

JACK WEBSTER AWARDS POLL (1 OF 2)

9-in-10 Acknowledge Importance of Media to Society, but Public Divided on Relevance and Balance of BC's Media

Jack Webster's Legacy Lives on in BC; 3-in-4 British Columbians Heard of Him, and Know What He's Renowned For



**Public Release Date:
3:00 pm (PST) - October 23, 2002**

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Ipsos-Reid has joined with the Jack Webster Foundation to conduct this public opinion poll in BC on the BC media. The poll is launched in conjunction with the 2002 Webster Awards Dinner that takes place on Tuesday, October 29th in Vancouver. At the dinner, additional results of the Ipsos-Reid poll will be released, including the top news story in BC according to the general public. The Jack Webster Foundation was formed in 1986 to recognize excellence in journalism in British Columbia.

Vancouver, BC – A new Ipsos-Reid public opinion poll, conducted in partnership with the Jack Webster Foundation, reveals that the vast majority of people in BC acknowledge the importance the media plays in society overall (96%) and to themselves personally (88%). However, many British Columbians are divided in their assessment of BC's media when it comes to its relevance and balance; 4-in-10 or more give the provincial media a failing grade in these two areas. "There is little doubt that British Columbians appreciate the role the media plays in their lives," notes Daniel Savas, Senior Vice-President in Ipsos-Reid's Vancouver office. "However, it's equally clear they are quite discerning in what they take in from the media. No one should think for a moment that people in this province are swallowing holus bolus everything they read, see, or hear. Quite the contrary. There's a healthy amount of questioning about the balance in the stories the media provides for them, and the relevance these stories have for British Columbians."

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Poll results also show that a solid majority of British Columbians have heard of Jack Webster (72%), and correctly identify him as a Canadian journalist (75%). “As we prepare for the 2002 Webster Awards to celebrate the best in BC journalism, it’s clear Jack Webster has left his mark on the people of BC,” comments George Madden, Chair of the Jack Webster Foundation. “Jack has clearly touched a chord with British Columbians to have established such a household name in the province,” adds Savas, “It’s unlikely any other journalist has such a caché in BC. It’s quite appropriate to recognize this in advance of the Awards for journalistic excellence given out in Webster’s name.”

These are the findings of a BC Ipsos-Reid poll conducted between October 7th and 14th, 2002 among a representative cross-section of 800 British Columbian adults. These data are statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, age and sex composition reflects that of the actual BC population according to 1996 Census data. With a provincial sample of 800, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the overall results are within ± 3.5 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire adult BC population been polled. The margin of error will be larger for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

Vast Majority of BC Public Acknowledge Importance of Media to Society Overall (96%) and to Themselves Personally (88%)

The vast majority of British Columbians see the media as important to society as a whole (96%), and to them personally (88%). And, they share these sentiments with some degree of intensity – fully 67% believe the media is “very important” to society overall, and 49% say it’s “very important” to them personally.

Evaluating the importance of the media is very much linked to news consumption. Self-described “avid news junkies”, people who spend almost 15 hours per week consuming news, are even more likely than the average British Columbian to place a great deal of importance on the media. In all, 81% of news junkies say it’s “very important” for society as a whole (vs. 67% in the general population), and 74% say it’s “very important” to them personally. To contrast, the numbers for “infrequent news consumers” (3 hours per week consuming news) are 38% and 12%, respectively.

This overall perspective on the media is quite consistent across all regions of the BC, and with people from all walks of life. However, Vancouver Island residents share more intense feelings about the media than others in the province; fully 79% see the media as “very important” to society overall, compared to two-thirds or fewer in other regions (67% Lower Mainland, 58% Interior/North).

Among population groups, it’s women (70% “very important” vs. 63% for men), and university graduates (74% vs. 62% high school or less) who attribute more importance to the media.

When it comes to how British Columbians judge the media's importance to them personally, we find some differences between population groups. For example, more middle-age and older British Columbians (55%) say the media is "very important" to them, compared to just 38% of those under 35 years of age.

BC Public Divided on Relevance and Balance of BC's Media

Despite their overwhelming endorsement of the role the media plays in their lives, British Columbians show themselves to be somewhat more discerning, and even critical, when given the opportunity to assess the BC media's performance. While the public gives the provincial media top marks for its timeliness (72% excellent/good job), and clarity (59%), views are somewhat more divided when it comes to the media's relevancy (56% excellent/good vs. 43% poor/very poor), and balance (44% vs. 54%).

Interestingly, however, the more positive views of the BC media tend to emerge from those who consume news more frequently. For example, 60% of "avid news junkies" think the BC media is doing a "excellent/good job" when it comes to relevancy, compared to 40% of "infrequent news consumers". Similarly, in terms of balance in reporting, 41% "avid news junkies" are more positive, compared to just 32% of "infrequent news consumers".

Overall, women tend to give a more favourable assessment of the BC media across all measures. This is particularly true when it comes to balance (women 48% excellent/good vs. 39% of men), relevancy (60% vs. 52%), and timeliness (76% vs. 68%). The same can be said for older British Columbians (55+), who are more complimentary than those 35-54 years of age across all measures.



Jack Webster's Legacy Lives on in BC; 3-in-4 British Columbians Heard of Him, and Know What He's Renowned For

The vast majority of British Columbians (72%) say they've heard of Jack Webster. And, when prompted with a series of 5 possible professional identities for Webster, 75% correctly identify him as a Canadian journalist. This level of recognition establishes Webster as pretty much a household name in the province. To contrast, 7% thought Jack Webster was the founder of Webster's Dictionary; 3% believed he was a prominent stock broker; 1% thought he was a Canadian comedian, and 1% saw him as a hamburger chain owner. And, 15% simply did not know one way or the other.

Those in BC who consume the news more frequently are more likely to have heard of Jack Webster than others who are less frequent news consumers. Fully 81% of "avid news junkies" and 80% of "regular news consumers" told Ipsos-Reid they'd heard of Webster, compared to about half the "occasional" (53%) and "infrequent" (48%) news consumers.

Similarly, a much greater number of frequent news consumers correctly identified Jack Webster as a Canadian journalist; 88% of "avid news junkies" and 82% of "regular news consumers" did so. This compares to just over half the "occasional" (53%), and "infrequent" (56%) news consumer population. This "infrequent" group were more likely than others to identify Webster as the founder of Webster's Dictionary (12% and 10%, respectively), or as a prominent stock broker (3% and 7%). About a third of these less frequent news consumers simply did not know who Jack Webster was.

Webster's renown is high across all regions of the province, and with most population groups. Vancouver Island residents are, however, more likely than those living in Vancouver/Burnaby to have heard of Jack Webster (79% vs. 65%).

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Both men and women share equal levels of awareness of Webster (71% and 72%, respectively).

There is, however, a very significant generation gap in awareness, indicating Jack Webster may well be a product of his generation. While 96% of older British Columbians (55+) have ever heard of Webster, this drops dramatically to just 36% of those under 35 years of age (64% have never heard of him). Meanwhile, 85% of those 35 to 54 years of age have heard of Webster.

This generation gap is further revealed when we note that less than half of those 18 to 34 years of age correctly identify Webster as a Canadian journalist (47%), compared to 95% of older, and 85% of middle-aged British Columbians. Among the younger population, fully 31% have no idea who Jack Webster was; 14% incorrectly thought he was the founder of Webster's Dictionary, 6% believed he was a prominent stock broker, 2% a hamburger chain owner, and 1% a Canadian comedian.



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