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July 3, 2012

## **2010 CENSUS PLANNING MEMORANDA SERIES**

**No. 210**

MEMORANDUM FOR      The Distribution List

From:                      Burton Reist *[signed]*  
Acting Chief, Decennial Management Division

Subject:                    2010 Census Integrated Communications Program: 2010 Census  
Website Assessment Report

Attached is the 2010 Census Integrated Communications Program: 2010 Census Website Assessment Report. The Quality Process for the 2010 Census Test Evaluations, Experiments, and Assessments was applied to the methodology development and review process. The report is sound and appropriate for completeness and accuracy.

If you have any questions about this document, please contact Mary Bucci at (301) 763-9925.

Attachment

May 24, 2012

# 2010 Census Integrated Communications Program 2010 Census Website Assessment Report

U.S. Census Bureau standards and quality process procedures were applied throughout the creation of this report.

**Final**

**Eric Newburger**

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Associate Director for Communications



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## Executive Summary

The 2010 Census Website page was implemented by the Census 2010 Publicity Office and was the center for the integration of the entire 2010 Census Communications Campaign. Programs as diverse as Census in Schools, the Road Tour, and Partnerships all delivered content to their constituents via the 2010 Census website - *2010Census.gov* – and it continues to provide value to the Census Bureau as a release vehicle for the 2010 Census results. This post-campaign use represents a significant expansion of the original vision of the website.

This website was created in an expedited manner from June 2009 through October 2010. This assessment will show that this rushed effort was ultimately successful and even award winning although it was challenging to implement. The goals of this assessment will be to document the difficulties this late start created, as well as the successes the Census Bureau achieved.

In creating the *2010Census.gov* website, the Census Bureau referenced the Census 2000 communications program, which had been credited for helping to reverse a three-decade decline in the mail response rates and also to reduce the differential undercount for historically undercounted population groups. However, with the increasing prevalence of the Internet in the United States combined with corresponding changes in public expectations for both the quality of online content and the ways of interacting with that content, digital media presented both new opportunities and new challenges in the 2010 Census.

New technologies, in particular social media, were used to reach segments of the population that had previously been difficult to reach. It has become a major means of correspondence in the nation, which allows us to quickly publish and disseminate documents of all sorts such as tool kits, press releases, talking points, brochures, pamphlets, study guides, videos, audio recordings, still photos, and data maps at a low cost. Furthermore, the Census Bureau could put all these documents in the same place, making it easy for people to find what they needed. The 2010 Census website allowed us to instantly transmit to all of our audience segments via this one channel.

Given the central role for 2010 Census website, it was unfortunate that the web team formed so late in the campaign timeline. This required a compressed development schedule that naturally resulted in some difficulties. For example, had the Census Bureau been able to user-test the marquee prior to launch, the Census Bureau would likely have discovered the problems with its interface and corrected them. Had the web team begun earlier, the Census Bureau could have fully integrated the Census in Schools and Jobs webpages into the rest of the site. Our social media efforts, while successful, would likely have been more successful, since social media promulgates via a grass-roots growth, which requires time to mature.

The Census Bureau made considerable use of the internet for the 2010 Census Communications Campaign, with many successes and some failures. If the Census Bureau takes more time to plan our efforts for the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau should be able to avoid repeating mistakes, while making even greater use of this new and pervasive communications tool. Based on the results of this assessment, there are four prominent Lessons Learned and Recommendations:



1. The web has become a major communications medium in the United States, and it should be critical to the 2020 Census;
2. The web allows for targeting messages to disparate audience segments to a degree beyond that offered by traditional media, and this contributed to the integration of the 2010 Census Communications Campaign. Future campaigns, bolstered by more detailed audience segmentation models may benefit from additional investment in this targeted media;
3. Presuming the 2020 Census adheres to a schedule similar to the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau should begin the 2020 Census web effort should begin planning, design, coding of test pages, and most importantly user testing by 2016 at the latest, to allow early parts of the census campaign (such as the hiring of enumerators) to benefit from the web strategy.
4. Using sources outside the Census Bureau to create the website was challenging. Intimate knowledge of Census Bureau datasets and methods of operation had to be provided to people with no significant background in the subject matter. The 2020 Census web effort should allow the Census Bureau to develop an internal staff capable of building the kinds of tools the Census Bureau will use without using outside contractors for programming.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Scope

The aim of this assessment is to describe the various efforts that the 2010 Census Integrated Communications Program (ICP) engaged in during the 2010 Census and the outputs that resulted from this work. Analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing the measurable effectiveness of the ICP relative to program goals is beyond the scope of this study.

This assessment will describe the benefits web-based communications conveyed to the ICP. In an age of declining survey participation rates, the Census Bureau made use of every possible communications vehicle that might prove effective in gaining the public's cooperation with our survey requests. As web-based communications proliferate in the form of new web applications, social media networks, and mobile platforms; the Census Bureau increasingly depended upon these technologies to both connect with its constituents, and to deliver content to data consumers. This assessment of Census 2010 Publicity Office's (C2PO) efforts to leverage web technologies in service of the Census Bureau's largest census to date should prove instructive to those tasked with using the web as a key communications tool for future operations.

## 1.2 Intended Audience

This document is meant to inform the program managers and staff responsible for planning the 2020 Census in relation to using the Internet as a tool for awareness and data dissemination.

# 2. Background

## 2.1 Census 2000

Census 2000 was the first time that the Census Bureau had used the Internet during a census campaign. At that time, approximately 42 percent of homes had Internet access (Newburger, 2001). Publication of daily mail response rates by geography engaged the public. For example, USA Today repackaged the census data and published its own map each day. The Census Bureau posted all logos, taglines, and other graphic elements on the Internet so that local governments and census partners could use them (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

## 2.2 2010 Census

For the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau created the *2010Census.gov* website. The *2010Census.gov* website was the Census Bureau's primary means of providing promotional information about the 2010 Census. All promotional content had to be on the web and available in various modes as expected by users. For example:

1. Partners accessed the website to get logos and printable promotional materials.
2. Media outlets used the website to download Public Service Announcements.
3. Job seekers used the website to find out how to apply for enumerator positions.
4. Media specialists accessed the website to find answers to frequently asked questions.
5. Teachers downloaded materials from the website for Census in Schools efforts.

6. The public at large looked to the website to be informative and interactive.
7. Many ethnic populations accessed In-Language Materials.

The web offered unique opportunities. It provided a platform for instant responses to public relations challenges. It gave another venue for communicating with a public whose attention is increasingly divided by an atomized media environment that offers literally hundreds of channels divided among dozens of delivery mechanisms. The website provided a central clearinghouse for all sorts of materials at a very low cost, only needing a small staff (including contractors) to post materials as they were created in the course of our normal campaign operations. It also allowed the Census Bureau to connect with a particularly hard-to-count population, the young unattached mobiles.

The web also presented new challenges. Online security and privacy issues had become more complex during the decade. The Census Bureau chose not to offer an Internet version of the 2010 Census form. This was contrary to public expectations and required explanations.

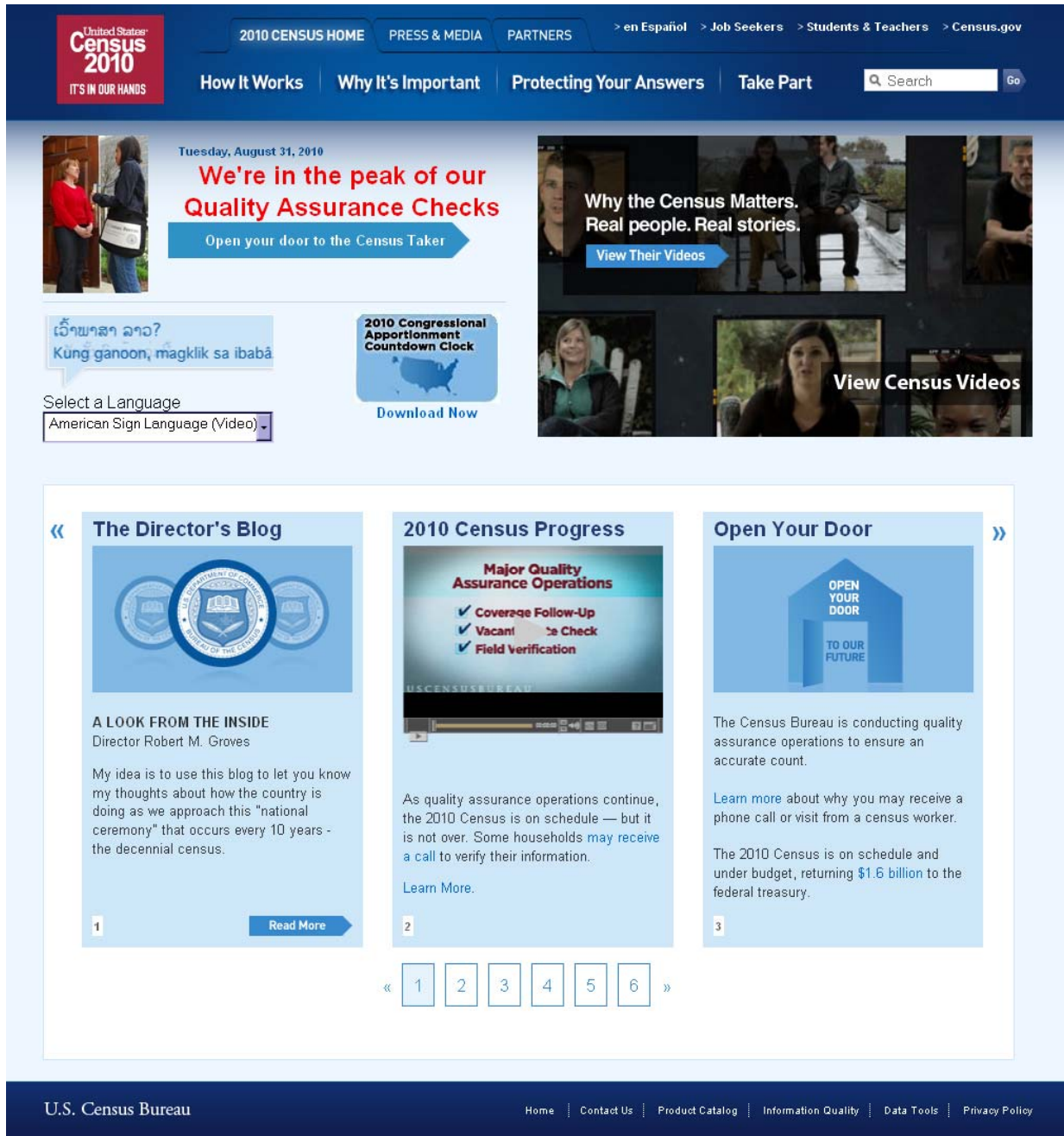
The ICP had three phases: (1) building awareness of census, (2) motivating people to respond to the form, and (3) encouraging cooperation with enumerators during non-response follow-up (NRFU) operations. The website content needed to reflect these changing phases.

The *2010Census.gov* included a main page with active content, such as the rotating languages guide selector, the marquee video-interactive module, multi-media content (“The Whole Story”, blogs), and the “slider,” a group of rotating modules for announcing the most current online offerings. For most of the campaign, the “Take 10” map and navigational elements made up the remainder of the main page. Global navigation on every page led to four areas, namely:

1. the Partners page (</2010.census.gov/partners/>);
2. an online news room (</2010.census.gov/news/>);
3. the Road Tour page (</2010.census.gov/roadtour/>); and
4. a group of several pages designed to forward the three messages of the 2010 Census campaign, “easy, important, and safe”.

Additional pages lead to Census Jobs and Census in Schools, which predated the redesigned website and required some “re-skinning” so that the style of these pages would not clash with the main website.

Figure 1: 2010Census.gov Main Page



Source: 2010Census.gov

2010Census.gov as it appears now began in 2008 with most of the work occurring after July 2009, in time for an October launch. However, the launch was only the start. The Web Team and contractors (principally DraftFCB and We Like Small) continued to work through the entire communications campaign to post fresh content almost daily and to add new applications by all remaining deadlines.

## Staffing

Prior to the redesign in mid to late 2009, the website effort had been largely staffed by contractors. With the redesign effort, staff throughout the Communications (ADCOM) directorate launched two “Strike Teams” – one for the web, and one for Take 10 – each comprised of five to eight people from across the directorate, who would spend large proportions of their time on the website and meet weekly with executive management. Most of these staff members had significant additional responsibilities elsewhere in the directorate, and none would spend 100 percent of their time on the web alone. In addition to these core employees, staff throughout ADCOM produced content for posting on the web, at the same time, the contractor expanded to include additional sub teams. The Census Bureau has no consolidated figures for staff time on the website, and thus no estimate of staff cost. However, the contract eventually came in at just over four million dollars.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Methods

Methodology used to answer the questions below were research questions conducted in depth through informant interviews with Census Bureau staff and contractors who conducted and contributed to the research efforts. In addition, C2PO collected and reviewed documentation relating to all research efforts including memoranda, responses to public inquiries, and lessons learned reports.

### 3.2 Data to answer the questions were derived from the following sources - that are either currently available or will be available after campaign closeout:

- Requirements documents.
- Usability testing results.
- Metrics of web usage.
- Key informant interviews that allow us to qualitatively collect information from all parties closely involved with the 2010 Census digital campaign.
- Archival research including e-mails, memos, and documentation (e.g., lessons learned reports) pertaining to the 2010 Census digital campaign.

### 3.3 Questions to be Answered

Did the 2010 Census Website team successfully:

1. Develop the 2010 website as originally planned? If not, were there budgetary impacts to the changes?
2. Design the website so that it was simple, easy-to-use, and allow for immediate discovery and navigation of content and features? If yes, describe.
3. Generate content that would easily go viral and take steps to make viralization more likely?
4. Design the 2010 Census website so that it was the primary online destination for information regarding the 2010 Census? If yes, how?

5. Focus on the core mission of awareness, increasing response rates to the 2010 Census and earning cooperation with enumerators during the 2010 Census Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) operations on the website?
6. Develop the website to promote the following three fundamental messages of the 2010 Census?
  - a. Ease
  - b. Safety
  - c. Importance
7. Design the website so that it could respond to public questions, issues, and concerns in a timely fashion? If yes, describe.
8. Design the website to provide a rich and engaging user experience, encouraging them to make return visits and recommend the site to others? If yes, describe.
9. Develop interactive webpages and materials to integrate, promote, and support the following areas?
  - a. Partner Communications Area
  - b. Online News Room
  - c. 2010 Census Jobs
  - d. Census in Schools
10. In what ways did the website act as a platform to distribute the 2010 Census messages and content?
11. Did the website's messaging complement Paid Advertising, Public Relations, National and Regional Partnerships, and Census in Schools?
12. How did the visual design, copy development, and coding of the *2010Census.gov* site (Search Engine Optimization) provide the best possible organic search results for the website and for the public to access?
13. Did the Search Engine Marketing (SEM) approach promote the website and increase the visibility in Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs) through the use of paid placement, contextual advertising, and paid inclusion? If yes, describe.
14. How did the inclusion of Social Media in the website help to achieve the objectives of the communications campaign? How many followers did each site have?
15. Did the website team design the marquee so that it represented everyone in the United States? If yes, describe.
16. Was the Road Tour application updated accurately and in real-time so that users could track each bus and its route?
17. Were multimedia elements successfully integrated?
18. Was the Spanish mirror site planned and implemented?
19. How were in-language materials grouped/organized on the website?
20. How was the decision made regarding what languages to include on the website?
21. What process was established to review in-language materials for the website?
22. How many hits did the in-language website pages get during the 2010 Census? Based on most hits, which were the top language pages?

## **4. Limitations**

### **4.1 Insufficient Documentation**

Due to the extremely hectic environment within the Census Bureau during the 2010 Census communications campaign, some topics may lack detailed documentation that would otherwise appear in this assessment. In these cases, this assessment will rely solely upon first person interviews.

### **4.2 Changing Technology**

Web technology is changing rapidly. While this assessment conveys lessons we learned about managing web-based communications and delivers evidence about the power of those communication techniques, all of the particular technologies the Census Bureau employed will be utterly outdated by the 2020 Census. For example, “Flash” – the dominant web animation program last year – was used for all components of the website that needed to move on screen. As the Census Bureau writes this assessment, Flash is losing market share to competitors such as HTML5. There is no way to predict which particular technology will emerge as dominant even months from now, much less in years. Ironically, the last minute approach the Census Bureau took in creating the 2010 Census website actually conveyed an advantage in that it assured our use of the most up-to-date technologies.

## **5. Results**

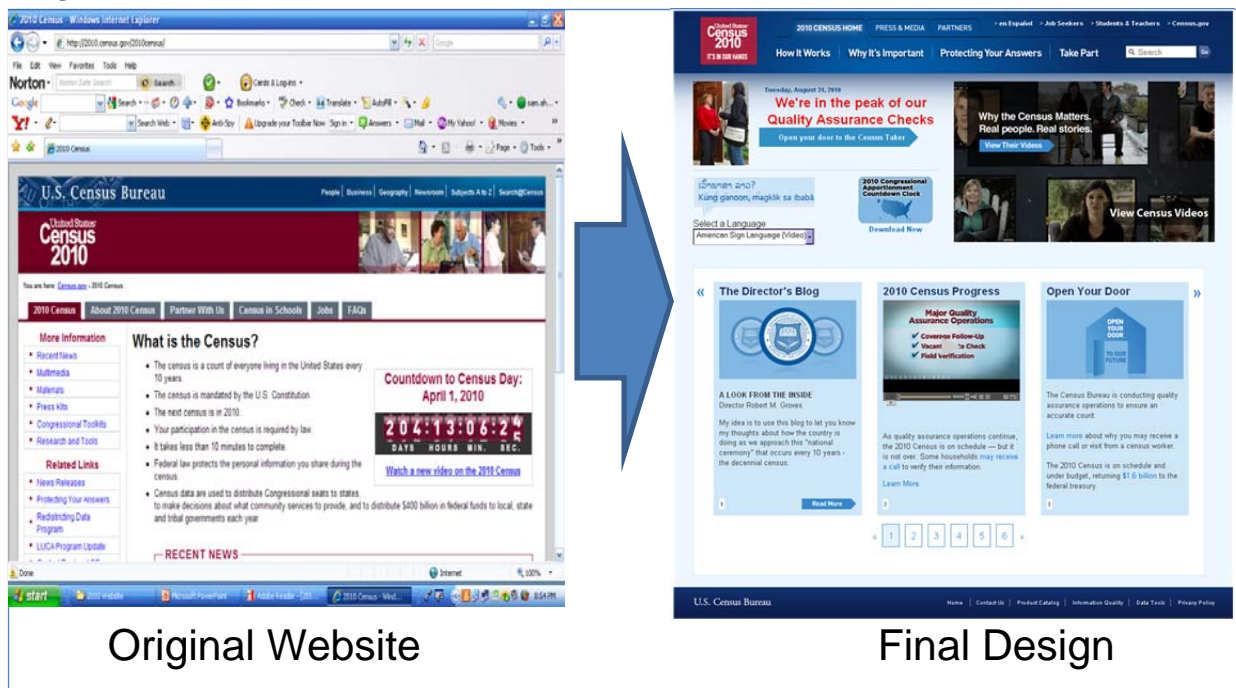
### **5.1 Did the 2010 Census Website team successfully develop the 2010 website as originally planned? If not, were their budgetary impacts to the changes?**

The Census Bureau’s expectations for the website shifted significantly during the ICP. The first 2010 Census website was a recruitment site that advertised for field representative positions. The Census Bureau then began to work on a website devoted to advertising the 2010 Census itself. The site began as a small component of a larger communications plan. When the view of the website changed, its role grew until it became a focal point for the whole 2010 ICP. The original communications website design was essentially scrapped and completely redone. The redesigned 2010 Census website proved useful enough that the Census Bureau retained it beyond the campaign, using it as a vehicle for releasing 2010 Census data.

A change in executive management within ADCOM in May 2009 drove the change in the website. The website became more complex than originally conceived, requiring commitment of additional development funds. This change of vision and scope made the 2010 Census website a success. The history of these changes in scope, and their budgetary impacts, began with a new task order, and developed through a series of ten contract modifications. This new task order marked the fundamental shift in Census Bureau expectations for the site. Prior to this, the website work had been split between two separate task orders: one for Partnership Program Support which included high level requirements for a Partnership Communications Area; the other for Public Relations which included high level requirements for an On-line Newsroom. In both cases, the requirements were so high level that the contractor was unable to create anything

beyond a broad outline of the website. The Census Bureau de-scoped website work from these two task orders, and shifted the requirements and funds into one task order.

Figure 2: 2010 Census Website



Source: 2010 Census Website Development, Briefing for: National Congress of American Indian and National American Indian Housing Council

The contractor and their sub-contractors worked on the website with considerable management effort from the Census Bureau. Contractors had little or no knowledge of Census Bureau procedures, policies, or data sets, and creating the website required knowledge of all three. For example, the Take 10 map tool required knowledge of disclosure avoidance policies and our geographies as well as the datasets that describe their intricate boundaries. Census Bureau staff, organized by C2PO, but also including members from the Public Information Office (PIO), Geography Division, Administrative and Customer Services Division, Computer Services Division, Decennial Management Division (DMD), Decennial Statistical Studies Division, Policy Office, and others, spent many hours inculcating this knowledge in the sub-contractors, a job made all the more complex by the need to work through the intermediary of the main contractor.

Security was also a problem. While contractors and their sub-contractors had their own development site, it differed in critical ways from the Census Bureau servers. For security reasons, the sub-contractors were unable to work on our servers directly. Each new code delivery resulted in hours or sometimes days of debugging by Census Bureau Internet staff. The lack of any Census Bureau staff able to work with one of the software elements the contractors used (“Flash”) meant that any code delivery that included this program was unchangeable without a whole new delivery. Simple wording changes were impossible, if the wording was in Flash.



## **5.2 Design the website so that it was simple, easy-to-use, and allow for immediate discovery and navigation of content and features? If yes, describe.**

Because of the complexity of the existing Census Bureau main webpage, management acted on recommendations from the contractor (Johnson, 2008) to create a dedicated new website for the 2010 communications campaign - *www.2010Census.gov*. This would serve as a central location for 2010 Census information of all sorts: jobs, details of the 2010 Census questionnaire, Census in Schools, and information about data releases. It would display everything related to the 2010 Census in one place. The website was intended to eschew jargon, provide navigation that met or exceeded industry best practices, and focus on three key messages: that the 2010 Census was easy, important, and safe. The Census Bureau employed usability testing to ensure the resulting webpages met these goals (Cisneros, 2009).

The webpage was dedicated to a single call to action of mailing back the census form. It incorporated global, local, and contextual navigation on every page (see Web requirements), as well as a search function. This ensured that users could find anything on the site from anywhere in the site within three clicks.

The front page of the website included several modules: a marquee interactive experience --a large banner that, when clicked, brought users to one of three virtual street corners meant to represent rural, urban, and sub-urban areas. Within these environments, it was possible to click on people who would then tell their census-related stories through video, a multi-media area or a “slider” (a series of rotating images that, when clicked, lead to topical assets the Census Bureau wished to give prominence to). All of these highlighted a variety of offerings including the latest posts, the news window, the language module, a Frequently Asked Questions page, and the “Whole Story” area for debunking census myths. All of these modules highlighted the three messages of the site – easy, important, and safe – but through different kinds of media. This variety of media, all on the front page, ensured that each user was likely to find some content that would meet their request for information.

## **5.3 Generate content that would easily go viral and take steps to make viralization more likely?**

The web team created blog posts, videos, and embeddable “widgets” (the countdown clock and Take 10 widget). These kinds of content were easily viralized, since their uniform resource locators (URLs) could be dropped into other sites as links.

In addition to creating the content and providing URLs, we also used social media tools to make viralization easier. Videos were posted on YouTube as well as our own site. The Census Bureau hosted a Facebook page and sent out updates through Twitter. Visitors to the website found links to over 140 social media networks/tools as a tab on every page (via a “share” button), and a dedicated social network page (Aherrera et al., 2009b).

## **5.4 Design the 2010 Census Website so that it was the primary online destination for information regarding the 2010 Census. If yes, how?**

Web users who went to *www.census.gov* found a link to the 2010 Census site prominently displayed. The Census Bureau used search-optimization and embedded code words to ensure

that web users searching for information on the 2010 Census would find a link to our site at the top of the list.

The 2010 Census website included pages dedicated to all major programs associated with the 2010 Census: the general public, census partners, Census in Schools participants, Census on Campus (college level program begun in the Boston region), Road Tour participants, and even job seekers interested in becoming enumerators.

The site included an online newsroom for press or bloggers. All news releases went out via the website. Media outlets requiring “b-roll” for their news broadcasts found it on the website, as did outlets seeking a public service announcement.

All programs producing “toolkits” for particular constituents, such as members of congress, posted them on the website. The Take 10 participation rate program map went out through the website. Language assistance guides -- and eventually associated videos -- were all provided through the website.

### **5.5 Focus on the core mission of awareness, increasing response rates to the 2010 Census and earning cooperation with enumerators during the 2010 Census Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) Operation on the website?**

The entire site was designed with these goals in mind, as well as integrating with the larger ICP, which shared these goals (Aherrera et al., 2009a).

The 2010 ICP had three phases which parallel the goals of the campaign: an awareness building phase; a mail response phase (the motivation phase); and a NRFU phase. The website became a hub of the communications campaign. As such, it helped to promote each component of the campaign: partnerships, public relations, the Road Tour, and even paid advertising. As the campaign progressed through the three phases, the website changed its face and content to match. Partnership materials, press releases, road tour stops and calendars, and copies of our ads all went on the website timed to match the campaign phases.

In addition, the website had exclusive online content set to match the needs of the campaign phases. For example, during the awareness phase, the Census Bureau created and gave prominence to the interactive form. During the mail back period, the Census Bureau gave prominence to the Take 10 map. During NRFU, the website promoted video messages on the front of the slider that specifically addressed households eligible for NRFU. In fact, the Census Bureau created videos for each phase, as well as blogs, frequently asked questions, and other content designed with the changing phases of the campaign in mind.

### **5.6 Develop the website to promote the following three fundamental messages of the 2010 Census:**

- a. Ease**
- b. Importance**
- c. Safety**

The website included pages devoted to each of these three core messages, which were available both as tabs on the front page, and through global navigation elements on every page of the site.

The messages appear as, “How it works,” “Why it’s important,” and “Protecting your answers.” These titles came out of our user testing prior to launch.

Each tab led to a page or pages containing information about the selected messages. For example, the safety tab led to information about confidentiality of census data, videos about the oath Census Bureau workers take to keep personal information private for life, and related materials.

### **5.7 Design the website so that it could respond to public questions, issues, and concerns in a timely fashion? If yes, describe.**

The website was constantly refreshed with new content and was designed to make access to this content easy.

For example, the front page included a prominent “slider” module, that is, a set of screen-blocks that could shuffle like a deck of cards, allowing users to slide from one block to the next. Each block could hold a video, an frequently asked questions (FAQ), a Take 10 map, or a press release with a photo. These blocks were relatively simple for our programmers to exchange, and could be reordered for emphasis by placing them automatically on top of the deck (top three showed) when the page opened.

The front page had a number of modules specifically aimed to answer questions in a timely fashion. These included: the question submission page (part of the FAQ page); the blogs, including the Census Bureau Director’s blog that could develop an authoritative answer to an issue on the rise within 12 hours; the “Full Story” area for myth-busting, including both text and video; and the multi-media area that allowed us to post videos with links anywhere else on the site.

In addition, our social media sites (principally Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and MySpace) allowed us to address issues, take questions, and send out alerts in nearly real time.

The website was the primary tool in our rapid response efforts. For example, when social media measures and other indicators suggested a backlash on the issue of the constitutionality of the census questions, the Census Bureau was able to use the web to answer this question, through blogs, through Facebook posts, and through the release of the James Madison/Founding Fathers video. The Census Bureau was able to publicize these efforts via online advertising to targeted audiences via specific sites, and through social media tools such as Twitter.

### **5.8 Design the website to provide a rich and engaging user experience, encouraging them to make return visits and recommend the site to others? If yes, describe.**

The website included a multitude of content, from video to blogs to frequently asked questions, to explorable content like the interactive form and Take 10 map. The Census Bureau provided links to major social media sites, encouraging visitors to share their experiences, to “Friend” us on Facebook, retweet our Twitter content, embed the Take 10 widget on their own webpages, and similar activities.

The website also included the marquee, a fully interactive video experience, rich in content and detail. This provided an immersive virtual environment which lead to a series of short

documentaries about people, and how the census intersected with their lives. The videos were shot by a documentary film crew, with film-quality production values, and told many interesting stories.

Unfortunately, this interactive experience may have proved too involved for our web visitors. Very few people ever clicked on this major element of the website. The most popular among these videos received views in the thousands, and some only reached hundreds of people. The marquee spanned the top of the screen, and had the appearance of being a banner advertisement; our users apparently did not see it in a phenomenon called “Banner Blindness” in the industry. Banner advertisements were very common online in the 2010 Census, and people often avoided them as a nuisance that would take them away from whatever they were doing on a site they were on (Benway 1998, Bayles 2000, Nielson 2007).

In response to the low click-through rate for the marquee, the Census Bureau redesigned the front page to reduce the size of the marquee, and to eliminate the waiting time created by the “Four Corners” view of the interface. However, click-through rates remained low.

Far more success came from the interactive form, the language module, selected videos (for example, the public service announcement (PSA) done by Karl Rove on our YouTube channel), and above all, the Take 10 map. These modules provided content that was obviously census related, information dense, and also clearly non-commercial.

#### **5.9 Develop interactive webpages and materials to integrate, promote, and support the following areas:**

- a. Partner Communications Area**
- b. Online News Room**
- c. 2010 Census Jobs**
- d. Census in Schools (CIS)**

While the website successfully integrated all the listed areas by providing dedicated pages for each available through navigation elements from the front page and globally, the integration would have been better if the web team had formed earlier. The CIS site, and even more so the Jobs site, were in place before the 2010 Census main site was established, and thus differed in style and behind-the-scenes software. While the web team was able to apply some degree of cosmetic retrofitting, the Jobs and CIS sites would have more seamlessly integrated with the rest of the site had they been designed and built simultaneously with it.

#### **5.10 In what ways did the website act as a platform to distribute the 2010 Census messages and content?**

The 2010 Census website was the central hub for all ICP materials – from press releases to videos, from partnership materials they could download and print, to Census in Schools curricula. The Census Bureau posted our advertisements. The Census Bureau also posted our public service announcements in high quality files, available for downloading and replay by broadcasters. The Census Bureau published Road Tour schedules and resulting social media, blogs from the director to rapidly address developing issues in the media environment, and many web-only materials that communicated the main messages of the campaign.

### **5.11 Did the website’s messaging complement Paid Advertising, Public Relations, National and Regional Partnerships, and Census in Schools?**

In addition to acting as a hub for all the materials required for the Paid Advertising, Public Relations, National and Regional Partnerships, and CIS programs the web content itself was written to integrate well with those programmatic materials. The same messaging appeared throughout (It’s Easy, It’s Important and It’s Safe). The website and the programmatic materials displayed the form prominently and often, as its simplicity proved to be one of our best ambassadors. The website and programmatic materials were written as a call to action for respondents to mail back their forms, and to be responsive to enumerators (Aherrera et al., 2009a).

### **5.12 How did the visual design, copy development, and coding of the 2010Census.gov site (Search Engine Optimization) provide the best possible organic search results for the website and for the public to access?**

The web team employed search engine optimization – both with key words and anchor text – to provide the best possible organic search results for public access to the website (DraftFCB et al., 2010). In addition to this measure, the web team designed the site to provide intuitive navigation. For example, every page after the home page included top navigation that provided global search, and left navigation providing contextual and local search. This style matched the industry standard in 2010, so that users who were accustomed to other websites would find ours simple to understand and intuitive.

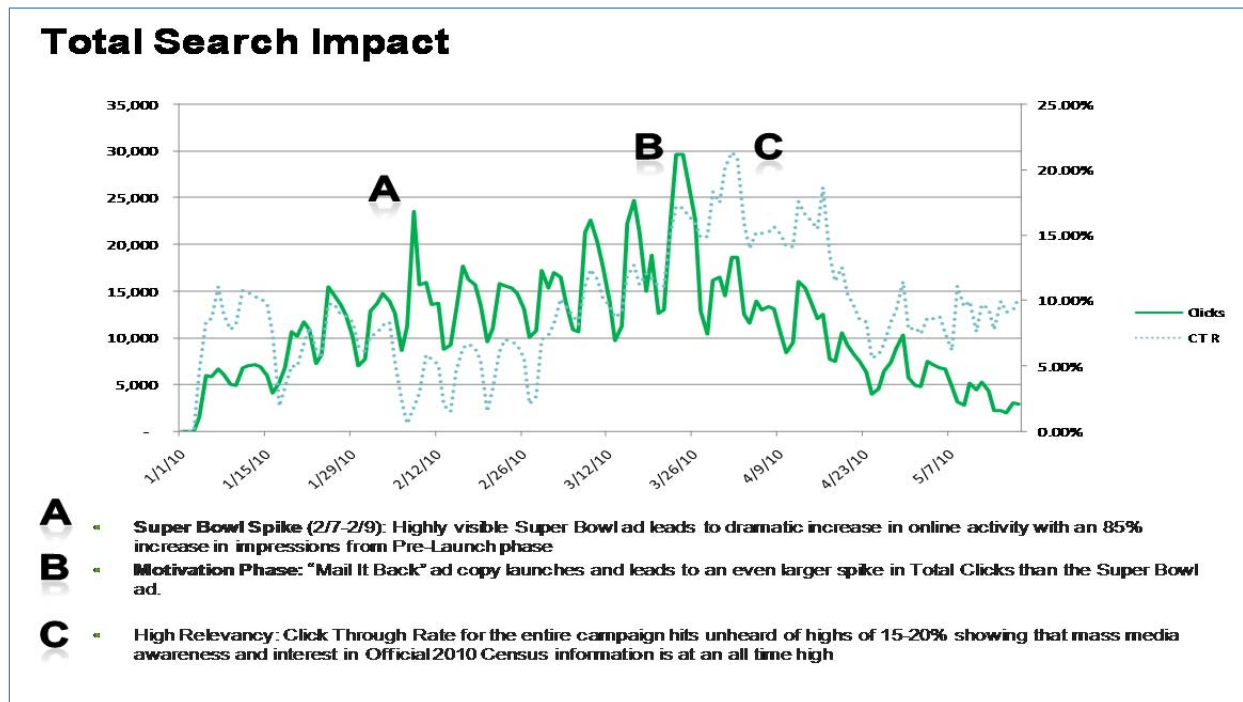
The team also implemented several recommendations from usability testing to make copy on the site more intuitive (Cisneros, 2009).

### **5.13 Did the Search Engine Marketing (SEM) approach promote the website and increase the visibility in Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs) through the use of paid placement, contextual advertising, and paid inclusion? If yes, describe.**

“Paid Search” refers to the practice of paying search engines to return your website as a top choice when a user searches on certain key terms. For details, see the wrap-up report that DraftFCB provided on Paid Search, May 2010 (DraftFCB et al., 2010). Some highlights of the report are:

1. Paid Search proved to be an effective driver of site traffic and helped build interest in the 2010 Census across Google, Yahoo!, and Bing. Paid Search for the 2010 Census campaign was extremely cost effective with average Cost per Click at about 50 cents. Total paid search advertising was 854,000 dollars, compared to a total marketing and advertising budget for the 2010 ICP of 340 million dollars.
2. Average Click Through Rate, that is, proportion of times our website appeared in a search and was selected with a mouse click by the user, increased 10 to 13 percent in March 2010 and April 2010 to nearly unprecedented levels (Figure 4). A two percent click-through rate was considered high in 2010 year across the industry.

Figure 3: Total Search Impact



Source: Census Paid Search Wrap Up

3. Average position within search results, that is, how close to the top of the page the 2010 Census Website appeared in a given search results list, remained consistent at 1.1(1= top of list) throughout the life of the campaign. This ensured that Census Paid Search advertisements were always in the most prominent places possible and able to lead the evolving on-line conversation surrounding the 2010 Census.
4. In addition to being cost effective, the Census Search Campaign was flexible, able to add new search keywords to respond to current events such as media criticism/myths surrounding the census, student questions, and education surrounding enumerators.
5. Contextual paid search advertising, where available, was used to expand a search's reach across the engines syndication partners.

**5.14 How did the inclusion of Social Media in the website help to achieve the objectives of the communications campaign? How many followers did each site have?**

Inclusion of social media served three primary campaign objectives:

1. Reaching unattached mobiles. Social media tools, like many emerging technologies, skew toward young, single individuals who are highly mobile (renters and college students, for example). This group highly correlates with the hard-to-count unattached mobile population segment.
2. Reaching as large a group within the general population as possible through the new media channels. The Census Bureau cannot know the full impact of all our social media efforts on the total population. However, we have some indicators including: number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers, demographic information such as age and gender,

and data on fan and follower interactions including number of comments and twitter posts.

3. Facilitating a national dialogue on the 2010 Census to ensure that our messages had a voice that could compete with negative messages spread online and in print media by census detractors. The Census Bureau had strong indications that this occurred. The Director's Blog, for example, became a destination for media, the public, and Census Bureau employees (including enumerators). We were able to authoritatively and rapidly (within 12 hours) respond to rising issues. Through our 8,000 Twitter followers we were able to disseminate Census Bureau messaging in real time. For example, we put out messages about the efficiency of Super Bowl advertising during the game itself in response to the numerous critics decrying the spending of tax payer money on a high profile advertisement. We were also able to spread the message about April 1 not being a deadline for responding by mail, and then spread the message about the actual deadline later in the month.

By December 2010, the Census Bureau had 101,000 Facebook fans, over 8,000 Twitter followers, and over 350 videos on YouTube with, collectively, over 500,000 views. The Director's blog had over 600,000 page views. Yet these measures likely understate the true impact of social media, since the social media tools work synergistically, that is, each component the Census Bureau can measure tends to drive others the Census Bureau cannot. The numbers presented here indicate that the Census Bureau were able to drive messages into the social space on a large scale that, the Census Bureau believe, drove the nationwide census discussion in a positive direction.

For example, census staff could tweet people to check out our YouTube videos, a new blog post, or join our Facebook page. When we posted the PSA done by Karl Rove on YouTube, he sent out a Tweet to his followers (some 22,000 of them) to check it out, which they did, and then re-tweeted to others, so that the Karl Rove video became among the most popular of our YouTube collection, with over 44,000 views. The Census Bureau had little ability to measure directly how many viewers then tweeted to their followers, wrote a blog, or simply talked to their friends.

#### **5.15 Did the website team design the marquee so that it represented everyone in the United States? If yes, describe.**

The web team used a matrix of demographic characteristics (age, race, sex, Hispanic origin) and life situations (for example, renter/owner/second home) to select stories that would represent all major identifiable groups in the nation. This matrix reflected combinations of characteristics (for example, "professional black male"), so that the resulting choices would provide a voice representing, as much as possible, everyone in the nation. The team then used this matrix to select subjects for video treatments.

#### **5.16 Was the Road Tour application updated accurately and in real-time so that users could track each bus and its route?**

Although there were technical problems early on, the Road Tour area of the website focused on four primary elements: a calendar of events, blogs from the vehicle drivers, a map showing vehicle locations in real time via Global Positioning System (GPS) feeds, and video messages created by visitors to Road Tour events. The GPS map, which was meant to tie all the elements

together, eventually fulfilled this expectation. However, during the initial days of the campaign, the map was unable to integrate the GPS data.

### **5.17 Were multimedia elements successfully integrated?**

Multimedia content on the 2010 Census website, such as video answers to common questions about the form, were originally posted as stand-alone items located in a dedicated area. However, the team ultimately recognized that these elements could reinforce material throughout the website. Thus, multimedia elements began to be integrated throughout the website by early 2010. If these integration efforts had begun at the outset and in a way so that all topics had the appropriate corresponding multimedia elements on their pages, this would have created an even stronger promotional effort.

By the end of March 2010, the Census Bureau had fully capitalized on the placement of new, timely material, embedding relevant multimedia elements that supported each topic. Both the English (2010Census.gov) and Spanish (2010Census.gov/espanol) websites included full integration of multimedia elements. Any topic that the Census Bureau had produced a video for had that video embedded on its corresponding page.

Videos could be single episodes, or an entire series. For example, at the end of March 2010, the multimedia team created a collection of 61 language assistance videos and embedded each on its corresponding language page. The team (members from C2PO and PIO) created a series of videos to support “The Whole Story,” a section of the website intended to address public concerns or questions about specific issues. The team created videos to support news releases, or in response to a topical issue/question; these videos appeared on the homepage slider as well as on the multimedia center.

In addition to video, the multimedia center provided photos when images could best illustrate the copy on topic pages. The team produced an audio series to complement the photo library and to reinforce the subject matter/messaging.

### **5.18 How was the Spanish mirror site planned and implemented?**

The Spanish site constituted a true trans-creation of the 2010 Census website home and related pages. The main contractor worked with a sub-contractor, “A Language Bank,” to create the translations, and then sent copy to the Census Bureau. C2PO used existing bilingual staff to check all materials. These next went on to DMD and Field Division (FLD) for a third and final check. The translation process required more than four weeks, which given the short development schedule, required effort from the contractor to reach the February 17, 2010 launch date of the Spanish site.

### **5.19 How were in-language materials grouped/organized on the website?**

In-language materials on the website were linked through the “language module,” a front page, “above the fold” feature of the website that was among our most popular features. It showed each of the 59 languages in their native character set, and these rotated every few seconds. Though small, this feature provided motion to the website – the language names appeared to slip upward through the box –and this movement attracted considerable attention considering the small total area occupied by the feature. Users hovering over the language module could see a



menu with all the languages listed. Clicking on any one could take users to a page for that language which included: a one-page description of the 2010 Census that included the three key messages of “It’s Easy, It’s Important, and It’s Safe,” as well as instructions on mailing back the form; a link to an in-language form where available (six languages had an in-language form); a language assistance guide; and the in-language video “It’s Easy,” that gave instructions for filling out the form.

#### **5.20 How was the decision made regarding what languages to include on the website?**

Languages for the 2010 Census were selected by DMD based on pre-determined, data-driven criteria. Using 2005 American Community Survey data and growth factors from the counts in Census 2000, the Census Bureau used the criterion “Number of Occupied Housing Units with no persons age 15 or older who speaks English very well.”

The Census Bureau used a cutoff of 2,000 housing units to select languages that would receive assistance guides (a few languages were removed from the list if the translation contractor working with DMD indicated an inability to translate in that language). Initially, 50 languages were selected. Nine languages were later added to reflect the recommendations of the Census Advisory Committee and the Race and Ethnicity Advisory Committee to add languages to the collection operations (Vitran, 2010).

#### **5.21 What process was established to review in-language materials for the website?**

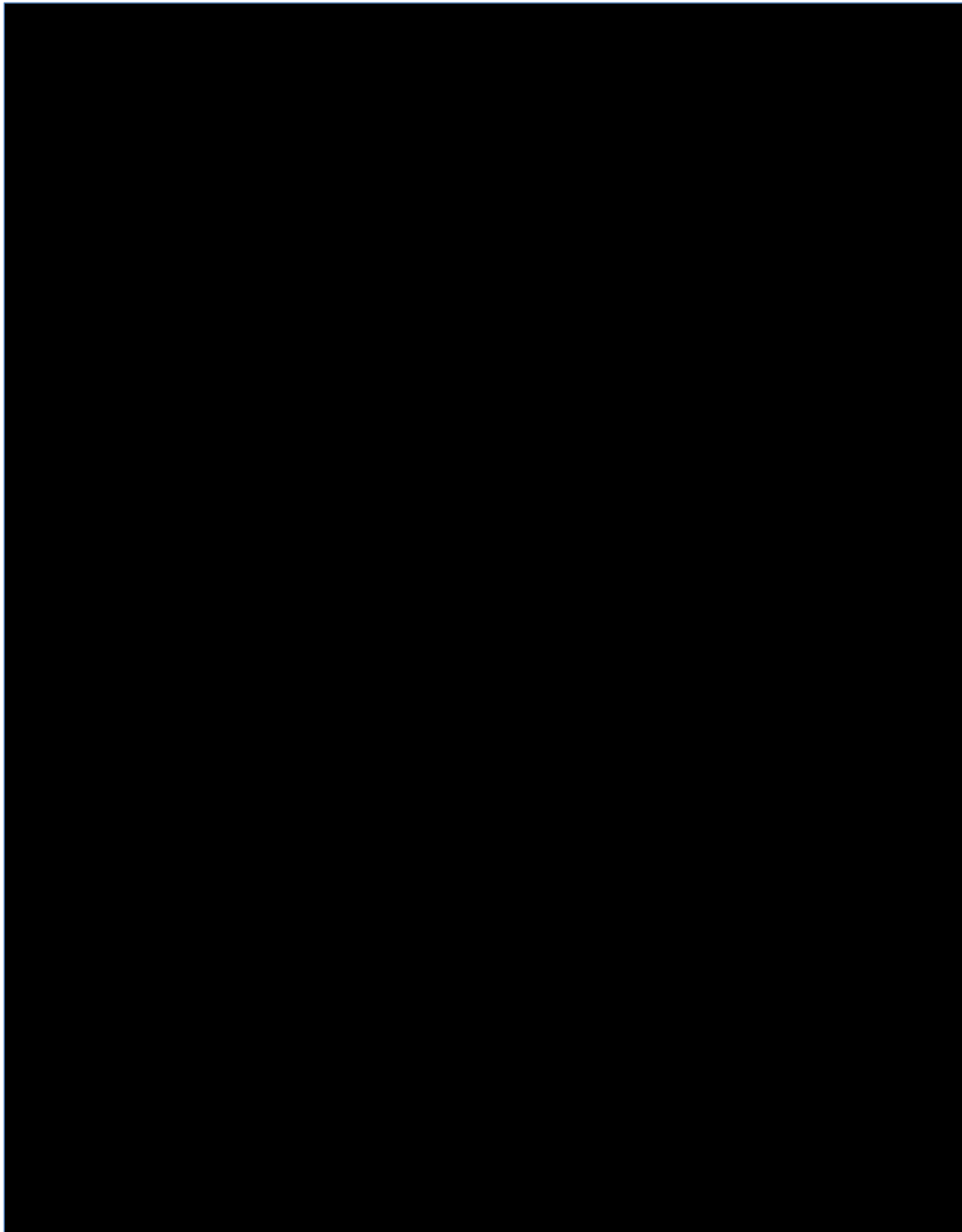
The contractor worked with a sub-contractor, “A Language Bank,” to create the translations, and then sent copy to the Census Bureau, where bilingual staff were asked to check materials, or in some cases, asked advice from outside experts (usually academics). Materials next went for one final internal check to DMD and FLD. Materials were then shared with Census Advisory Committees, who made additional suggestions.

The public also contributed many more suggestions – mostly by email – than the Census Bureau could use; indeed, comments often contradicted one another. However, where a suggested change reflected an unambiguous improvement in the clarity of the text, the Census Bureau incorporated them.

#### **5.22 How many hits did the in-language website pages get during the 2010 Census? Based on most hits, which were the top language pages?**

The top language webpage, based on traffic, was Spanish, with over five million hits or 83 percent of all in-language traffic. Korean and simplified Chinese came next, with about 233,000 and 146,000 hits respectively.

**Figure 4: In-Language Page Views**



## **6. Related Evaluations, Experiments, and/or Assessments**

- 2010 Census Integrated Communications Program Evaluation
- 2010 Census ICP assessment reports:
  - 2010 ICP Summary
  - Research
  - Paid Advertising
  - Earned Media and Public Relations
  - Rapid Response

- Portrait of America Road Tour
- Promotional Materials
- Census in Schools
- National Partnership
- Regional Partnership
- Mail Reponse Rates/Take 10

## 7. Key Lessons Learned, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Lessons Learned

- Web-based communications technologies played a larger than expected role in the 2010 Census ICP. The 2010 Census website became a central hub of the campaign with new technologies, in particular social media technologies, allowing the ICP to reach difficult segments of the population.
- The website gave us more than a way to interact with young, unattached mobiles; the web became the major modality for correspondence in the nation, displacing the postal service or other means of document delivery. The Census Bureau were able to publish and disseminate documents such as – tool kits, press releases, talking points, brochures, pamphlets, study guides, videos, audios, still photos, data maps with participation rates – and do so rapidly at low cost. Furthermore, the Census Bureau could put all of these documents in the same place, making it easier (given the right navigation tools) for people to find what they needed. The Census Bureau could instantly transmit to all our disparate audience segments via this one channel, and did just that.
- Given the central role for the website, it is unfortunate that the web team formed so late in the campaign timeline. This required a compressed development schedule that naturally resulted in some difficulties. For example, had the Census Bureau been able to user-test the marquee prior to launch, it likely have discovered the problems with its interface and corrected them. Had the web team begun earlier, the Census Bureau could have fully integrated the CIS and Recruitment webpages into the rest of the site.
- Our social media efforts, while successful, would likely have been more successful given a longer time window, since social media promulgates via a grass-roots growth model that requires time to mature.
- The web has become a major communications medium in the U.S. and some version of it will likely be critical to the 2020 Census.
- The web allows for targeting messages to disparate audience segments to a degree beyond that offered by traditional media, and this contributed to the integration of the 2010 Census communications campaign. As the media continues to atomize, the ability of the web to target particular audience segments may become increasingly important.
- The Census Bureau should begin the 2020 Census web effort earlier – including planning, design, coding of test pages, and most especially user testing – by 2016 at the latest, to allow early parts of the 2020 Census campaign (such as the hiring of enumerators) to benefit from the most sophisticated web strategy.
- The Census Bureau would have been unable to implement the 2010 Census website without outside contractors. However, going outside the Census Bureau to create a census communication vehicle that had to run on internal census servers, presented significant

challenges. The Census Bureau had to diffuse security risks, as well as provide an intimate knowledge of Census Bureau datasets and methods of operation to people with no significant background in the subject matter. The 2020 Census web effort will benefit greatly should the Census Bureau develop an internal staff capable of building the kinds of tools the Census Bureau will use at that time without turning to outside contractors for programming.

## **Recommendations**

- Expect some version of online communications, including social media elements, to play a major role in the 2020 Census communications. Invest early in understanding the state of the art as the 2020 Census approaches, including hiring staff with relevant experience.
- Research the relative merits of broadcast advertising in comparison with online, audience targeted advertising. If it appears viable, consider a shift in resources away from broadcast and into more targeted advertising.
- Begin the 2020 Census web effort earlier – including planning, design, coding of test pages, and most especially user testing – by 2016 at the latest, to allow early parts of the 2020 Census campaign (such as the hiring of enumerators) to benefit from the most sophisticated web strategy.
- While the 2020 Census web effort will naturally grow out of existing web assets, the messages of the campaign are about action (filling out the form) rather than data dissemination. Therefore, whether or not the 2020 Census campaign requires a separate website like the 2010 Census deployed, there will need to be new web efforts around the 2020 Census wherever they reside.
- The Census Bureau should develop an internal staff capable of building the kinds of tools the Census Bureau will use during the 2020 Census campaign, so that it can limit our use of outside contractors, particularly for technical capabilities like programming.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

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