

All MPs need to do better with their websites, advocacy group

SUMMERSIDE – In a world where the Internet has invaded virtually every aspect of human life there is no excuse for elected officials to not have an online presence, says a national democracy advocacy group.

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Samara is a non-profit and non-partisan organization that tries to build democratic participation among Canadians.

It recently completed a study on more than 300 websites of Members of Parliament to determine what level of services and interaction they offered. The study focused on 14 points, such as whether they included contact information, ways to leave comments, biographies and more.

While most MPs scored OK in terms of having the basics (although five had no websites at all), most need to improve their ability to interact with voters, said Alison Loat, executive director of Samara.

This needs to improve, she said.

“There is an increasing expectation on the part of citizens that they can get information and have opportunities to engage (online.)

“My worry is that if our elected representatives and our political systems aren’t sort of up to the expectations that citizens have – then they’re going to be increasingly considered irrelevant.”

For example, she said, 98 per cent of MP websites have their office addresses and 97 per cent have their biography. However, only 15 per cent include their office hours of operation and only nine per cent have spaces for discussion.

In terms of Island MPs, all four have websites, however, the average score for Island MPs was six out of 14 points, while the average of all MPs across the country was seven points.

So there is room for improvement locally as well, she said.

<http://www.journalpioneer.com/News/Local/2013-12-02/article-3527651/All-MPs-need-to-do-better-with-their-websites,-advocacy-group/1>

“The really good news about all this is that websites are very easy to change. So we’re really hoping this checklist gives some tips for MPs on how they can make some small changes on their websites that will help inform and encourage greater participation by Canadians in politics.

All Canadian MPs can access public funding to maintain a website.