

Reinventing the Occupational Outlook Handbook

Since the creation of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) public Web site in 1994, the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) has been its most frequently visited product. But the OOH continued to be written for hard-copy publication – a 900-page book weighing 5 pounds – and the print material has been simply posted online. The BLS Employment Projections program is engaged in reinventing the OOH as a product that is created specifically for the Web, taking advantage of Web search, presentation, and linking capabilities and using a writing style appropriate to the Web format.

The final prototype occupational profile has been developed, the result of a team effort involving researching how our customers use the OOH and how other career information resources are designed, developing a variety of options, and using a customer-driven approach to extensively test alternatives with real OOH users – counselors and students – through focus groups, interviews, usability testing, and expert review of test designs.

The final prototype has multiple navigation paths, multiple color photographs showing workers in the occupation (instead of one black-and-white photo in the print version), a “Quick Facts” box, graphs and brief tables, and the occupational descriptions that are the hallmark of each profile. These descriptions use clearly organized text to fully explain what workers in the occupation do, their work environment, preparation needed to enter and advance the occupation (education, training licensing and certification, work experience), pay, job outlook, similar occupations, and contacts for more information. OOH staff have been trained on the new prototype and writing for the Web and have begun preparing the first “reinvented” OOH, which will be published in December 2011.

The OOH is the most widely used career information resource in the United States. It is BLS’s most frequently used product, averaging about 7 million page views each month and accounting for more than one-fifth of the traffic on www.bls.gov. Content of the OOH also appears in a wide variety of career information materials produced by the States, educational institutions, professional and trade associations, labor unions, and private publishers, generating a large but immeasurable number of additional users.

The information in the OOH helps individuals – students, adult career changers, and the unemployed – explore career options and make decisions about their education and training investments. It also helps counselors, parents, teachers, and others who assist individuals in this exploration and decision-making.