/computers, business.) The most common suggestions for increasing the Web site's usefulness were to improve viewing technology and to increase access by making the videos portable and downloadable.

In summary, the MIT World Web site has been successful in its mission to provide broad content to a fairly wide audience in the USA and around the world. As a free web-based education service it is meeting its users' needs to learn about, or keep current in, a particular field or area of interest. Respondents were quite pleased with most aspects of the site, compared it favorably to other Web sites, have discussed the video contents, and recommended the site to others.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

GRG recommends that MIT World continue to make available the breadth of videos they are already providing. In addition:

- Consider promotion or PR to notify more people of this resource.
- Include more videos on the site.
- Improve the viewing technology and access.
- Include more non-video information on video content.