

EVALUATION OF SCOTTISHFOODANDDRINK.COM

**Final Report to:
Scottish Enterprise Grampian**

EVALUATION OF SCOTTISHFOODANDDRINK.COM

**FINAL REPORT TO:
SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE GRAMPIAN**

SQW Limited
economic development consultants

19 Alva Street
EDINBURGH
EH2 4PH

Tel: 0131 225 4007
Fax: 0131 225 4077
Email: ssim@sqw.co.uk

February 2006

CONTENTS

Section	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 COMPANIES' PERSPECTIVES	7
3 PARTNERS' PERSPECTIVES	17
4 NETWORK PERSPECTIVES	24
5 CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED	31
6 RECOMMENDATIONS	36
APPENDIX: SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND CONSULTEES	37

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from an interim evaluation of scottishfoodanddrink.com. The research took the form of an annual survey, to assess progress against sfd.com targets and to measure the impact of the service on users.

Three cohorts of users were surveyed using an online survey tool: companies; ‘partner’ organisations; and Scottish Enterprise / Highlands & Islands Enterprise staff.

Main findings

The findings from the three survey strands are summarised below.

Summary of companies’ views:

- companies’ views of the sfd.com service are largely positive
- awareness and usage levels have increased significantly from last year (70% this year, compared to 58% last year)
- there are several specific examples of tangible benefits to users (new markets penetrated, business awards won, etc) ...
- ... however, very few companies are able to identify financial benefits in terms of increased productivity, turnover, etc
- a high proportion of respondents did not answer a number of question areas – suggesting that they were unable to answer the questions ‘on the spot’
- many users are very keen to see the website’s interactivity increased, and particularly wish to receive regular email alerts when new information is posted.

Summary of partners’ views:

- as with companies, awareness and usage levels have increased on last year
- partner organisations use sfd.com both for their own organisational purposes, and for the benefit of their clients/customers
- the most commonly cited reason for using the website was to keep in touch with current industry news, events and issues
- again, many respondents chose not to answer certain question areas, whether through indifference or lack of knowledge

- the service is not generally felt to be having a direct impact upon productivity, turnover or costs – however, it is likely that some productivity gains are happening without being recognised.

Summary of Network views:

- all account managers and non-account managers are aware of sfd.com and use it – but frequency of usage appears to be higher amongst non-account managers
- the majority of managers promote sfd.com to their clients, and many report that their clients regard the service favourably
- there is evidence that managers are experiencing productivity gains as a result of using sfd.com – but they are not necessarily recognising those gains.

Progress towards objectives		
Objectives Set August 2003	Results Oct 2004	Results Dec 2005
Deliver tangible business benefits for users	£850k per annum increased turnover; £140k per annum reduced costs, 100 companies with productivity improvements	Poor response to some question areas makes it impossible to produce robust figures relating to turnover and productivity gains. However, 21% of companies have won new customers/business as a result of using sfd.com, and 23% report new international trade/exports. 50% have improved business or marketing planning.
Provide access to business information for the Food & Drink industry	58% of industry and 53% of partners/stakeholders using. 93% believe relevant/very relevant to industry	70% of companies use sfd.com, and 64% report they are better informed / more knowledgeable about the industry as a result of using sfd.com. Number of unique visitors to website is increasing (to a high of 15,183 in Jan 2006). Number of pages visited has increased from a previous high of 160,000 per month to 390,701 in December 2005, indicating a very significant increase in the level of traffic.
Reduce search costs for Food & Drink businesses and supporting organisations	60% of companies and 50% of supporting organisations have reduced search costs	The total value of information gained through use of the sfd.com helpline during the period 1 May 2005 to 31 January 2006 amounts to almost £310K (i.e. this is the total cost saving to companies, who would otherwise have had to pay for the use of databases such as Mintel). The total cost saving over a 12-month period amounts to over £413K.
Promote effective communications and collaboration within the industry	News/events sections used by 80% of users; 15% used to support collaborative activity	News section used by 82% of companies and 93% of partners. Events section used by 82% of companies and 89% of partners. 57% of companies have got involved in other SFD activities as a result of using sfd.com
Reach more customers through use of web	52% of companies using at least once per month; 53% of partners/stakeholders using and encouraging company usage	41% of companies using at least once per month (22% using at least once per week); 70% of partners/stakeholders using the service (of which 70% use at least once per month).
Web-enable SE projects	Food Futures, Food Learning Network, Food Facts, CAMIC delivered through	Food Futures, Food Learning Network, Food Facts, CAMIC delivered through

	scottishfoodanddrink.com	scottishfoodanddrink.com
Provide enhanced knowledge base for SE staff supporting the industry	77% of account managers use and value the service	100% of account managers and non-account managers use the service. Frequency of usage appears to be higher among non-account managers.

Conclusions

Regardless of the difficulties associated with the poor response to some question areas, the 2005 online survey nevertheless enables us to identify some important trends and reveals some interesting findings.

Awareness and usage of the sfd.com service has significantly increased since the 2004 survey. Amongst companies, 70% have heard of it and used it, compared to 58% in the previous year. This is highly encouraging. It is thought that this significant increase is at least partly due to the new ‘e-zine’ service which was launched in September 2005, whereby news bulletins (containing hyperlinks to the sfd.com website) are sent to all registered users.

Users are very keen to see website functionality enhanced, in particular through the introduction of an **email alert service** which will prompt them to use the site more often. This idea was mooted in the previous evaluation of sfd.com, and there is clearly increasing demand for such a service. The success of such a development would depend, first, upon the quality of user contact information held by the central source. The high proportion of questionnaires returned as ‘undeliverable’ or ‘unknown address’ from our online survey indicates that this is something that deserves attention.

It is interesting that respondents overwhelmingly requested email alerts and more interactivity from the website, yet **no one acknowledged the new e-zine service** which was launched in September 2005. It is not clear whether users of sfd.com failed to associate the e-zine with the website, or whether they had forgotten that they received the bulletin. Clearly Scottish Food and Drink has already gone at least part of the way towards satisfying users’ requests for increased interactivity, and is in tune with users’ thinking. However, it would be useful to build on this by investigating the feasibility of providing bespoke and/or automated email alerts to different types of user, depending on their areas of interest.

As noted earlier, when respondents were asked a direct question about productivity gains resulting from use of sfd.com they tended to reply in the negative. Only one respondent felt able to ‘strongly agree’ that sfd.com had helped to improve productivity. However, when asked more indirect questions – such as whether sfd.com had saved them time in terms of finding information – the response was unanimously positive. Clearly **productivity gains are happening as a result of sfd.com but, crucially, they are not being recognised**. This has implications for survey design (as described above), but also raises wider evaluation issues.

In terms of ongoing evaluation of sfd.com, Scottish Enterprise is faced with the major challenge: to **reduce the proportion of companies who cannot identify what kind of impact sfd.com has had**

upon their business. The high proportion of ‘don’t knows’ and skipped responses in our survey has made it impossible to conduct any meaningful analysis of the service’s impact on costs, income and productivity. We have obtained some useful qualitative insight from open questions in the online survey and from telephone interviews with companies, but quantitative data has been even more sparse than in the 2004 survey.

Recommendations

Our survey and subsequent telephone consultation has uncovered a widespread desire on the part of users to achieve more from the sfd.com service. With awareness and usage levels higher than ever before, this is the time to capitalise on organisations’ interest in getting more out of the service. The recently introduced e-zine service goes some way towards addressing this demand.

We recommend that the service be further enhanced by **creating an email alert service** which will:

- prompt people to use the website and/or helpline (i.e. a basic reminder service)
- alert users to any significant new material posted on the website
- (if possible) be tailored to suit the interests / needs of particular types of users.

We also recommend that users of the website should be encouraged to think on a more regular basis about the impact (if any) which sfd.com is having upon their business. The annual online survey should continue to be distributed. However, we suggest that the following **additional measures should be taken to enhance the survey process:**

- users should be alerted (say, one month in advance) to the fact that they will be surveyed about sfd.com and its impact on their organisation
- this alert should take the form of an advance memo in electronic form, prompting users to think about any financial benefits they may have gained (turnover, productivity, income) as a result of using sfd.com – including examples of the kind of benefit they may have experienced
- the online survey should be designed in such a way that respondents cannot skip questions
- particular questions – particularly those concerning the organisational benefits arising from use of sfd.com – should be redesigned to ensure the optimum response.

We recommend that **Scottish Food and Drink user groups be used to discuss and pilot new survey questions** relating in particular to the impact of sfd.com on organisations’ productivity and costs.

1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 The initiative known as scottishfoodanddrink.com was launched in March 2003 as the industry information service for the Scottish food and drink industry. It addresses the need for food and drink businesses to become more market-led and to build capacity in other areas. It gathers, catalogues and distributes comprehensive industry information primarily via the website, supported by other channels such as the telephone helpline.
- 1.2 A first interim evaluation of the initiative was conducted in 2004. The present assignment seeks to build on the 2004 evaluation, and uses a similar methodology in order that year on year comparisons can be made.

Methodology

- 1.3 In line with the methodology use in the first interim evaluation, online surveys were sent out to three stakeholder groups:
- companies
 - partners
 - SE/HIE Network staff (split into Account Managers and Non-account managers).
- 1.4 In order to produce comparable results this year, separate surveys to each of the stakeholder groups were once again used, based on primarily the same questions used in the 2004 survey.
- 1.5 Recipients' email addresses were provided to SQW by Scottish Enterprise, and the surveys were sent out using an online survey tool (surveymonkey.com). A summary of the number of individuals contacted in relation to each of the above surveys, along with the final response rate, is shown in the table below. The figures in italics relate to the 2004 survey, and are included for the purposes of year-on-year comparison.

Target audience	Number of individuals contacted 2005 (<i>2004</i>)	Number of responses received 2005 (<i>2004</i>)	Response Rate 2005 (<i>2004</i>)
Companies	688 (<i>738</i>)	77 (<i>118</i>)	11% (<i>16%</i>)
Partner organisations	248 (<i>446</i>)	47 (<i>36</i>)	19% (<i>8%</i>)
Network Account Managers	49	28	57%
Network Non-Account Managers	22	10	45%
(<i>Network managers</i>)*	(<i>88</i>)	(<i>24</i>)	(<i>27%</i>)

* Figures for 2004 do not distinguish between Account Managers and non-Account Managers

- 1.6 Permission for further contact was provided by the respondents through the online survey. Following on from this, SQW undertook a series of telephone interviews with ten companies.
- 1.7 The surveys covered a range of topics. Key areas investigated included:
- how the service is used by companies, partners and SE/HIE Network staff
 - benefits arising from using scottishfoodanddrink.com
 - the impact on performance
 - general views and opinions of the service.

2 Companies' perspectives

Survey response rate

- 2.1 The online survey was sent to 782 companies. However, a total of 94 email addresses proved to be invalid or undeliverable, thus rendering the actual number of recipients 688. The survey was then resent Responses were received from 77 companies – a response rate of 11%. This might be regarded as disappointing, but the timing of the survey was inconvenient from the point of view of the food and drink industry: companies are known to be particularly busy around the Christmas period.
- 2.2 The total number of respondents is lower than last year, when 118 companies completed the questionnaire. The response rate was also lower (11% this year, 16% in 2004).

Survey respondents and organisation type

- 2.3 Most of the companies that took part in the survey defined themselves as Food Producers (38%) or Food Processors (33%). Five respondents (7%) defined themselves as Distributors. There were three retailers, one service provider, one industry organisation and one consultancy.
- 2.4 The eleven respondents (15%) who defined themselves as 'Other' included drinks producers, wholesalers, and combinations of various functions such as 'grower/retailer', 'producer/distributor', etc.
- 2.5 The majority of companies who responded to the survey were small, as might be expected: 73% employed fewer than 50 people, and almost half of those employed 1–5 people. Only two companies employed over 250 people. Of the remainder, 19% employed 50–250 people and four (5%) were sole traders with no employees.
- 2.6 The vast majority of respondents felt that their company was growing, either very fast (34%) or slowly (49%). One expected to cease trading, and six expected to stay the same size.

Levels of awareness and usage of website

- 2.7 Just over 70% of survey respondents had heard of scottishfoodanddrink.com and had used it – an encouraging increase over the previous year, when 58% reported that they had used the service. The proportion of companies who had heard of the service but had not used it now stands at 27%, compared to 39% last year.

Feedback from non-users

2.8 Of the 18 respondents who answered the question *Why have you not used scottishfoodanddrink.com?*, the responses were:

- *‘I have looked at it but did not find it helpful’ (8)*
- *‘I have not had a chance to look at it yet’ (8)*
- *‘I use other sources of industry information’ (2)*

2.9 Alternative sources of industry advice or information cited by non-users of scottishfoodanddrink.com were: Food From Britain; Slow Food Movement; Sea Fish Industry Authority; the Society of Dairy Technology; and the Specialist Cheesemakers Association.

Frequency of use

2.10 In the 2004 survey of companies, 86% of respondents indicated that they accessed the website once per month or less, suggesting that the service was being used for update purposes rather than as a constant input or contribution to business management. In this year’s survey the figure has reduced to 78%, and the proportion of companies making use of the service on a regular basis (i.e. at least once per week) has increased.

2.11 This is a further indication that companies are starting to obtain more use out of scottishfoodanddrink.com as a contribution to business management.

Nature of in-company use

2.12 Companies were asked to indicate which functions or departments in their organisation used scottishfoodanddrink.com. The Marketing & Sales function within companies was cited by almost 39% of respondents as being most likely to make use of the service. A further 20% reported ‘no one else that I am aware of’. This latter group of respondents is likely to comprise directors or owner-managers of very small companies.

Levels of awareness and usage of helpline

2.13 As in the 2004 survey, the majority of respondents had *not* used the telephone helpline service. There was a very small increase in the proportion of people who had used it (19% this year, compared to 18% last year), but 25% of respondents had not heard of the service before.

2.14 Of the 14 respondents who had used the helpline, 2 said that they did not find it helpful.

2.15 Those who had used the helpline were asked to choose a statement which best described their opinion of the service. Responses were:

- *I use the helpline because I find it difficult to find what I am looking for on the website (1 respondent)*

- *I use the helpline because I prefer using the telephone and discussing my needs with someone rather than only using the website (1)*
- *I use the helpline to access information or support that is outside the scope of the website (5)*
- *The helpline is a useful addition to the internet-based service because I can ask for more detail on specific points of interest or support (6)*

Use of main sections of sfd.com website

2.16 Table 2.1, below, shows the relative usage of each area of the website:

Table 2.1: Use of each area of sfd.com website				
	Number of respondents			
	Use frequently	Use occasionally	Do not use	Total no. respondents
News	13 (28%)	25 (53%)	9 (19%)	47 (100%)
Events	15 (33%)	23 (50%)	8 (17%)	46 (100%)
Marketing	4 (9%)	32 (68%)	11 (23%)	47 (100%)
Packaging	2 (5%)	17 (43%)	21 (53%)	40 (100%)
Logistics	1 (3%)	10 (27%)	26 (70%)	37 (100%)
Hygiene and safety	0	13 (34%)	25 (66%)	38 (100%)
Export	1 (3%)	16 (42%)	21 (55%)	38 (100%)
Food service	5 (13%)	21 (54%)	13 (33%)	39 (100%)
Retail	5 (13%)	19 (48%)	16 (40%)	40 (100%)
Organic	3 (7%)	15 (36%)	24 (57%)	42 (100%)
Learning	0	19 (50%)	19 (50%)	38 (100%)
Buyers guide	8 (19%)	22 (52%)	12 (29%)	42 (100%)
Projects	1 (3%)	16 (41%)	22 (56%)	39 (100%)
Forum	3 (8%)	19 (48%)	18 (45%)	40 (100%)
Strategy	0	10 (27%)	27 (73%)	37 (100%)
How Do I guides	1 (3%)	12 (31%)	26 (67%)	39 (100%)
Healthy eating	2 (5%)	16 (42%)	20 (53%)	38 (100%)

Ways in which information is used

2.17 Respondents were asked to describe how they had used information from the scottishfoodanddrink.com website or from the helpline. This is summarised in Table 3.2, below.

Table 2.2: Ways in which information from SFD is used by companies				
	Number of respondents			
	Yes	No	Don't know	Total no. respondents
Kept in touch with current industry news, events and issues	10 (67%)	5 (33%)	-	15 (100%)
Identified new market information	8 (62%)	4 (31%)	1 (7%)	13 (100%)
Identified/better suppliers, or products or services	3 (23%)	7 (54%)	3 (23%)	13 (100%)
Accessed information about sources of funding	3 (23%)	10 (77%)	-	13 (100%)
Helped identify suitable training opportunities	3 (23%)	10 (77%)	-	13 (100%)
Helped in recruiting staff	-	12 (92%)	1 (8%)	13 (100%)
Found regulatory and quality information	6 (40%)	7 (47%)	2 (13%)	15 (100%)
Identified other sources of information and advice	8 (57%)	4 (29%)	2 (14%)	14 (100%)

2.18 Unfortunately many respondents skipped this question area, and there is only a limited amount of data available for analysis. Amongst those who did answer the question, the most common response was that they used it to ‘keep in touch with current industry news, events and issues’ (cited by two thirds of those who answered the question), followed by ‘identified new market information’ (62%) and ‘identified other sources of information and advice’ (57%).

2.19 In addition, a number of open comments were received. These were as follows:

- *‘about sourcing ingredients for new products’ (1 respondent)*
- *‘I have never had sensible interaction on anything which might be of help to me’ (1)*
- *‘I have used it as an advertising tool to broaden our small companies appeal’ (1)*
- *‘In particular one of our core strategic weaknesses being a manufacturer is distribution. We have used the website to further strengthen this issue of our business, yet have found it difficult identifying suitable chilled food distributors that work within Scotland who could sell and/or distribute our brand’ (1)*
- *‘Mainly sales leads and news’ (1)*
- *‘Tend to forget it is there and therefore probably don’t get the best use out of it. This [survey] has prompted me to have another look. I don’t think we have significantly reduced costs or increased income as a result of using the site’ (1)*

- 'Trying to find specific customers for items I am trying to move' (1).

Benefits arising from use of scottishfoodanddrink.com

2.20 Companies were asked what benefits they felt arose from using the website. The results are shown in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3: Benefits arising from using scottishfoodanddrink.com				
	No. replying 'Yes'	No. replying 'No'	No. replying 'Don't Know'	Total no. respondents
Productivity improvements	1 (6%)	10 (67%)	4 (27%)	15 (100%)
Lowered costs	0	10 (67%)	5 (33%)	15 (100%)
Improved turnover	2 (13%)	8 (53%)	5 (33%)	15 (100%)

2.21 The figures in Table 2.3 appear disappointing. Again, the number of people who chose to answer the question is too small to lead to robust analysis. Of those who did respond to the question, the majority do not perceive any positive impact on productivity, costs or turnover as a result of using sfd.com.

Table 2.4 Actions achieved as a result of using scottishfoodanddrink.com				
	Number of respondents			
	'Yes'	'No'	'Don't Know'	Total responding to question
Better informed / more knowledgeable about the industry	9 (64%)	4 (29%)	1 (7%)	14 (100%)
Using new suppliers, products or services	3 (23%)	9 (69%)	1 (8%)	13 (100%)
Established collaboration with other organisations	1 (7%)	9 (69%)	3 (23%)	13 (100%)
Improved business or marketing planning	7 (50%)	6 (43%)	1 (7%)	14 (100%)
Expanded into new market sectors	1 (7%)	11 (85%)	1 (7%)	13 (100%)
Won new customers / business	3 (21%)	8 (57%)	3 (21%)	14 (100%)
New international trade / exports	3 (23%)	10 (77%)	0 (0%)	13 (100%)
Accessed new sources of funding	0 (0%)	13 (100%)	0 (0%)	13 (100%)
Committed to attaining quality standards	1 (7%)	12 (86%)	1 (7%)	14 (100%)
Improved skill levels within the organisation	0 (0%)	12 (92%)	1 (8%)	13 (100%)
Got involved in other SFD activities	8 (57%)	5 (36%)	1 (7%)	14 (100%)

2.22 Although the numbers are too small to enable meaningful analysis to be conducted, a number of points emerge very clearly from the above. In particular:

- the service appears to be having no, or negligible, impact in helping companies to improve their skill levels or access new sources of funding
- its most effective role is in helping companies become better informed about their industry, and improving their business/marketing planning.

2.23 The lack of impact of sfd.com upon skill levels is a potential cause for concern, given the importance of skills in the SFD strategy and in the wider Smart Successful Scotland agenda.

2.24 However, it is encouraging that just over 23% of those who answered the question said that they had won new customers or business as a result of using sfd.com, and a slightly higher proportion reported that they had won new international trade / exports. These figures are higher than in last year's survey, but it is impossible to draw robust conclusions from the very small numbers involved. Further positive feedback was obtained from our telephone interviews with user companies. For example:

“We have found the website very useful, particularly in relation to providing a list of Scottish wholesalers and contact details for exporting to Hong Kong. Also, as a result of our using the website we found out about an industry award which we hadn’t been aware of. We entered our business for an award, and actually won the ‘best product’ award. This wouldn’t have happened without our having visited the website.”

2.25 Companies were asked to estimate the financial benefits to their organisation as a result of using scottishfoodanddrink.com, in terms of reduced costs and increased income. The results are summarised in tables 2.5 and 2.6 below (and include comparison with data from the previous year’s survey).

Table 2.5: Cost savings as a result of using scottishfoodanddrink.com (2004 and 2005)				
	Annual cost savings (2004 survey)		Annual cost savings (2005 survey)	
	No. cases	% full sample	No. cases	% full sample
Up to £500	10	8%	2	3%
£501 - £1,000	3	2%	1	1%
£1,001 - £5,000	3	2%	-	-
£5,001 - £10,000	-	-	-	-
£10,001 - £50,000	-	-	-	-
Don't know	20	17%	7	9%
None or blank	85	70%	67	87%
Total	121	100%	77	100%

Table 2.6: Income gained as a result of using scottishfoodanddrink.com (2004 and 2005)				
	Annual income gained (2004 survey)		Annual income gained (2005 survey)	
	No. cases	% full sample	No. cases	% full sample
Up to £500	4	3%	1	1%
£501 - £1,000	2	2%	-	-
£1,001 - £5,000	2	2%	-	-
£5,001 - £10,000	2	2%	2	3%
£10,001 - £50,000	1	1%	-	-
Don't know	27	22%	7	9%
None or blank	83	69%	67	87%
Total	121	100%	77	100%

- 2.26 The numbers reporting financial benefits are very low, and it would be unwise to attempt to draw robust conclusions from such limited data. Too many respondents simply left the question blank. From this it should not necessarily be deduced that the financial benefit to them has been negligible: in many cases it is likely that users do not recognise, or are unable to quantify, the impact that sfd.com has had.
- 2.27 We return in our Conclusions and Recommendations to the issue of non-response, as it has implications for any future survey work.

Alternative sources of information

- 2.28 Respondents were asked whether they would have been able to find the same information from other sources. Of a total of 14 respondents, three did not know. The remainder reported the following:

- *Yes, but not as much detail or quality (2)*
- *Yes, but would have been more difficult to find (7)*
- *Yes, but would have cost more (2)*

- 2.29 Other potential sources of information were cited by four respondents:

- *Business Gateway; specialist press*
- *Camden Research*
- *Food & Drink Federation; Lawlabs; RSSL*
- *Trade journals; published research; Mintel reports; IGD; databases; websites; Yellow Pages; Mardeck Guide.*

- 2.30 When asked to compare scottishfoodanddrink.com with other information sources, only one respondent felt that the standard of sfd.com was lower than other sources. Encouragingly, 50% of companies (7 out of 14 respondents) felt that the SFD information service was superior to most other information sources. The remaining three felt that the standard was similar.

Views and opinions

- 2.31 A very high proportion of respondents (11 out of 12) felt that scottishfoodanddrink.com provided a service that was relevant to the needs of their company.
- 2.32 Twelve respondents had suggestions of how the service might be improved. These are set out below, in full and verbatim (each comment is from a different respondent).
- *“Always more information on retail / foodservice / trends, contact details, etc. Easier to say than to do!”*

- *“Distribution is our weakness, and strengthening of the service whereby strategic links can be forged with chilled distributors in our market would make the website more attractive to us.”*
- *“Find a replacement for Scotland the Brand as a quality assurance sign for export market. Produce a free directory similar to what H&I enterprise do to highlight what producers/manufacturers there are.”*
- *“Give updates for certain areas of information of events, news, etc, to make people visit site more. Basically we are too busy and need prompted to visit. Really annoying when I find out of an event would like to go to, but didn’t go on site until passed. All our fault of course. Reminders, etc, helpful to use site.”*
- *“Improve the search facility – but haven’t looked in last year, as got so cheesed of looking for packaging/labelling suppliers.”*
- *“Links to other pertinent sites, like where to access packaging, equipment, marketing guides, export guides, etc.”*
- *“More info and assistance enabling a family type rural business to access multiple stores and similar markets on a regional basis.”*
- *“Perhaps a short quarterly email with an eye catching statement and the website address to simply click on and enter the site. This would be a simple and direct reminder that the site is there and I think in many cases recipients of the email would click on the site.”*
- *“Promoting the site / news via emails.”*
- *“Service is based on me checking the website regularly. If website held a profile of my interests and alerted me when an event was planned it would be better.”*
- *“The Buyers Guide section contains contact details which I know, from my activities within various sectors, are out of date. Perhaps a regular request to all listed companies to update contact information would be useful?”*
- *“This is not an informative website with structured help or good guidance. The design is poor and content comes from information that is available in the public domain. It is a portal with no substance.”*

2.33 Some of the suggestions arising from the online survey response were reflected in our subsequent telephone interviews with ten companies. In particular, the idea of improving the ‘interactivity’ of the website was raised by several consultees whom we interviewed. For example:

- *“The next level for improving the website is to try and get companies to interact and somehow share information online. Essentially the website needs to become more interactive with the client base. One possibility is through virtual chat rooms, so that more networking can be done online. Another possibility is to introduce virtual seminars online, so businesses logging on can have question and answer*

sessions with the 'expert speaker' on whatever topic is being discussed. This would save time, as many business people cannot always attend seminars. The main point to bear in mind is that it's all about improving connectivity." (juicing company)

- *"It would be better if information on events could be emailed to users on a weekly basis. The website needs to be more pro-active; it needs to engage better with its users." (vegetable and fruit processor)*
- *"The best improvement you could make would be to send updates or news alerts directly to the user by email." (seafood company)*

2.34 Telephone consultations also confirmed the view of some of the online respondents that contact details on the website were not as comprehensive or up to date as they might be.

2.35 In summary:

- companies' views of the sfd.com service are largely positive
- awareness and usage levels have increased on last year
- there are several specific examples of tangible benefits to users (new markets penetrated, business awards won, etc) ...
- ... however, very few companies are able to identify financial benefits in terms of increased productivity, turnover, etc
- a high proportion of respondents did not answer a number of question areas – suggesting that they were either unable to answer the questions, or were simply indifferent to the issues raised
- many users are very keen to see the website's interactivity increased, and particularly wish to receive regular email alerts when new information is posted.

3 Partners' perspectives

Survey response rate

- 3.1 The online survey questionnaire was sent to 367 organisations classed as 'partners' or 'stakeholders' of SFD. Of these, however, 119 were returned as undeliverable or unknown user. The actual number of recipients was therefore 248.
- 3.2 Responses were received from 47 organisations – a response rate of just under 19%, which we regard as satisfactory. Furthermore, the total number of respondents is higher than last year, when only 36 partner organisations completed the questionnaire.

Survey respondents and organisation type

- 3.3 Amongst the responses received, the breakdown of organisation type was as follows:
- Trade organisation or industry association (15)
 - Further education colleges (9)
 - Government or local authority (8)
 - Business support agency (4)
 - University (3)
 - 'Other' (3) – contract caterer, research institute and national broker of learning
 - Consultancy (2)
 - Careers advice (1)
 - Retailer (1)
 - Service provider (1)
- 3.4 Almost half of respondents defined themselves as Senior Managers or Managers (49%), with a further 23% defining themselves as Directors. Amongst the 21% who defined themselves as 'Other', these included lecturers, CEOs and marketing executives.

Levels of awareness and usage of website

- 3.5 The overwhelming majority of respondents had heard of scottishfoodanddrink.com. Encouragingly, 68% of all respondents had used the service – a considerable increase on last year, when only 53% of partner organisations said they had made use of it.

- 3.6 In last year's survey, 39% of companies had heard of the service but had *not* used it. In 2005, this figure has reduced to 23%.
- 3.7 A total of 14 organisations had *not* used the service, of which 3 had not heard of it before.
- 3.8 Most respondents had been made aware of the service by Scottish Enterprise: in 38% of cases this was how they had first heard about it. A further 17% had first heard about it through SFD events or publications. Other responses included: through a colleague (17%); through an adviser (4%); and, variously, LEC and trade association.

Feedback from non-users

- 3.9 Eleven respondents answered the question, *why have you not used scottishfoodanddrink.com?* Responses were:
- *I have looked at it but did not find it helpful (1)*
 - *I have not had the chance to look at it yet (5)*
 - *I use other sources of industry information (3)*
- 3.10 In the case of those who used other sources of information, the alternative sources cited were, respectively:
- *EU, SEERAD, FSA, IAAS, SAMW, USDA, Meat Australia, Meat and Wool New Zealand, FAO, OECD, UK Customs and Excise etc*
 - *HCIMA, Scottish Food And Drink Publication, Sodexo.Com, The List, Eat Scotland, Visit Scotland, Scottish Chefs*
 - *Trade press, CATERER magazine, Cotacys with suppliers, The Authorities Buying Consortium for Local Authorities.*

Frequency of use

- 3.11 As with the survey of companies, partner organisations were asked how frequently they made use of the service. Of the 30 organisations who answered the question, 10 (33%) said that they used it at least once a week.
- 3.12 In last year's survey the majority of respondents said that they used the service once per month or less. The fact that this has now reduced to 67% is very encouraging.

Reasons for using the website

- 3.13 Partner organisations were asked whether they accessed the website primarily for their own needs in terms of maintaining their knowledge and understanding of the industry, or for specific activities for clients or members.

- 3.14 Of the 29 people who answered the question, 18 used it primarily for their own benefit (in terms of maintaining their knowledge and understanding of the industry) and 9 used it primarily for specific client or member activities. The remaining two respondents used it, respectively, for careers events and for passing on information to students.
- 3.15 Partners were asked whether they perceived any barriers to using an internet-based information service. More than two thirds of those who answered the question did not perceive any barriers at all. Of the four who perceived barriers, these were identified as:
- concerns about how up to date the information is
 - [lack of] familiarity with using web-based resources and applications
 - not relevant to small local market producers
 - the time it takes to find the information you are looking for.

Use of specific areas of the website

- 3.16 The relative popularity of each area of the website is highlighted below:

Table 3.1: Use of each area of scottishfoodanddrink.com				
	Number of respondents			
	'Use frequently	'Use occasionally'	'Do not use	Total no. respondents
News	10 (37%)	15 (56%)	2 (7%)	27 (100%)
Events	9 (32%)	16 (57%)	3 (11%)	28 (100%)
Marketing	0	11 (52%)	10 (48%)	21 (100%)
Packaging	0	5 (25%)	15 (75%)	20 (100%)
Logistics	0	4 (21%)	15 (79%)	19 (100%)
Hygiene and safety	4 (19%)	7 (33%)	10 (48%)	21 (100%)
Export	0	6 (32%)	13 (68%)	19 (100%)
Food service	3 (14%)	10 (48%)	8 (38%)	21 (100%)
Retail	0	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	20 (100%)
Organic	0	9 (47%)	10 (53%)	19 (100%)
Learning	6 (27%)	9 (41%)	7 (32%)	22 (100%)
Buyers guide	5 (24%)	7 (33%)	9 (43%)	21 (100%)
Projects	4 (20%)	11 (55%)	5 (25%)	20 (100%)
Forums	6 (27%)	7 (32%)	9 (41%)	22 (100%)
Strategy	8 (33%)	9 (38%)	7 (29%)	24 (100%)
How Do I Guides	1 (5%)	8 (42%)	10 (53%)	19 (100%)
Healthy Eating	5 (22%)	10 (43%)	8 (35%)	23 (100%)

3.17 The areas most likely to be accessed on a frequent basis are News and Events.

Levels of awareness and usage of the Helpline

3.18 Very few respondents among partner organisations had used the SFD Helpline – only three out of 39. Just over 30% of respondents were not aware of its existence, and 61% reported that they had not used it.

3.19 Those who had used it were asked to select a statement which best described their opinion of the helpline. Responses were:

- *I use the helpline to access information or support that is outside the scope of the website (2)*
- *The helpline is a useful addition to sfd.com because I can ask for more detail on specific points of interest or support (1).*

Benefits arising from use of scottishfoodanddrink.com

3.20 Partner organisations were asked to indicate what benefits (financial and otherwise) had accrued as a result of using scottishfoodanddrink.com, on two levels:

- benefits to partner organisation itself
- benefits to clients/members of the partner organisation.

3.21 Unfortunately the number of partner organisations who responded to the questions in this section was extremely small, and it is impossible to draw robust conclusions from the very limited data we gleaned from this part of the survey. The disappointing response has implications for the design of any subsequent survey. We refer to this again in our Conclusions and Recommendations.

3.22 Respondents were asked whether use of the SFD website or helpline had led to any improvements in productivity levels, or reductions in costs, in their own organisation or in member organisations. The majority of those who responded felt that the service had *not* had an impact on productivity or costs.

3.23 Only one respondent was able to say that the service had had a positive impact on productivity levels and costs. This respondent (from a college) reported that as a result of using sfd.com in the last year, costs had been reduced by between £1,000 and £5,000, and additional income had been gained in the same range. The respondent felt that scottishfoodanddrink.com had:

- improved their productivity through the quality and range of information available
- lowered their operating costs by avoiding the need for them to provide this service for their members or clients

- improved their income or turnover as a result of being more informed about their market
- saved them time and money in terms of avoiding the need to source, publish or provide industry information for their members or clients
- enabled them to offer an 'added value' service to their members/clients.

3.24 Respondents were asked to identify the ways in which they used the information obtained via scottishfoodanddrink.com. These are highlighted below.

Table 3.2: Ways in which information from SFD is used by partner organisations				
	Number of respondents			
	Yes	No	Don't know	Total no. respondents
Kept in touch with current industry news, events and issues	10 (53%)	7 (37%)	2 (11%)	19 (100%)
Identified new market information	3 (19%)	10 (63%)	3 (19%)	16 (100%)
Identified/better suppliers, or products or services	2 (13%)	11 (73%)	2 (13%)	15 (100%)
Accessed information about sources of funding	3 (20%)	10 (67%)	2 (13%)	15 (100%)
Helped identify suitable training opportunities	1 (7%)	11 (73%)	3 (20%)	15 (100%)
Helped in recruiting staff	1 (7%)	12 (80%)	2 (13%)	15 (100%)
Found information on careers in Food and Drink	2 (13%)	12 (75%)	2 (13%)	16 (100%)
Found regulatory and quality information	2 (14%)	9 (64%)	3 (21%)	14 (100%)
Identified other sources of information and advice	7 (39%)	8 (44%)	3 (17%)	18 (100%)

3.25 Keeping in touch with industry news and events, and identifying further sources of information and guidance, are the two most commonly cited ways in which SFD information is used by partner organisations. This reflects the findings from the survey of companies.

Views and opinions

3.26 Eight respondents answered the question, 'what do you particularly like about the scottishfoodanddrink.com website and helpline?' Their comments are set out below, in full and verbatim.

- *"Depth of information, and ability to find sector specific information"*
- *"Ease of access"*
- *"Good source of information and news"*

- *“Informative”*
- *“Instant access to information about the food and drink industry at the touch of a button. Helpline can handle complex enquiries with a quick response.”*
- *“It provides good leads in looking for information about the industry”*
- *“Supplier database”*
- *“Website useful for Scottish industry news and events information and also a useful reference point for company and other contact details.”*

3.27 Nine respondents provided suggestions about how the service might be improved:

- *“An innovation page for technology”*
- *“[Make it] easier to use”*
- *“Have a more full synopsis on the news elements”*
- *“Improve awareness through a seminar programme”*
- *“It would be useful if people could add themselves to a mailing list so that they receive a prompt email each time there is new information on the website – would prompt you to visit more regularly and make it easier to locate information of interest. Perhaps people opting into such an email prompt service could indicate topics of interest so that they would only be prompted about new information in those areas.”*
- *“Links with further organisations”*
- *“Make it faster to search through the database”*
- *“The design and navigation could be better. The learning zone works on the assumption that the user knows what they are looking for. It is not helpful having learning providers in alphabetical order instead of more meaningful groupings. Information needs to be presented in a more user-friendly manner or the reader will get bored quickly and give up.”*
- *“Too many layers of information. Needs more filtering.”*

3.28 To summarise the views of partner organisations:

- as with companies, awareness and usage levels have increased on last year
- partner organisations use sfd.com both for their own organisational purposes, and for the benefit of their clients/customers
- the most commonly cited reason for using the website was to keep in touch with current industry news, events and issues

- again, many respondents chose not to answer certain question areas, whether through indifference or lack of knowledge
- the service is not generally felt to be having a direct impact upon productivity, turnover or costs – however, it is likely that some productivity gains are happening without being recognised.

4 Network perspectives

Survey response rate

- 4.1 The online survey questionnaire was sent to a total of 71 staff within the SE and HIE networks. Of these, 49 were account managers and 22 were non-account managers.
- 4.2 Amongst account managers, responses were received from 28 individuals – a response rate of 57%, which we regard as very good. Of these, 5 were from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) or HIE Local Enterprise account managers. Amongst the non-account managers, responses were received from 10 individuals – a response rate of 45%. Of these, only one was from the HIE network.

Levels of awareness and usage of website

- 4.3 All the respondents had heard of scottishfoodanddrink.com and had used it. All non-account managers had known about scottishfoodanddrink.com for more than a year.

Frequency of use

- 4.4 As with the other surveys, respondents were asked how frequently they made use of the service. Over two thirds of account managers (19) stated that they used the website at least once a month. Interestingly, a very high proportion of non-account managers (80%) said that they used the website at least once per week.
- 4.5 Almost all (25) account managers said that their average visit to scottishfoodanddrink.com lasted less than 15 minutes.

Reasons for using the website

- 4.6 Respondents were asked whether they accessed the website primarily for their own needs in terms of maintaining their knowledge and understanding of the industry, or for specific activities for clients or members.
- 4.7 Almost two thirds (18 respondents) of account managers used it primarily for their own benefit and 9 used it primarily for specific client or member activities. The remaining respondents used it for both reasons. Amongst the non-account managers, half (5) used it primarily for their own benefit; two used it mainly for client-related activities, and the remainder used it for both purposes.
- 4.8 Account managers were asked what other internet based sources of industry information they had used. Their responses are set out below in full and verbatim.

- *“Cob web info for more general information”*
- *“DEFRA, SEERAD, QMS, SAOS, ARLA FOODS UK, BEPA, FARMSTOCK, DEANS, STONEGATE, SCOTTISH DAIRY ASSOCIATION, SOPA, NUF(S), MLC”*
- *“euromonitor, Business Gateway, IGD kompass”*
- *“Food From Britian, www.foodhygiene.com”*
- *“FSA website HMSO website”*
- *“I have never used the Helpline but some of the enquiries I put through out Business Information Officers go to the helpline.”*
- *“igd, nomis, the grocer, food business review, dairy reporter”*
- *“IGD, Mintel, datamonitor”*
- *“Numerous!”*
- *“UK Trade partners”*

Use of specific areas of the website

4.9 The relative popularity of each area of the website is highlighted in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Use of each area of scottishfoodanddrink.com by Network staff								
	Account managers				Non-account managers			
	'Do not use'	'Use occasionally'	'Use frequently'	Total no. resp'ts	'Do not use'	'Use occasionally'	'Use frequently'	Total no. resp'ts
News	3 (12%)	16 (62%)	7 (27%)	26	0	3 (30%)	7 (70%)	10
Events	2 (7%)	21 (78%)	4 (15%)	27	0	0	10 (100%)	10
Marketing	7 (26%)	13 (48%)	7 (26%)	27	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)	8
Packaging	8 (38%)	13 (62%)	0	21	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	0	8
Logistics	8 (36%)	13 (59%)	1 (5%)	22	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	0	8
Hygiene and safety	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	0	20	3 (38%)	5 (62%)	0	8
Export	8 (33%)	14 (58%)	2 (8%)	24	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)	8
Food service	4 (18%)	16 (73%)	2 (9%)	22	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	3 (33%)	9
Retail	3 (14%)	16 (73%)	3 (14%)	22	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	3 (33%)	9
Organic	10 (45%)	11 (50%)	1 (5%)	22	3 (38%)	4 (50%)	1 (12%)	8
Learning	8 (38%)	11 (52%)	2 (10%)	21	3 (33%)	4 (44%)	2 (22%)	9
Buyers guide	5 (22%)	11 (48%)	7 (30%)	23	0	2 (20%)	8 (80%)	10
Projects	5 (25%)	9 (45%)	6 (30%)	20	1 (13%)	5 (63%)	2 (25%)	8
Forums	10 (48%)	11 (52%)	0	21	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	3 (33%)	9
Strategy	10 (45%)	11 (50%)	1 (5%)	22	1 (13%)	4 (50%)	3 (38%)	8
How Do I Guides	9 (43%)	6 (29%)	6 (29%)	21	1 (11%)	5 (56%)	3 (33%)	9
Healthy Eating	10 (50%)	8 (40%)	2 (10%)	20	3 (33%)	3 (33%)	3 (33%)	9

4.10 The key salient points are that:

- the areas which **account managers** stated they 'use frequently' were "buyers' guide" (30% of respondents), "news" (27%), "projects" (30%) and "How do I Guides" (29%)
- the areas which **non-account managers** stated they 'use frequently' were "events" (100% of respondents), "Buyers' Guide" (80%) and "news" (70%).

Customer usage of scottishfoodanddrink.com and the Helpline

4.11 Of the 22 account manager respondents, 13 (59%) stated that they recommended scottishfoodanddrink.com to all their customers in the food and drink industry. A higher proportion of non-account managers (80%) reported the same.

4.12 The majority of account managers (23) reported that some of their customers use the website. Only one stated that none of their customers used it and the remainder (4) did not know.

- 4.13 The majority of account managers (13) reported that customers have ‘occasionally’ said that the service is useful. One commented that customers ‘often’ say how useful the service is; one said that customers had found it ‘not very easy to use’. The rest (8) stated that customers had never commented on the service or they did not know.
- 4.14 Amongst the non-account managers, 6 (60%) reported that ‘all’ (1) or ‘some’ (5) of their customers used the Scottish Food and Drink Helpline. The rest (4) did not know.
- 4.15 Only 7 account managers reported that some of their customers used the Scottish Food and Drink Helpline. Three stated that none of their customers used it, and the rest (18) did not know.

Benefits arising from use of scottishfoodanddrink.com

- 4.16 Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which sfd.com had been useful to them, and whether it had led to any improvements, on two levels:
- benefits to account managers themselves
 - benefits to customers of the account managers.
- 4.17 The benefits felt by respondents within their own LEC are presented below:

Table 4.2: How important is scottishfoodanddrink.com or the Helpline in terms of helping you fulfil the following needs in your own organisation?					
	Essential	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Total respond'ts
Keeping you up to date with news and information on the industry	4 (11%)	7 (19%)	21 (58%)	4 (11%)	36 (100%)
Helping you to develop your skills and knowledge related to the industry	2 (6%)	6 (17%)	21 (58%)	7 (19%)	36 (100%)
Improving your ability to support food and drink customers	4 (11%)	7 (19%)	22 (61%)	3 (8%)	36 (100%)

Table 4.3: Has your use of sfd.com led to any of the following improvements in your own organisation? (all Network respondents)					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total respond'ts
Saved you time in terms of finding information	10 (28%)	25 (69%)	0	1 (3%)	36 (100%)
Avoided you having to provide alternative support for customers	4 (11%)	17 (47%)	11 (31%)	4 (11%)	36 (100%)

(such as commissioning research or appointing a consultant)					
Improved the standard of food and drink intelligence available from Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise	9 (25%)	21 (58%)	3 (8%)	3 (8%)	36 (100%)
Improved productivity	1 (3%)	17 (47%)	6 (17%)	12 (33%)	36 (100%)

4.18 It is interesting to note that when respondents were asked a direct question about productivity gains, only one felt able to ‘strongly agree’ that sfd.com had helped to improve productivity. However, when asked more indirect questions – such as whether sfd.com had saved them time in terms of finding information – the response was unanimously positive. Clearly productivity gains are happening as a result of sfd.com but, crucially, they are not being recognised.

4.19 The benefits which respondents felt their customers had gained from use of sfd.com are summarised in Table 5.4, below:

Table 4.4: How important do you believe the scottishfoodanddrink.com website is in terms of helping your customers undertake the following activities?						
	Essential	Very Important	Important	Not important	n/a	Total number of respondents
Being better informed/more knowledgeable about the industry	3 (10%)	13 (42%)	13 (42%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	31 (100%)
Using new suppliers, products or services	2 (7%)	10 (33%)	13 (43%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	30 (100%)
Establishing collaboration(s) with other organisation(s)	0 (0%)	8 (28%)	18 (62%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	29 (100%)
Improving business or marketing planning	3 (10%)	10 (34%)	13 (45%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	29 (100%)
Expanding into new markets/sectors	4 (13%)	9 (30%)	13 (43%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	30 (100%)
Winning new customers/business	2 (6%)	6 (19%)	17 (55%)	5 (16%)	1 (3%)	31 (100%)
Establishing new international trade/exports activity	1 (3%)	9 (30%)	17 (57%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	30 (100%)

Views and opinions

- 4.20 When rating scottishfoodanddrink.com or the Scottish Food and Drink Helpline against other industry information sources, twelve of the account manager respondents (44%) felt that scottishfoodanddrink.com was superior. Only one stated it was of a lower standard and the rest felt that it was of a similar standard compared to other industry information sources. Of the non-account managers, five respondents (50%) thought that the sfd.com service was superior to most other industry information sources and the rest thought that it was of a similar standard.
- 4.21 Six respondents answered the question, ‘what do you particularly like about the scottishfoodanddrink.com website and helpline?’ Their comments are set out below, in full and verbatim.
- *“dedicated focus on Food and Drink information”*
 - *“ease of use and up to date, available and accurate information”*
 - *“easy of use; flexibility of service”*
 - *“the help guides”*
 - *“focused on industry needs Uses industry language. Is constantly updated and reviewed to ensure it remains relevant”*
 - *“most information is free of charge which is a great benefit for companies.”*
- 4.22 Four respondents provided suggestions about how the service might be improved:
- *“interactive site for research information”*
 - *“keep up the good work extended the links with IGD retail analysis”*
 - *“you need to monitor your company database more rigorously to ensure that information is kept up to date. You could improve access to other and related web sites.”*
 - *“Buyers Guide - give detail of accreditation of companies eg EFSIS etc”.*
- 4.23 Finally, it is worth noting the comment of one non-account manager that:
- *“the service has vastly improved this year and information is much easier to find.”*
- 4.24 To summarise the feedback from LEC personnel:
- all account managers and non-account managers are aware of sfd.com and use it – but frequency of usage appears to be higher amongst non-account managers

- the majority of managers promote sfd.com to their clients, and many report that their clients regard the service favourably
- there is evidence that managers are experiencing productivity gains as a result of using sfd.com – but are not necessarily recognising those gains.

5 Conclusions and lessons learned

Assessment against SFD strategy goals

5.1 As in our 2004 survey, we briefly assess how the scottishfoodanddrink.com service has contributed to the six goals of the SFD strategy.

- *Develop and grow leading processors of food and drink.* As we noted in last year's evaluation, the SFD service is likely to be of greater value to smaller businesses than to the leading processors. Some elements of the service (market information, etc) will provide value to leading processors, but additionality is likely to be higher for smaller businesses which, without sfd.com, would be unlikely to have the time or resources to be able to find this kind of information.
- *Exploit the premium retail and foodservice markets of the UK and Europe.* The survey response provided some indications that sfd.com is facilitating access to premium markets. Just over 23% of respondents said that they had won new customers or business as a result of using sfd.com, and a slightly higher proportion reported that they had won new international trade / exports. (These figures are higher than in last year's survey, but we would emphasise that the number of people who answered this question was small.)
- *Grow advantage through innovation and exploiting technology.* In terms of the website, there is much evidence to suggest that users are keen to exploit the available technology further. Many company and partner respondent requested that the service become more interactive, and in particular that it be enhanced through an automated email alert service.
- *Develop an efficient supply chain.* Of the small number of companies who answered the question in this year's survey, 23% reported that they were now using new suppliers, products or services as a result of using scottishfoodanddrink.com. Amongst partner organisations the figure was 13%. Again, these figures are higher than in last year's survey but absolute numbers are too small for us to draw robust conclusions. There is also some evidence to suggest that companies are trying to make use of sfd.com to improve their supply chain, but are not yet succeeding. We note, for example, the comment from one food manufacturer that, 'our core strategic weakness is distribution [...] we have used the website to further strengthen this aspect of our business, yet have found it difficult identifying suitable chilled food distributors working within Scotland who could sell and/or distribute our brand'.
- *Develop the capabilities of our people.* Based on this year's survey response (and with the caveat that the number of responses was low), sfd.com does not appear to be having a direct impact on skill levels within organisations in the Scottish food and drink industry. There is some feedback to suggest that the 'Learning' zone of

the website is not yet laid out in a sufficiently user-friendly way to promote usage, and this is something that may need to be considered in the longer term.

Progress towards objectives

5.2 In Table 5.1 below we summarise progress towards the objectives set out in the 2003 Approval Paper.

Table 5.1: Progress towards objectives		
Objectives Set August 2003	Results Oct 2004	Results Dec 2005
Deliver tangible business benefits for users	£850k per annum increased turnover; £140k per annum reduced costs, 100 companies with productivity improvements	Poor response to some question areas makes it impossible to produce robust figures relating to turnover and productivity gains. However, 21% of companies have won new customers/business as a result of using sfd.com, and 23% report new international trade/exports. 50% have improved business or marketing planning.
Provide access to business information for the Food & Drink industry	58% of industry and 53% of partners/stakeholders using. 93% believe relevant/very relevant to industry	70% of companies use sfd.com, and 64% report they are better informed / more knowledgeable about the industry as a result of using sfd.com. Number of unique visitors to website is increasing (to a high of 15,183 in Jan 2006). Number of pages visited has increased from a previous high of 160,000 per month to 390,701 in December 2005, indicating a very significant increase in the level of traffic.
Reduce search costs for Food & Drink businesses and supporting organisations	60% of companies and 50% of supporting organisations have reduced search costs	The total value of information gained through use of the sfd.com helpline during the period 1 May 2005 to 31 January 2006 amounts to almost £310K (i.e. this is the total cost saving to companies, who would otherwise have had to pay for the use of databases such as Mintel). The total cost saving over a 12-month period amounts to over £413K.
Promote effective communications and collaboration within the industry	News/events sections used by 80% of users; 15% used to support collaborative activity	News section used by 82% of companies and 93% of partners. Events section used by 82% of companies and 89% of partners. 57% of companies have got involved in other SFD activities as a result of using sfd.com
Reach more customers through use of web	52% of companies using at least once per month; 53% of partners/stakeholders using and encouraging company usage	41% of companies using at least once per month (22% using at least once per week); 70% of partners/stakeholders using the service (of which 70% use at least once per month).
Web-enable SE projects	Food Futures, Food Learning Network, Food Facts, CAMIC delivered through scottishfoodanddrink.com	Food Futures, Food Learning Network, Food Facts, CAMIC delivered through scottishfoodanddrink.com
Provide enhanced knowledge base for SE staff supporting the industry	77% of account managers use and value the service	100% of account managers and non-account managers use the service. Frequency of usage appears to be higher among non-account managers.

Lessons learned from the 2005 survey

5.3 The response to the 2005 online survey has been disappointing in the lack of detail which it elicited in key question areas. Only a very small proportion of respondents chose to answer the questions about the impact of sfd.com on their organisation: the absence of response to these key question areas has prevented us from drawing robust conclusions about the success of sfd.com. Several lessons can be learned from this year's survey:

- With hindsight, it is perhaps obvious that an electronic survey such as this, coming out of the blue at a busy time of year, will find respondents unprepared and unlikely to have detailed information at their fingertips. Many of them will be polite enough to return the survey, but it is understandable if they simply skip the questions which require a lot of thinking or preparation.
- The fact that the design of the online survey allowed respondents to skip questions was a mistake. In future surveys it would be wise to ensure that all respondents are required to complete all questions, even if their answer is 'don't know'.
- In future it would be sensible to alert all respondents in advance of the survey, probably by email, say, a week before the survey is issued. The purpose of the alert would be to remind users to look at the website again and consider how their use of the site might have impacted upon the way they work.
- For the sake of comparison and consistency, many questions in the 2005 survey were phrased in the same way as the 2004 survey. However, we note that when questions about impact are phrased in a direct way (e.g. "has use of the website had a positive impact on productivity?", or "has your turnover increased as a result of using sfd.com?") many respondents answer in the negative. We believe that in future a more creative approach should be adopted, using a series of questions framed in a more indirect way, which will encourage respondents to think about the ways in which use of sfd.com has benefited them. For example, questions such as: "If you use the 'News' section to keep you up to date with industry activity, do you find that sfd.com provides you with a quicker means of doing so than using other methods?", or "Has your use of 'How Do I' guides helped you to avoid using consultants, or made you better prepared to work with consultants?" provide a better means of eliciting information about the tangible impacts of sfd.com. When phrased in this way, and combined with a question on the number of examples/instances, it becomes easier to assign a value to the benefit gained. The Scottish Food and Drink user groups should provide a useful forum for testing and piloting new survey questions.
- Finally, the annual online survey is a useful means of obtaining information about industry awareness and usage of sfd.com. With modifications such as those described above, its ability to elicit information about impact should improve. However, even with enhancements the online survey on its own is unlikely to secure the full depth and breadth of feedback required to measure the impact of

sfd.com and its progress towards objectives. The survey should not be relied upon as the sole source of feedback from users of sfd.com. Feedback from focus groups / user groups will complement and enhance the annual survey findings.

Conclusions

- 5.4 Regardless of the difficulties associated with the poor response to some question areas, the 2005 online survey nevertheless enables us to identify some important trends and reveals some interesting findings.
- 5.5 **Awareness and usage of the sfd.com service has significantly increased** since the 2004 survey. Amongst companies, 70% have heard of it and used it, compared to 58% in the previous year. This is highly encouraging. It is thought that this significant increase is at least partly due to the new 'e-zine' service which was launched in September 2005, whereby news bulletins (containing hyperlinks to the sfd.com website) are sent to all registered users.
- 5.6 **Users are very keen to see website functionality enhanced**, in particular through the introduction of an **email alert service** which will prompt them to use the site more often. This idea was mooted in the previous evaluation of sfd.com, and there is clearly increasing demand for such a service. The success of such a development would depend, first, upon the quality of user contact information held by the central source. The high proportion of questionnaires returned as 'undeliverable' or 'unknown address' from our online survey indicates that this is something that deserves attention.
- 5.7 It is interesting that respondents overwhelmingly requested email alerts and more interactivity from the website, yet **no one acknowledged the new e-zine service** which was launched in September 2005. It is not clear whether users of sfd.com failed to associate the e-zine with the website, or whether they had forgotten that they received the bulletin. Clearly Scottish Food and Drink has already gone at least part of the way towards satisfying users' requests for increased interactivity, and is in tune with users' thinking. However, it would be useful to build on this by investigating the feasibility of providing bespoke and/or automated email alerts to different types of user, depending on their areas of interest.
- 5.8 As noted earlier, when respondents were asked a direct question about productivity gains resulting from use of sfd.com they tended to reply in the negative. Only one respondent felt able to 'strongly agree' that sfd.com had helped to improve productivity. However, when asked more indirect questions – such as whether sfd.com had saved them time in terms of finding information – the response was unanimously positive. Clearly **productivity gains are happening as a result of sfd.com but, crucially, they are not being recognised**. This has implications for survey design (as described above), but also raises wider evaluation issues.
- 5.9 In terms of ongoing evaluation of sfd.com, Scottish Enterprise is faced with the major challenge: to **reduce the proportion of companies who cannot identify what kind of**

impact sfd.com has had upon their business. The high proportion of ‘don’t knows’ and skipped responses in our survey has made it impossible to conduct any meaningful analysis of the service’s impact on costs, income and productivity. We have obtained some useful qualitative insight from open questions in the online survey and from telephone interviews with companies, but quantitative data has been even more sparse than in the 2004 survey.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Our survey and subsequent telephone consultation has uncovered a widespread desire on the part of users to achieve more from the sfd.com service. With awareness and usage levels higher than ever before, this is the time to capitalise on organisations' interest in getting more out of the service. The recently introduced e-zine service goes some way towards addressing this demand.
- 6.2 We recommend that the service be further enhanced by **creating an email alert service** which will:
- prompt people to use the website and/or helpline (i.e. a basic reminder service)
 - alert users to any significant new material posted on the website
 - (if possible) be tailored to suit the interests / needs of particular types of users.
- 6.3 We also recommend that users of the website should be encouraged to think on a more regular basis about the impact (if any) which sfd.com is having upon their business. The annual online survey should continue to be distributed. However, we suggest that the following **additional measures should be taken to enhance the survey process**:
- users should be alerted (say, one month in advance) to the fact that they will be surveyed about sfd.com and its impact on their organisation
 - this alert should take the form of an advance memo in electronic form, prompting users to think about any financial benefits they may have gained (turnover, productivity, income) as a result of using sfd.com – including examples of the kind of benefit they may have experienced
 - the online survey should be designed in such a way that respondents cannot skip questions
 - particular questions – particularly those concerning the organisational benefits arising from use of sfd.com – should be redesigned to ensure the optimum response.
- 6.4 We recommend that **Scottish Food and Drink user groups be used to discuss and pilot new survey questions** relating in particular to the impact of sfd.com on organisations' productivity and costs.

Appendix: survey respondents and consultees

List of companies (by email address) responding to online survey

a.unis@tiscali.co.uk
acunningham@ucbuk.co.uk
admin@forsythonline.co.uk
admin@wallaceseexpress.com
alanmartin@taninternational.com
allyjr@supanet.com
bob_nelson@talk21.com
cblacksnr@blackofdunoon.co.uk
david@centopercetowines.com
dmc@krystal-klear.com
donnyg@scottishshellfish.co.uk
emmowatt@tiscali.co.uk
enquiries@scottishorganiclamb.com
enquiries@speysidespecialities.co.uk
g.thompson@josephrobertson.com
gordon.a.shaw@rhm.com
grahame@burgon.co.uk
grahammcoull@hotmail.com
great-taste@skyefudge.co.uk
grocery@scofro.com
huntlyherbs@hotmail.com
ian.clarke@strathmore-foods.com
info@albert-bartlett.co.uk
info@betterbeverage.co.uk
info@deesidewater.co.uk
info@dewarratray.com
info@gilliesfinefoods.co.uk
info@glenfarclas.co.uk
info@golower.com
info@inveralmond-brewery.co.uk
info@kathyscornucopia.com
info@mackays.com
info@mitchells-scotland.com
info@osprio.com
info@ross-of-edinburgh.co.uk
info@scottishjerky.com
info@simplesimonspies.co.uk
info@westhighlanddairy.co.uk
inter_tartans@ednet.co.uk
Isabellaspreserves@btinternet.com
jo@earnpark.fsnet.co.uk
jo@geoffreybruce.co.uk
john.mclay@mclaywallace.co.uk
jonathan@getjuiced.co.uk
judith.vajk@lineone.net
keith@homes-style.demon.co.uk
macleod.organics@virgin.net

magnus@swansonsfruit.co.uk
mckenzie-biscuits@smartone.co.uk
neil@organicbuildings.com
Office@Denrosa.demon.co.uk
orgmeat@aol.com
peatlandgroup@yahoo.co.uk
robert@westofscotlandpo.idps.co.uk
sales@bibacity.co.uk
sales@gowriegrowers.co.uk
sales@greencity.co.uk
sales@hebrideanseafare.com
sales@mathiesons.co.uk
sales@orkneyherring.com
sales@plaisirduchocolat.co.uk
sales@scotprime.com
sales@solwayveg.co.uk
scotchbeef@munrodingwall.co.uk
scotland@omsco.co.uk
service@aquascot.com
sifsalmo@globalnet.co.uk
speyside@lineone.net
speysmokehouse@btconnect.com
Stctradlin@aol.com
tapa-ltd@tiscali.co.uk
tara@shetlandwhisky.com
towardfarm@aol.com
val_shields@hotmail.com

List of companies consulted by telephone

Get Juiced Ltd

Black of Dunoon (Bakers)

Speyside Glenlivet Water co ltd

Isabella's Preserves

ScottishJerky.com

Solway Veg Ltd

The Edinburgh Liqueur Company

Hebridean Seafare Ltd

Albert Bartlett & Sons

Bibacity

List of partner organisations consulted by telephone

Quality Meat Scotland

Improve Ltd

Seafood Scotland

Scottish Agricultural College

SFDF

Macdonald Hotels