



Best Practice: Online Tool to Compare City Services

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CITY: STOCKHOLM

POLICY AREA: TECHNOLOGY

BEST PRACTICE

The City of Stockholm launched a web application named **Compare Services** in December 2008 aimed at providing an efficient tool for administrators as well as Stockholmers in general when choosing among the services offered by the City of Stockholm. The Compare Services website can be used to identify, compare and locate service providers in a specific neighborhood. The website also contains contact information for the City's various agencies. The site covers a wide range of city services, approximately 4,000 in total, including elderly care, schools and waste recycling centers.

ISSUE

Under the Education Act of the Ministry of Education and Science in Sweden, education for all children and youth is provided free of charge. Citizens also have the right to choose which educational institution to attend. In Stockholm, there are 1,200 pre-school facilities, 250 compulsory schools, 93 high schools, 27 facilities for adult education and 261 after-school recreational centers. Parents looking for pre-school facilities, summer camps, after school recreation centers, compulsory school or upper secondary schools need an efficient way compare educational institutions and find a school that fits their needs.

Prior to the Compare Services website, parents had to carry out time-consuming research when choosing a school for their children. Furthermore, facility managers were not allowed to offer recommendations to residents for which facility best met their needs. Stockholmers could choose services and providers, but did not generally have enough information to make well-informed decisions.

The Compare Services website provides and consolidates basic information on educational facilities, as well as all city services, and empowers residents to make well-informed choices.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal behind launching the Compare Services website was to create a tool that would make it easy and efficient for citizens to select educational institutions and other city services appropriate for their needs, while at the same time improving the quality of city services.

The overall objectives included:

- Providing a simple overview of all options available
- Helping citizens make the best choices based on their specific needs
- Simplifying the administration of applications for city services
- Benchmarking city services to make them more efficient, and improving the quality

IMPLEMENTATION

The Compare Service website supports citizens' freedom of choice. For example, parents can compare schools and search for the option they think offers the best education in terms of class size, proximity, and other factors. Data on both municipal and private providers are available on the website.

When the Compare Services website was developed, Stockholm looked at existing online tools for comparing products and prices. Instead of focusing on the delivery of city services, which is what the City had been doing, the perspective was changed to focusing on the needs of citizens. The City conducted interviews with residents who used the existing website, which revealed that the users were very familiar with shopping and comparing prices online.

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Based on this information, the website was designed to enable users to identify city services and then compare them online in the easiest way possible - similar to the online retail shopping experience. To efficiently search among the city's contractors (e.g. 1,200 pre-schools), a number of important parameters were established to simplify the search capability.

Search parameters involving pre-schools include among others:

- Type of organization (municipal, private, cooperative)
- Area (based on your desired geographical area)
- Specializations (e.g. language)
- Proximity (e.g. enter a home address and view the five closest pre-schools)

Given that proximity and geography are important factors when choosing a school, users can also do the search via a map function.

After ensuring that the website was a user friendly and efficient tool, the City focused on the possibility to compare services by placing them in a holding area, similar to a "cart" on an e-commerce site. Users can produce online lists where they can compare the available options and consolidate information into a table with graphical indicators for a clear presentation of the results.

The user can compare information based both on data collected from surveys and the quality of the service from service providers.

Examples of data provided for each pre-school include:

- Number of teachers
- Number of qualified teachers
- Number of children
- Group sizes



Screenshot of a Compare Schools graphic

Examples of the qualitative information provided by parents include:

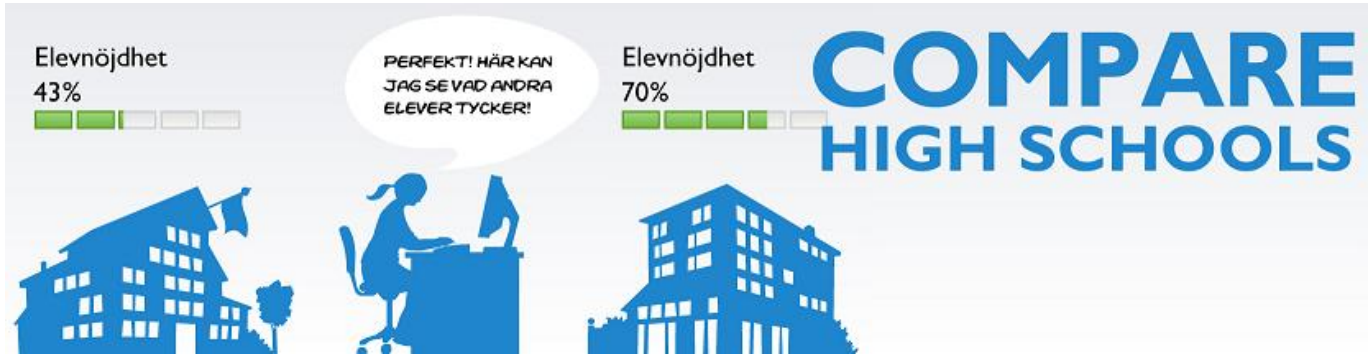
- Whether or not teachers are perceived as having a good attitude
- If their children have met the learning objectives
- If the pre-school is perceived as a safe place for their children

Detailed information is also presented together with photo galleries and a video from www.youtube.com on a fact sheet for each school or service provider. On the fact sheet, schools and other service providers can choose how they want to present their activities. These pages also contain several other documents, such as inspection and quality reports.

There is also a trip-planning feature on the Compare Service website, which makes it easy to find the fastest route to the service provider by public transport.

Website users can also submit an electronic application form for pre-schools and elementary schools.

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The girl above in the Compare High schools graphic is saying, "Great! Now I can see what other students think about different schools."

Services over the phone

Since some Stockholmers are unable to use the internet, a call center was created so administrators can answer questions, assist citizens in making choices, and receive applications for various services over the phone. The Compare Services call center helps citizens quickly find the services closest to their home. Call center representatives can also send lists of available service providers by post. This was previously done by administrators in the 14 different city district councils.

Other Areas of Use

Stockholm residents also use the Compare Services website for elderly care, sports facilities, waste recycling centers and many other city services. Data has been compiled for each agency (approximately 4,000) and is also available in a major online directory.

For people interested in swimming after work, for example, they can quickly find city swimming facilities via an interactive map. With help of a pedagogic interface, they can see the facility closest to their current location, compare opening hours, and view the location's scheduled activities.



The mother in the graphic above is saying, "I don't want my son to travel too far to his school"

COST

The Compare Services website is part of the City's e-service program. The total costs for development, surveys and evaluation is estimated at 12 million SEK (\$1.57 million USD).

Annual operating and management costs are approximately 1 million SEK (\$132,000 USD).



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TIMELINE

Fall 2007	The first generation of the Compare Services website developed.
July 2008	Citizens given the right to select a pre-school of their choice (they could already choose compulsory and high schools) and Compare Services launched to administrate pre-school applications.
December 2008	The Compare Services website becomes fully operational.
March 2009	Stockholm's City Educational Office launches a specific project to more efficiently gather data and conduct surveys for compulsory schools, high schools, adult education and childcare facilities. Data integrated with the Swedish School Board's national database. An online application feature for compulsory schools launched.
March 2010	Compare Services user interface updated and new features added.

LEGISLATION

Decentralized Decision-Making

In order for the city to develop in tune with its residents, a decentralized working model is used. Stockholm is divided into 14 district councils. The district councils work within their respective geographic area and have a specific responsibility for pre-school, elderly care and disability care.

The City of Stockholm's council has the comprehensive responsibility for issues concerning the entire municipality (e.g. municipal taxes and the City's budget). The major part of the City's resources is being used in the district councils (three quarters).

Freedom of Choice

Stockholm citizens have access to a large number of services. Since July 2008, citizens can choose among the following service providers:

- pre-school facilities
- at-home assistance services
- nursing and care accommodations
- after-school recreational centers
- compulsory schools
- high school education
- adult education facilities

LESSONS LEARNED

While developing the Compare Services website, the City learned that managing behavioral patterns and organizational change, especially when using a new website, takes time. It is easy to build an e-services website, but the challenge is to change old habits and practices. With this in mind, the City continuously prioritizes change management.

During the launch of Compare Services, it soon became clear that there were not enough online comments posted from residents. Since the purpose of the website is to enable users to make decisions based on residents' comments and ratings, it is crucial that a large number of comments can be viewed. Therefore, the city is focusing on conducting surveys to complement the current feedback.



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School representatives indicated that they appreciate that data and survey results are posted online. However, they stressed the importance of updating the information frequently to show as accurate information as possible. As a result, surveys are now conducted twice instead of once per year.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The city of Stockholm has approximately 860,000 inhabitants. The city website (www.stockholm.se) has over 1.1 million visitors each month. Each month, Compare Services has more than roughly 150,000 visitors. The increase of visitors has been approximately 25% per year.

The administration of applications and delivery of city services has become more efficient. Citizens also feel more comfortable when choosing city services from their home, and in their own time. The most innovative part of the website is that citizens can now compare services against others, narrowing down the choices based on their own needs.

The surveys are now designed to indicate where improvements in our services can be made and the results are used to follow up the annual political goals for the City's services. The results from the surveys are then used in the overall budget planning system. Since the surveys are detailed enough to present results on a classroom level, the schools can also use the results for local improvements.

Other results:

- All the services in the City of Stockholm can be found in one place.
- No printed catalogues. Guidance is offered over the phone or print can be made upon request.
- Approximately 75% of the citizens of Stockholm know there is a freedom of choice among City services.
- Approximately 22% of the citizens use Compare Services.
- Approximately 50% of parents use Compare Services when choosing a compulsory school.
- Higher participation in user surveys among citizens.
- The city used to do surveys and data collecting by obligation. By 2012 all surveys have been remodelled to fit a strict purpose and the results are being used.

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