

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts
Public Access and Records Management Division
Electronic Public Access Assessment

PACER User Satisfaction Report

Issued April 2013

PCG

PACIFIC
CONSULTING
GROUP

www.pcgfirm.com

200 S. California Avenue
Suite 200
Palo Alto, CA 94306

P: 650-327-8108
F: 650-326-6768

Executive Summary

The mission of the federal Judiciary's Electronic Public Access (EPA) program is to facilitate and improve electronic public access to court information at a reasonable cost, in accordance with legislative and Judiciary policies, security requirements, and user demands. The primary point of access to the court information and documents maintained in electronic format is through the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) service, which provides access to court case files and reports residing in each court's Case Management and Electronic Case Files (CM/ECF) system. Searching for case information across courts is accomplished through a tool called the PACER Case Locator. Support for the more than 450,000 PACER users, which include litigants, attorneys, and court staff, as well as commercial businesses, the media, academic researchers, students, and the general public, is provided by the PACER Service Center.

In 2009, the Judiciary undertook a comprehensive program assessment to better understand the different types of users of EPA services, including PACER, to measure user satisfaction, and to identify priority areas for improvement. Many improvements were implemented by the Judiciary based on the 2009 research results. This report communicates the results of a follow-up PACER User Satisfaction Survey conducted in September and October of 2012 to update information from the previous survey, assess the effect of improvements, and gather information to help evaluate the current fee structure.

Enhancements Following the 2009 PACER User Assessment

The comprehensive EPA Assessment led by the federal Judiciary and conducted by Pacific Consulting Group (PCG) in 2009 incorporated interviews, focus groups, and multiple surveys, including a User Satisfaction Survey. The following activities were undertaken by the federal Judiciary as a result of the Assessment recommendations:

- Created a new PACER Case Locator with expanded search capabilities
- Redesigned pacer.gov website
- Partnered with law libraries to provide training on the efficient and effective use of PACER
- Created a free PACER training database
- Promoted the use of RSS
- Created a mobile PACER application
- Created a tool to streamline billing for organizations with multiple PACER users
- Created video tutorials on how to use PACER
- Made audio recordings of court proceedings for some cases available through PACER

-
- Made opinions filed in some courts available for free through the Government Printing Office's Federal Digital System (FDsys)
 - Redesigned the PACER invoice

The Judiciary plans to address additional areas for improvement identified in the 2009 assessment, such as switching between CM/ECF and PACER, in the Next Generation of CM/ECF.

Goals of the 2012 PACER User Satisfaction Survey

The goals of the 2012 PACER User Satisfaction survey, also led by the federal Judiciary and conducted by PCG, were as follows:

- Update information from the previous comprehensive EPA Assessment
- Assess the effect of improvements implemented after the prior Assessment
- Gather information to help evaluate the current fee structure

About half of the questions were the same as questions asked in the 2009 User Satisfaction or Account Holder surveys to allow for comparisons and updates to the 2009 data. Additionally, new questions were designed to provide new insights, including investigating awareness and use of new services, testing interest in possible service enhancements, and gathering information on behaviors and attitudes.

Report Analysis Overview

A total of 1,752 completed surveys were collected and analyzed, with a response rate of 20 percent.¹ This response rate is similar to 2009 (23%) and is appropriate for an online survey of professionals and individuals, some of whom have an ongoing relationship with the service provider and others of whom have a one-time relationship.

Analysis and findings discussed in this report measure user satisfaction with PACER overall and with the nine satisfaction items, comparing them to 2009. Additional analyses, such as analysis of variance (ANOVA), identify key drivers of satisfaction. PCG's Net Impression[®] Leverage Analysis ranks the rating items in terms of where operational or other improvements will yield the greatest positive effect on overall satisfaction. Frequencies of responses measure usage of PACER, awareness of new services, and attitudes about pricing for all users and by user type.

¹ Invitations for the survey that were returned as undeliverable were deleted from the total number of survey invitations sent to calculate this 20% response rate.

Summary of Findings

Demographics and Usage of PACER: Demographics and usage was similar to 2009.

- The overall percentage of each user type remained similar to 2009.
- The frequency of PACER usage was similar to 2009.
- The way respondents use PACER was also consistent with 2009 findings, with over half of the respondents indicating that they use PACER to follow a case (58%), and over a third using it to search for cases within a court (38%) or to obtain reports (34%).

Figure A: PACER User Types

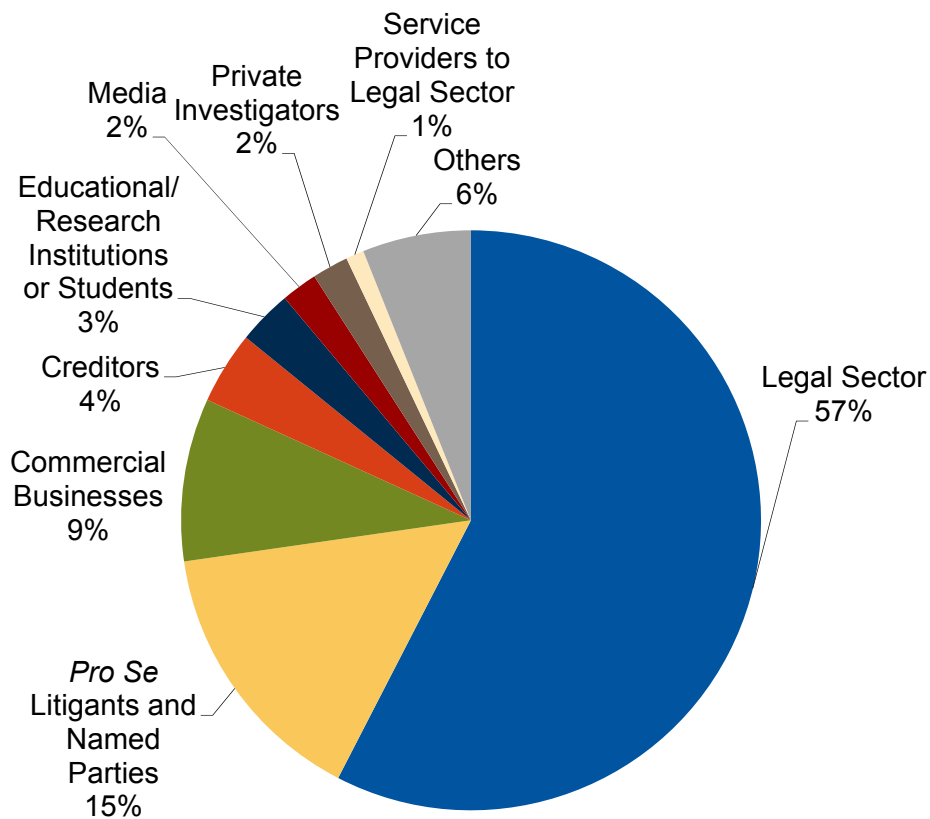
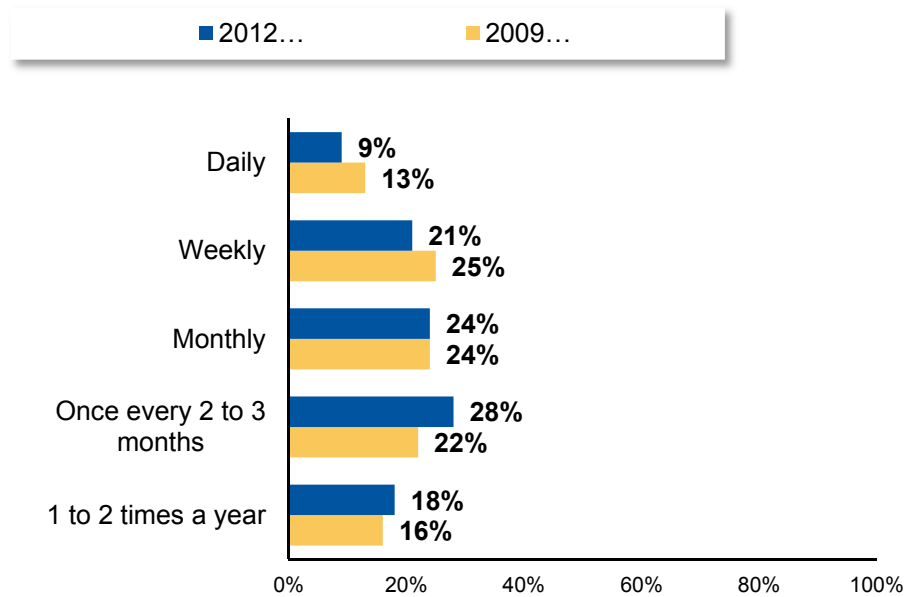


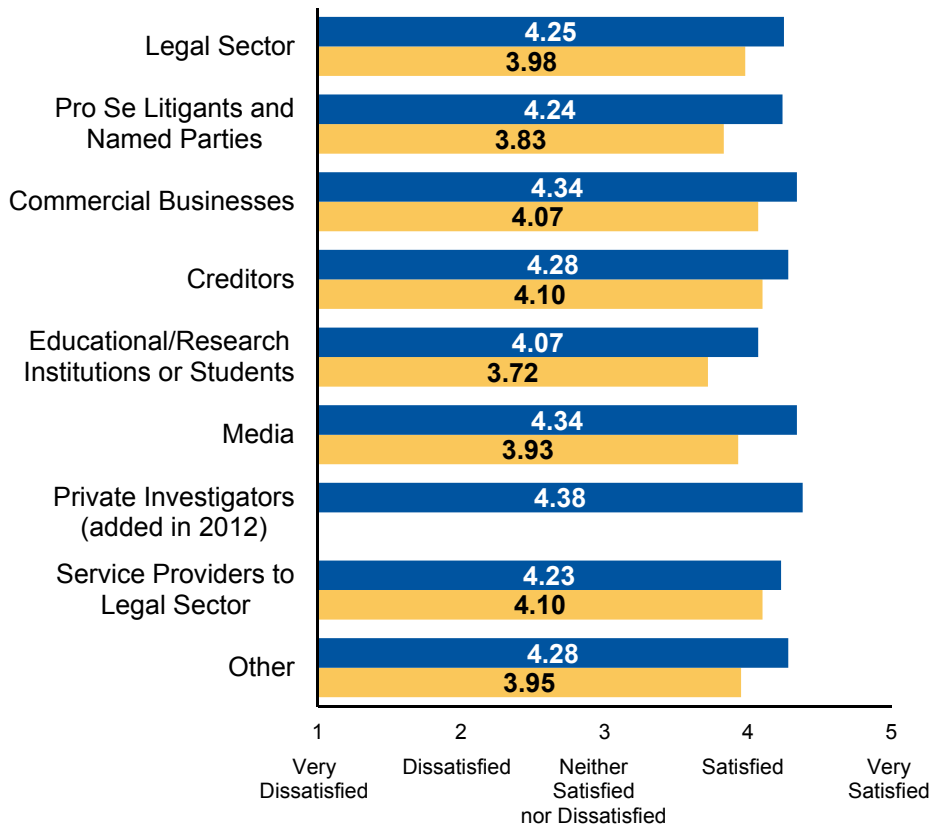
Figure B: In the past 12 months, how often have you used PACER?



Overall Satisfaction: Overall satisfaction has increased significantly since the EPA Assessment in 2009.

- In the current survey, nearly all respondents are satisfied with PACER overall (90%), compared to 75% satisfied in 2009. The percent dissatisfied has decreased substantially to 3% from 15% in 2009. Additionally, the current average satisfaction rating is 4.26 out of a possible 5, compared to 3.97 in 2009.
- The overall satisfaction ratings of all user types increased fairly consistently from 2009 to 2012.
- Frequency of use continues to be a key driver of overall satisfaction: those who use PACER more frequently are more satisfied.

Figure C: Overall Satisfaction by PACER User Types for 2012 and 2009



- Awareness of the PACER Service Center (PSC) also continues to be a driver of satisfaction, with those who are aware of the PSC giving higher overall satisfaction ratings. However, only about a quarter of those who are aware of the PSC have actually contacted it in the previous 12 months in both the current and prior surveys.

Search Capabilities: Users continue to find PACER reliable and are more satisfied with the improved search capabilities.

- *Accessing PACER when you need to* is the highest rating item, with an average rating of 4.45 and 91% satisfied. These ratings have increased compared to the average rating of 4.37 and 83% satisfied in 2009.
- Satisfaction with all items relating to searching and locating a case have improved: *Locating a case* has increased to an average rating of 4.23 and 86% satisfied from 4.11 and 78% satisfied; *Search results* has increased to 4.22 and 85% satisfied from 4.10 and 77% satisfied; and *Searching across courts* has increased to 4.15 and 79% satisfied from 3.99 and 73% satisfied.
- Additionally, usage of the PACER Case Locator has increased: only 13% of respondents have never used the PACER Case Locator, compared to 49% in 2009.

This change may be due, in part, to increased awareness of the name of the search tool.

Pricing: In general, users express satisfaction with the current pricing of PACER

- Users continue to be satisfied with the *Value of PACER for the money you pay*, giving it an average satisfaction rating of 4.18 with 81% satisfied and 13% neutral.
- Users also continue to be satisfied with *Understanding how PACER is priced*, giving it an average satisfaction rating of 4.01 with 73% satisfied and 22% neutral.

Awareness of PACER Services: Users continue to be unsure that they are familiar with all that PACER offers, and many are not aware of new services.

- *Being familiar with all that PACER offers* is the lowest rated item and has decreased in satisfaction from an average rating of 3.53 and 43% satisfied in 2009 to 3.34 and 37% satisfied in 2012.
- Awareness of new services was generally low, ranging from 8% to 28% aware. However, those who actually tried the new services found them extremely or somewhat helpful, ranging from 86% to 100%.

Interest in Possible New Services: Interest in the potential new services presented in the survey was limited.

- One-fifth to one-third of users are very or somewhat likely to use the various services listed².
- A batch downloading capability received the most interest of all services presented, with 33% of users somewhat or very likely to use it.

² Possible new services presented in the survey include: batch downloading; ability to set your PACER account to prevent you from going over a pre-paid balance; custom case alerts; pay as you go services using a credit card; subscription service; and standardized reports for a fixed fee.
