Co-op identity 2.0:
Do the websites of Canadian co-operatives reflect the co-op difference?

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Basic assumptions

• Co-operatives should reflect the distinctiveness of their business model in both internal and external communications.

• A corporate website is the public face of an organization: the extent to which a website reflects co-op identity speaks to the co-op identity of the organization itself.
Methodology

Content analysis Canadian co-operative websites
- 50 largest non-financial co-ops + The Co-operators and Desjardins
- 20 largest credit unions
- 20 new and emerging co-ops

Co-operative Identity Web Index (CIWI)
The CIWI

Six indicators:

- Does the website identify the organization as a co-operative, above and beyond the name & logo? (10 pts)
- Does the website attempt to answer the question “What is a co-op?” (10 pts)
- Does the website list the 7 co-operative principles? (10 pts)
- Does the website provide additional information about the co-operative model or the co-op movement, for example, a co-op FAQ? (10 pts)
- Does the website include links to other co-ops or co-operative associations? (5 pts – 1 for each link up to 5)
- Does the website use the .coop domain extension? (5 pts)

Total: 50 pts  (note: for each of the first 4 indicators, 1 pt is deducted per level of navigation)
Co-op identification: 52 largest co-ops

Indicator 1: Does the website identify the organization as a co-operative, above and beyond the name and/or logo?

- 49 out of 52 identified as co-op
- 21 identified as co-op on home page
- 25 identified as co-op on 2\textsuperscript{nd} level (1 click)
- 3 identified as co-op on 3\textsuperscript{rd} level (2 clicks)
- 3 did not identify as co-op beyond name or logo
What is a co-op?

Indicator 2: Does the website attempt to answer the question “What is a co-op?”

- 36 out of 52 made some effort to describe what a co-op is
- Only 1 – Pioneer Co-op – had info on home page
- 15 had info on 2nd level (1 click)
- 16 made no attempt to define a co-op
- Common phrases: “member-owned”, “controlled by members”, “profits shared”
Co-op principles

Indicator 3: Does the website list the seven co-operative principles?

• 21 co-ops listed the principles on their websites
• 6 more made reference to principles, but did not list them
• 25 made no reference to co-op principles
• No sites had principles on home page
• 10 listed principles in 2nd level navigation (1 click)
indicator 4: Does the website provide additional information about the co-operative model or the co-op movement, for example, a co-op FAQ?

- **33 sites** had additional information about co-ops, usually on 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} level.
Links to other co-op organizations

Indicator 5: Does the website include links to other co-ops or co-operative associations?

- Sites that listed other co-ops or associations but did not link received half points.
- **28 sites** included at least one link to another co-op or co-op association.
- **16 sites** had more than one link
The .coop domain

Indicator 6: Does the website use the .coop domain extension?

• Only 6 of the co-ops used the .coop domain, including La Coop fédérée.
• 23 used .ca, including FCL, MEC and The Co-operators.
• 23 used .com, including Desjardins, UFA & Agropur
52 largest co-ops: CIWI scorecard

- Median CIWI: 28/50
- Average CIWI: 23.3/50

Sorted by language of site
- English (34 sites): average CIWI: 20/50
- French (10 sites): average CIWI: 35.1/50
- Bilingual (8 sites): average CIWI: 26.6/50

Of the 6 sites that used .coop, four were in French, one was bilingual and one was in English.
CIWI top 12

- Citadelle (QC) - www.citadelle-camp.coop: 46/50
- Mid Island Co-op (BC) - www.midisland.coop: 46/50
- La Coop fédérée (QC) – www.lacoop.coop: 42/50
- La Coop des Bois-Francs (QC) – www.boisfrancs.coop: 42/50
- Groupe coopératif Dynaco (QC) – www.dynaco.coop: 42/50
- Co-op Atlantic (NB) – www.coopatlantic.ca: 42/50
- La Coop Purdel (QC) - http://www.purdel.qc.ca: 41/50
- Unicoop (QC) - http://www.unicoop.qc.ca: 40/50
- La Coop Seigneurie (QC) - http://www.scalaseigneurie.qc.ca: 40/50
- The Co-operators (ON): www.cooperators.ca: 38/50
- La Coop Profid’Or (QC): http://www.profidor.qc.ca: 38/50
What is a Co-op?

In 2011, members received a 3.8% equity rebate on their purchases.

Voluntary and open membership
Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

The values and principles behind the Cooperative

The Cooperative acts as a group of individuals who join together to satisfy shared economic, social, or cultural needs by operating an organization under the terms of the Act. Cibdelle is an agricultural cooperative that specializes in maple and honey products. It has nearly 2,600 members and operates in ten Quebec administrative regions. The cooperative uses a collection network to gather syrup and honey throughout the year. It works with a number of brokers in the United States and Canada and distributors throughout the world. Consequently, CIBDELE maple and honey products can be found in processing plants and on consumers’ tables in almost 40 countries.
Credit unions: 20 largest

- Modified index: instead of “what is co-op”, used “credit union difference”
- 13 of 20 described themselves as “financial co-operative”
- All 20 had some explanation of CU difference
- 6 of 20 included co-op principles
- 5 provided additional info about co-ops/CUs
- Only 2 had links to other co-op/CU assns
- None used .coop
- Median CIWI: 18/50; Average CIWI: 17.1
- Assiniboine, Vancity were top CUs
New and emerging co-ops

- 20 new and emerging co-ops, selected from list of CDI recipients: regional & sectoral diversity
- All but 2 identified as co-op
- 10/20 explained “what is a co-op”
- None included co-op principles
- 3 included other info about co-ops
- 6 included links to other co-ops, assns
- 3 used .coop
- Median CIWI: 18; average CIWI: 15.7
- Sumac, Funeral Co-op of Ottawa were top
Conclusions

• The good news: some co-ops, especially in Quebec, are making a serious effort to reflect the co-op difference through their websites.

• The bad news: Many co-ops do not perceive co-op identity as a marketing advantage and focus solely or largely on their product or service. Some co-ops that do provide co-op information bury it in 3rd-level navigation, making it difficult to find on their sites.

• The really bad news: The .coop domain, which should ideally be used to distinguish co-operatives online, has little traction among the largest players in the co-op movement.

• New and emerging co-ops are no more likely to reflect co-op identity than large, established co-ops.