



**Web Site Benchmarks and Best Practices for Small,
Disadvantaged IT Contractors**

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Methodology and Sample Characteristics

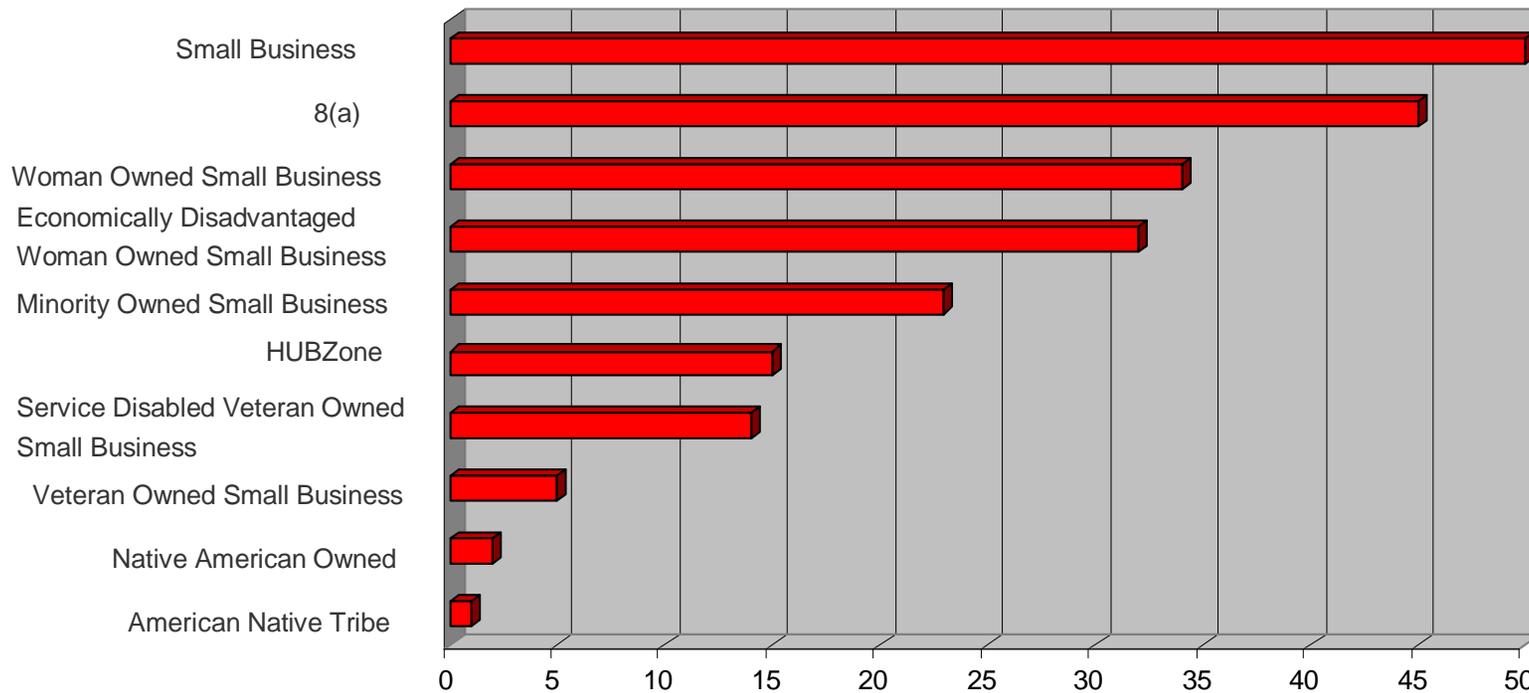
In May and June, 2011, One Red Arrow conducted an analysis of web sites of IT/management consulting firms that were self-identified as a small, disadvantaged business entity (SDB). Two primary data sources were used for the study:

- A sample of 123 web sites were chosen randomly based on the qualifications above (the Sample). These web sites were all reviewed against certain quantitative measures. A sub-set of these web sites were randomly selected and given an additional detailed web site audit , which included additional technical evaluations as well as subjective evaluations (clarity of messaging, appearance, for example).
- A small sample of firms was surveyed as to usage and plans for web sites (the Survey). The survey is not statistically projectable, but provides insight as to behaviors of these firms.

In addition to these quantitative data, interviews were conducted with executives responsible for small business partnerships within large IT contractors, as well as government executives responsible for small business activities.

Within our Sample, just under half of the firms self-identified as small business and 8(a). Over 20 percent of the Sample identified themselves as woman-owned small business, economically disadvantaged woman owned small business, and minority owned small business. Smaller numbers identified themselves as HUBZone, Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business, Veteran Owned Small Business, Native American Owned and American Native Tribe.

Distribution of Sample by SDB Category Self Reported



Note: Based on a Sample of 123 web sites of firms self-identifying as SDB IT/Management Consulting contractors. Most businesses reported multiple Small and Disadvantaged Business (SDB) categories, thus percentages sum to greater than 100%.

Other Characteristics of SDB IT Firms from our Survey

While not statistically projectable, the firms responding to our survey reflect the diversity of the SDB IT contractor community in several important respects.

Size of Firm. Even among our small Survey there was amazing diversity of firm size, with the majority of firms between four and 10 employees. However, there were also a number of firms in the 11-99 range, and several in the 100+ employee range. This distribution is consistent with the diversity of SDB businesses. While many are startups, or “mom and pop” type operations, many are more mature operations with significant overhead operations.

Growth. Growth seems to be one characteristics most firms share. Over three-quarters of our Surveyed firms experienced top line revenue growth in the most recent year-over-year period. This growth reflects positive market conditions in the government IT sector even as much of the economy has suffered. In addition, continued government focus on providing opportunities to SDB firms has no doubt contributed to this growth.

SDB IT Contractors Management of Web Activities

- **Web Site Spending is Increasing.** About 60% of our Surveyed firms spend less than \$10,000 per year on web site, social media, and associated marketing collateral. The remaining 40% of firms spent between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year. Over two-thirds of Surveyed firms increased their web spending in the past year-over-year period. Only about 10% decreased web spending in this period, with the remaining firms reporting flat spending.
- **Most SDB IT Contractors Manage Web Sites Internally.** Over two-thirds of our Surveyed firms managed their web sites using internal resources.

Breakdown of Most Common Pages Used by SDB IT Contractors

Virtually all SDB IT contractors use a standard set of pages. The most common pages, Home, About Us, and Contact, were used by virtually all contractors.

- **Experience.** 83% of IT contractors had an Experience page. This page is used by government contract officers, partners and potential employees to quickly assess areas of past activity by the firm. This page is often used by potential partners to assess a company's ability to win a new contract in a specific area of expertise. It should also demonstrate size, complexity and geographic diversity of project performance.
- **Careers** or Jobs pages were used by 76 percent of the Sample. Careers pages are a critical tool for recruitment, but are also used to signal activity and focus to key constituencies. The degree to which our Sample successfully used its Careers page is discussed separately.
- **Company News** was a separate web page for 59% of our Sample. Like careers pages, the effectiveness of this page by companies that employed them varied widely. One site examined displayed a box on the home page titled "Latest Company News." In the box was a story datelined four years ago. A company that says on its home page that it has had no news in four years is sending strong negative signals to the community. If company news is given a focus, it should be updated quarterly.
- **Contracts** was a separate page for 54% of our Sample. Self explanatory, this section displays contract vehicles available to the firm.

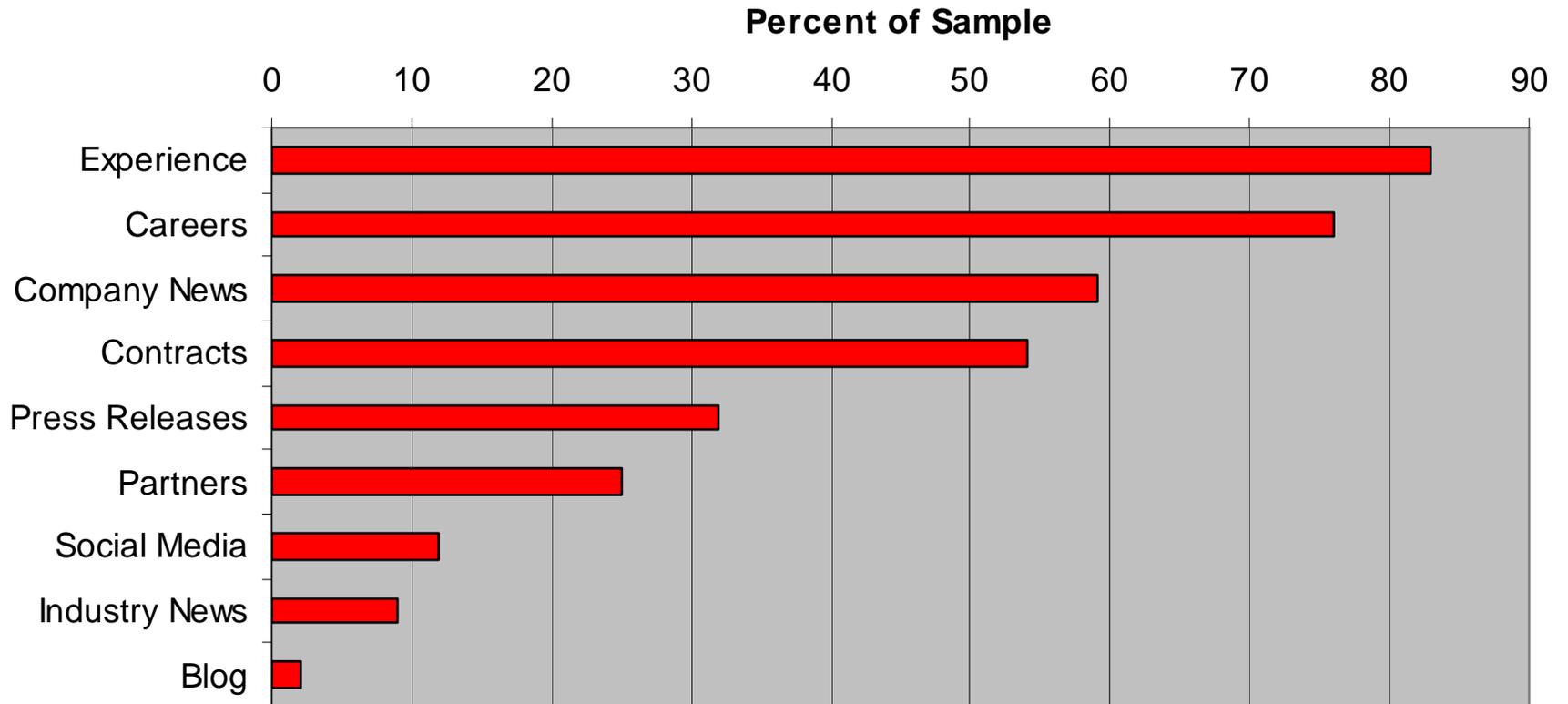
Breakdown of Most Common Pages Used by SDB IT Contractors (Continued)

- **Press Releases.** Just under one-third of our sample used Press Releases. Press Releases are similar to Company News except that they use the more regimented Press Release format. This format includes a headline, dateline, several paragraphs with facts and quotes, and a terminal paragraph describing the issuing entity and providing a press contact. Use of Press Releases is relatively rare for small businesses. However, SDB IT contractors can make effective use of Press Releases to generate cost-effective awareness among a highly target community of clients and partners. As with other dated material, if Press Releases are included, there should be some activity on this page regularly, in this case at least semi-annually.
- **Partners.** Just one-quarter of our Sample had pages devoted to partnerships. Partnerships are particularly important to SDB IT contractors. It is extremely common for these firms to bid for work as part of a team, to include other firms as key subcontractors on set-aside projects where the firm is prime, and to work as a specialty subcontractor to other large firms. These partner relationships are critical to small IT firms' success, and should be cultivated. Partnerships can be cultivated by promoting existing relationships (including presenting logos and links to the partner) and identifying why the firm makes an attractive partner to other firms. A dedicated Partner page indicates that the firm treats partnerships as a corporate priority.
- **Social Media.** Much discussed by the industry, social media is currently being used by just 12% of the Sample. Social media networks in use are discussed separately.

Breakdown of Most Common Pages Used by SDB IT Contractors (Continued)

- **Industry News.** Placing industry news on the web site can be a useful tool to generate current relevant content of interest to the firm's community of interest. Only 9% of our Sample firms placed industry news on their web site.
- **Blogs.** Blogs can often be successfully used to demonstrate thought leadership and create community around the firm. Unfortunately, blogs are often time consuming, particularly by top leadership of the firm where time is scarce. Thought leadership is often not a priority among small firms and this is reflected in the fact that less than five percent of the sample currently used blogs on their sites.

Pages/Functions Used in Sample Web Sites

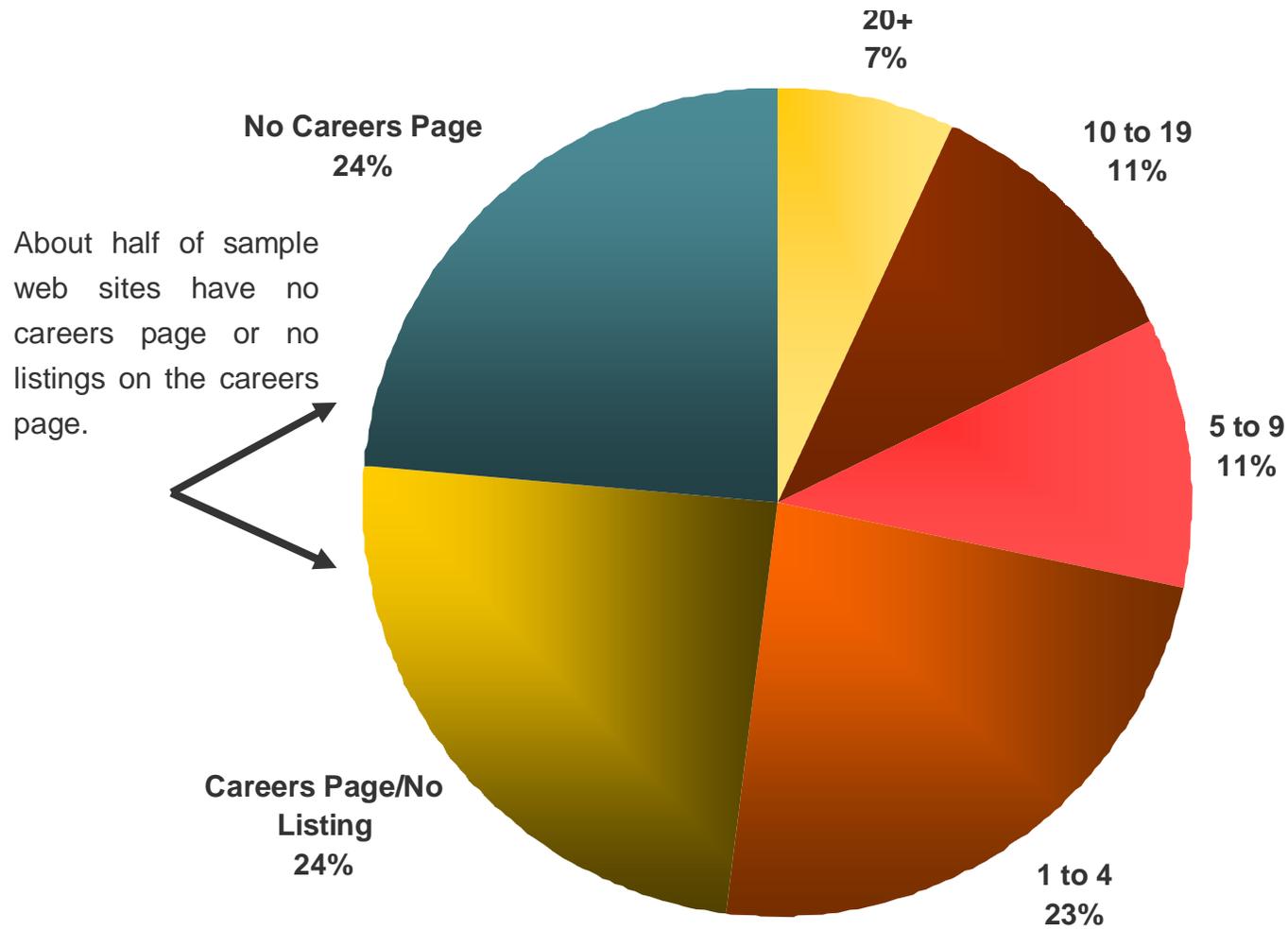


Using the Careers Page to Signal Key Constituencies

- **What signals** should be sent by the Careers Page:
 - Identify candidates for new positions.
 - Show potential employees that this is a place where they would want to work.
 - Show partners and potential clients that they are a thriving concern as demonstrated by active job postings.
 - Show partners and potential clients that the firm understands the requirements of pending contract opportunities through targeted job listings.
- **Do 76% of IT firms have effective Careers Pages?** It was previously mentioned that 76% of the Sample made use of a Careers page. Does this indicate that a solid majority of the Sample has this component under control? Actually, the reality is that most firms do not have an effective careers page.
- **The Careers Page Deficit.** While 24% of the Sample had no Careers Page, an additional 24% of the Sample had a Careers Page but no listings posted. As with the firm who's latest news is over four years old, these firms are sending negative signals about the viability of the firm and its ability to understand and react to the marketplace. In addition to those without any listings, there were a number of firms with a few outdated job offerings. The fact that at least half of SDB IT firms are not using active careers pages is reinforced by our Survey which indicated only about 40% of firms had a section of the web site dedicated to recruitment.

Overall, at least half of our Sample was sending negative signals to its key constituencies through the lack of an effective Careers page

Number of Job Opportunities Listed on Careers Page



Using Social Media to Create Community, Demonstrate Thought Leadership, and Recruit

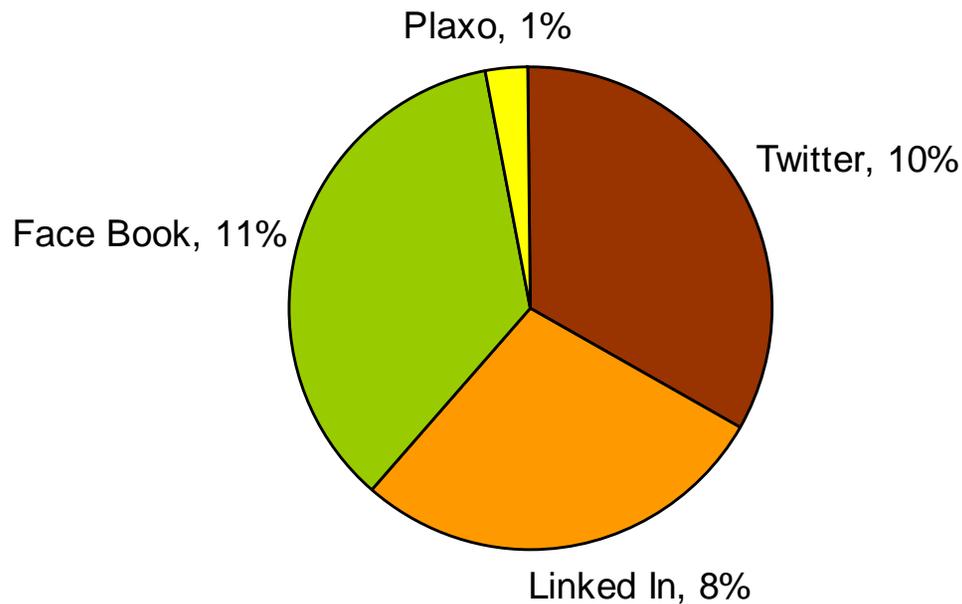
- **Social Media Not Heavily Used by SDB IT Contractors Relative to Other Small Businesses.** Overall, 12% of our sample used social media. While our Sample results generally were consistent with those firms completing our detailed Survey, this was one area of divergence, with almost a third of our Surveyed firms indicating that they were active in social media. A 2010 survey by Zoomerang indicated that 34% of small businesses used some type of social media, and a 2011 survey by American Express OPEN indicated 44% of small businesses used social media. It is clear that use of social media is increasing among SDB IT firms. Current rates of usage among SDB IT contractors are estimated to be between 12% and 30%.
- **Face Book, Twitter, and LinkedIn were the three dominant social networks used by SDB IT contractors.** This finding was consistent with the findings of Zoomerang in their analysis of all small businesses.
- **Social Media for Recruitment.** SDB IT contractors depend upon the availability of highly specialized personnel to perform their contracts. In addition to using social media to create community and demonstrate thought leadership, we found increasing use of this tool to identify potential employees or individual contractors with specific skill sets.

Social Media is at early stages but growing among SDB IT contractors.

Using Social Media to Create Community and Demonstrate Thought Leadership

12% of Sample Use Social Media

Of Those Using Social Media, Face Book, Twitter, and Linked In Most Popular



Why Current Content Matters

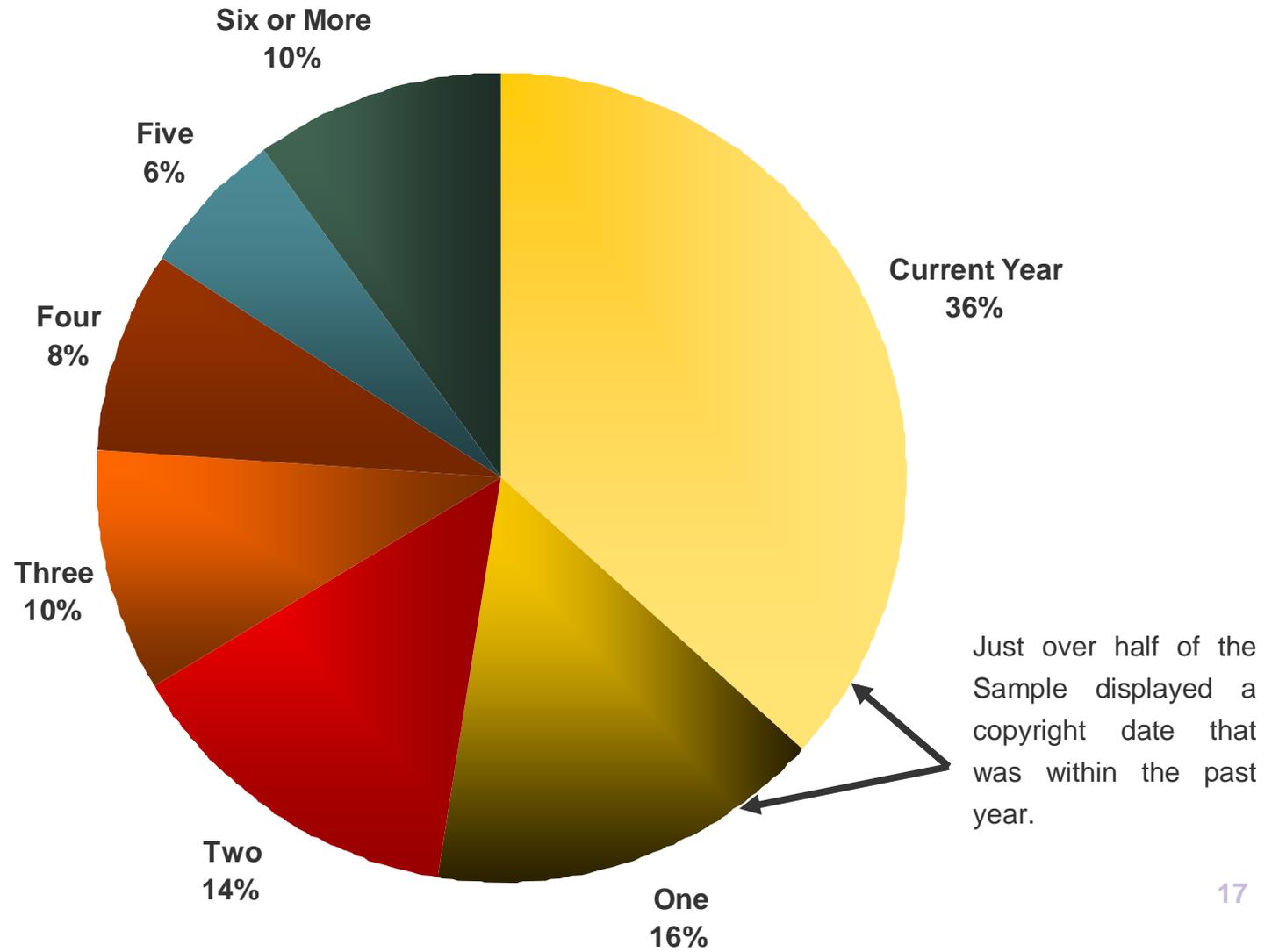
- **The Update Debate.** You own a small IT contracting business. You recognize the need for an effective web site in your overall business development strategy. You understand the key components of your messaging and have a good idea on how to structure your site. You hire a web development firm, who gives you the site you dreamed of on time on budget. Eighteen months later, you realize that some of the data on the site is a little dated... you have won some new contracts and you have a new partner. You never learned how to post new jobs on the Careers Page. However, the thought of paying the web development firm again to update these items on your web site so soon just rubs you the wrong way, you would rather put the money into capture management or bid development. Is this a good decision?
- **Why Updating your Site Matters.** There are a number of key reasons why continuous updates to your site are good for business:
 - **You Change.** No operating firm stays the same. You win new contracts, add or lose key staff, gain experience, change partners and change focus. With each new contact you make you will generate a visit to your web site. If what you tell them is not reflected in the site you send mixed signals at best and look foolish at worst.
 - **The Market Changes.** IT contractors live in a particularly rapidly changing market. As a professional services firm, you must demonstrate that your firm understands market changes and is taking actions to be best positioned to deliver excellence in whatever sector you have focused on. This can not be done in a two-year old web site.
 - **People will Stop Visiting.** Static sites provide no incentive for visitors to return to the site. If visitors don't return, you have lost an opportunity to create a long-term impression. You want that key contracts officer to remember you at a critical juncture in the development of an opportunity. You want that key partner to remember you when they have a need that you can fill. They are more likely to remember you if you have given them a reason to periodically check on your web site.

About Half of SDB IT Firms Do Not Have Recent Content on Their Sites

- **What Surveyed Firms Say.** Among those responding to our survey, about 20% indicated that they updated their web sites annually or never. An additional 30% updated the sites quarterly, and about half updated their sites weekly or monthly. These responses indicate a more rapid update frequency than is indicated by our sample of websites as indicated by the copyright dates and dated content on the site.
- **What the Copyright Says.** One measure of how often web sites are updated is the web site copyright. This typically appears as a notice at the bottom of the page. The copyright indicates who owns the copyright and the date that the copyright became effective. The copyright date is one good indicator of the period since the site (or page) was last updated.
- **About half of our Sample had recent copyright dates.** Thirty-six percent of our Sample had a copyright date of the current year. An additional 16% had a copyright date from the previous year for a total of 52% of our Sample that had a copyright date no more than one year old. About a quarter of our sample had very old copyright dates – four or more years old.

This Information Looks Old!

Years Since Copyright Updated



This Information Looks Old!

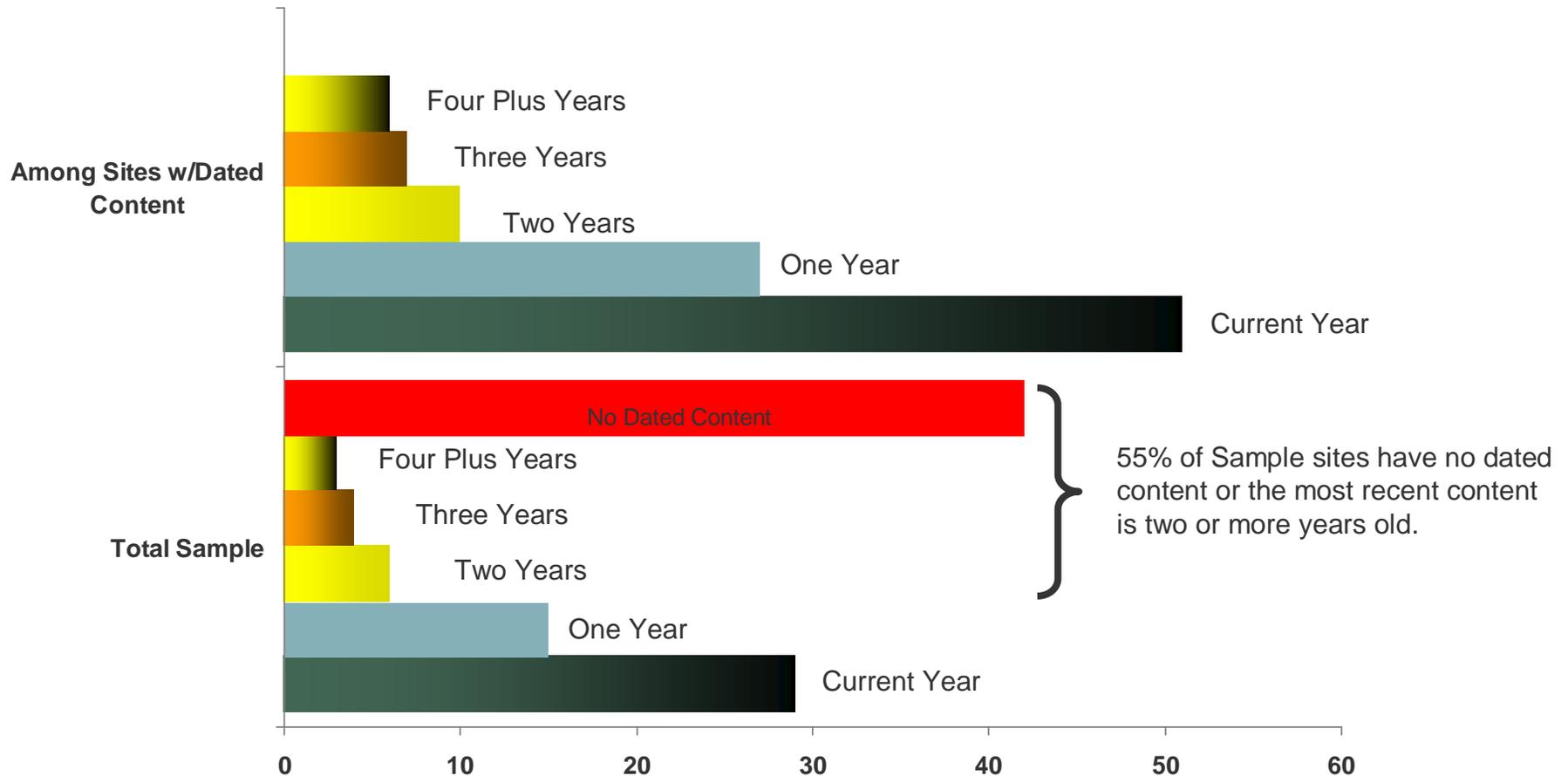
About Half of SDB IT Firms Do Not Have Recent Content on Their Sites (Continued)

- **Dated Content Defined.** Another measure that a web site is being updated regularly is the presence of recent dated content. Dated content can appear anywhere in a web site, but for SDB IT firms it is most commonly found in the following areas:
 - Press Releases
 - Company Announcements and Newsletters
 - Job postings
 - Contract information
 - Industry News
- **Old Content.** Over half, about 55% of our Sample, had no dated content or the most recent dated content on the site was more than two years old.

The age of the copyright and the age of dated content tell similar stories – about half of SDB IT firms are not updating their sites on a regular basis. The image they are projecting is that of a firm that does not keep up in a rapidly changing industry.

This Information Looks Old!

Age of Most Recent Dated Web Site Content



Make Your Site Visible Through SEO

- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** is an important way to make your site more visible to search engines in organic search results. Some of the techniques used in SEO (according to Google):
 - Create unique, accurate page titles
 - Make use of the 'description' Meta tag
 - Improve the structure of your URLs
 - Optimize navigation
 - Use appropriate heading tags
 - Use webmaster tools to optimize site
- **Surveys and Web Audits Indicate Little SEO by SDB IT Firms.** Among firms responding to our Survey, less than one-third of SDB IT firms stated they implemented SEO on their web sites. These Survey findings are consistent with our audit of web sites which also indicated approximately 30-40% of SDB IT contractor web sites showed indications of SEO. Interestingly, none of the Surveyed firms indicated that they tracked metrics to measure the success of their SEO efforts. This would indicate a mix of low understanding of SEO implementation, benefits and optimization techniques among these firms.
- **Other Surveys of Small Businesses and SEO.** In its 2010 survey, Zoomerang found that about 22% of all small businesses had some budget allocated to SEO, and 14% of small businesses allocated less than 10% of their marketing budgets to SEO. American Express OPEN found that the vast majority of small businesses (73%) handle SEO internally, although 56% indicated that they required some outside help to manage SEO.

Common Site Design Errors

Our detailed review of SDB IT sites indicated some common problems that reduced the utility of the web site.

- **Excessive use of Flash.** Use of Flash in web sites is a subjective topic, and 10 web developers will give you 11 opinions. However, our review of SDB IT sites indicated some sites where use of flash was completely out of control. One site we reviewed had heavy Flash pages throughout the site resulting in painful loading times. Also, at some point the animation distracts from the content, it does not attract attention. What may be appropriate for a consumer-oriented site may be a bit much for a government IT oriented site.
- **Broken Links.** While this sounds basic, we found a significant minority of sites where links were broken or never established.
- **Non-functioning Navigation.** We found a significant minority of sites where navigation links were broken, or there was no landing page for a navigation function. If there is a navigation button, there should be a landing page.
- **Lack of content on Home Page.** Placing no content on your home page is giving up your most valuable digital real estate for no return. The most common version of this problem was a graphic or Flash presentation with no substantive content, and a “Click Here” to enter site link. One way of looking at this practice is to calculate the number of clicks it takes for a new user to reach specific information. By adding a non-functioning home page, you are adding a click for each new user to every item of desired information.

Create an Identity

A complaint of larger IT contractors seeking services from SDB IT firms was that many SDB IT firms' web sites did not accomplish the most basic function – telling the visitor quickly what the firm does and why it is unique in how it does it. This complaint was reinforced by our web site audits, where we found a lack of clear and consistent messaging. It is important for a company to create a brand identity and for the messaging to follow through in every communications channel, including face to face networking.

Strong messaging based on a company's specific capabilities enables government agencies and potential partners to learn quickly whether a company can fulfill their contracting needs. Messaging is subjective, but at a minimum the following issues should be considered:

- **Mission Statement.** A concise statement of the firm's mission should be prominently displayed on the Home or About Us pages. An effective mission statement is no more than a paragraph and clearly states what the business is, what markets it serves and what services it provides those markets.
- **Elevator Pitch.** Typically on the Home, About Us, or Services page, the Elevator Pitch is a short paragraph that explains why an organization should do business with the firm. This is sometimes called the firm's competitive positioning. Do you have unique experience? Unusual staff backgrounds? Strength in your experience? Geographic breadth or focus? The most common mistake by firms in presenting competitive positioning is to state "We provide the highest quality at the lowest price." This is almost never the true nature of competitive positioning and in any case is not specific enough to be helpful to the reader. If you think that this is your advantage, think further about the factors that help you achieve price and quality and write about those factors.

Create an Identity

- **NAICS Codes.** Out of the site's surveyed ,46% listed NAICS codes somewhere on the site, with some sites making it easy to find the codes, and others burying the information. Fifty four percent of the sites did not list NAICS codes, but many listed product and service offerings. NAICS codes are a critical piece of information for SDB IT contractors. In addition, some Web sites had long lists of NAICS codes: Some large IT contractors prefer to see a smaller list of top NAICS codes so that firms can be quickly identified to fill specific needs. When a large company's small business officer reviews potential partners' Web sites to establish if they list the appropriate NAICS codes, a long broad list of NAICS makes a SDB look like a jack of all trades and master of none. The bottom line: If you really provide the product/service as a core function, definitely include the NAICS. However, think twice about adding NAICS on your web site that are "might do someday" or "did a bit of once."

6 Steps to a More Effective IT Contractor Web site

- 1. Include Key Pages.** Make sure your site has the basics. About half of Sample firms had no Careers Page or had no job postings. Half of firms had no Partners Page. These are basics for any IT contractor web site.
- 2. Use the Careers Page.** The Careers Page is a great way to signal that you are a growing, vibrant firm and that you understand the skills needed to succeed in your area of specialization. Employees churn and sometimes firms hire opportunistically even when they were not looking to fill a specific position, so it is completely valid to have job openings even if you think you are fully staffed at the moment.
- 3. Update Your Site.** While Surveyed firms indicate that they are updating content at least quarterly, a Sample of industry sites indicate a significant portion of the industry with old copyright dates (about half) and dated content where the most recent date was two or more years old (again, about half). In the IT industry, web sites should be updated at least quarterly. The easiest areas to update the site are company news, job postings, industry news, contracts and experience. Sites that have current content have higher search engine standings and encourage return visits, thereby helping create a sense of community and brand awareness among your target audiences. If you outsource your site development, be sure to discuss with your web developer how regular minor updates to the site will be handled.
- 4. Take Minimum Actions to Implement SEO on Your Site.** Search Engine Optimization makes your site easier to find by your key audiences. In only about 30% to 40% of the sites we Audited did we find indications of SEO. While there are many steps that can be taken in SEO, at least do the basics. Make sure you have clear page titles and effective Meta tags on all of your pages, 63% of the sites audited had no meta data. Include a site map on your Web site. If you outsource web design, ask your contractor what their strategy is for SEO.

6 Steps to a More Effective IT Contractor Web site

5. **Don't Torture the User.** Don't be so clever with your site design that you make the user work harder to get at content. Avoid excessive use of Flash or other tools that slow down page loads and distract the user. Don't waste your home page real estate by displaying content-free graphics. Make sure your links and navigation works.

6. **Create a Brand.** Your Web site should leave a clear impression of identity to the visitor. Make sure you have a clear Mission Statement and Elevator Pitch prominently displayed on the site. The visitor should easily understand what the business is, what markets it serves and what products and services it provide to those markets. The Elevator Pitch is the "secret sauce" that makes your firm unique in how you do business.

About the Authors



Andrew Roscoe, Research Director. Mr. Roscoe leads corporate strategy and directs all research efforts by One Red Arrow. He is a 25 year plus career executive with a track record of building successful businesses that use a range of business models, most recently in the federal contracting space. He has experience in executive operations, corporate process development, marketing, strategic planning, market research, development economics, construction management and telecommunications/IT. He has a proven ability to develop successful market entry strategies, build an organization to achieve those strategies and execute successfully. Mr. Roscoe's previous positions include Executive Director Corporate Operations at Technologists, Inc. (a mid-sized government design/build contractor), Owner/CEO Roscoe Consulting (a strategic planning consultancy), Chairman and CEO of O2 Wireless Solutions (a public telecommunications construction company), Chairman and CEO of The Strategis Group (a global telecommunications consultancy), and Chairman of CommNOW (an electronic publishing firm in the telecommunications sector). He has earned a BA International Affairs, and MA Economics, both from The George Washington University.

Andrea Bona, Editor and Publisher. Ms. Bona acts as Editor and Publisher. Known for her leadership and collaboration skills, Ms. Bona brings 20 years of multi-channel marketing, branding and publishing experience to client engagements. Ms. Bona is able to help clients solve complex problems, set goals and achieve measurable results. Prior to launching One Orange Feather, Ms. Bona was Vice President of Strategic Marketing for the Mortgage Bankers Association, where she spearheaded corporate branding and marketing strategy for all revenue divisions. Previously she was a consultant with McKinley Marketing Partners, where she led new product launches for pharmaceutical clients and developed tactical online marketing campaigns for Network Solutions. As a new media publisher at CTIA, Ms. Bona developed the association's online brand strategy and ran the publishing division. Prior to CTIA, Ms. Bona had a dual role as Vice President of Marketing and Communications at The Strategis Group, where she was responsible for the company's global branding strategy, and as publisher for CommNOW.com, where she led the expansion of one of the first international online daily new companies.

Ms. Bona manages the day to day business as One Orange Feather Inc., as well as its messaging, online brand presence and digital platform. She also manages marketing consulting practice, where she audits clients existing strategies, sets goals then plans and executes integrated, multi-channel communications campaigns to targeted audiences. Ms. Bona has a BA in Communications and Sociology from James Madison University.

About One Red Arrow



One Red Arrow is the information resource for SDB (Small, Disadvantaged Business) government IT contractors. Through email newsletters, proprietary research, and its web portal, One Red Arrow provides a full suite of services to Federal contractors that compete for set aside opportunities as small or disadvantaged businesses. One Red Arrow helps these emerging companies face their unique challenges through community support, opportunity tracking, teaming, and contract support.

One Red Arrow is wholly owned by **One Orange Feather, Inc.** One Orange Feather provides marketing and management consulting services to the government IT contracting and nonprofit markets. Our mission is to provide actionable intelligence and marketing strategies that empower our clients to achieve faster, more profitable growth in their unique business environments.

Management Consulting

- Business Audit
- Competitive Assessment
- Product Evaluation
- Strategic Planning
- Value Creation
- Goal Setting

Marketing

- Brand Audit
- Style Guidelines
- Creative Services
- Message Creation
- Campaign Plan
- Online Marketing
- Marketing Metrics

Research

- Competitive Assessment
- Customer and Market Surveys
- Market Analysis

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