

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

Campus News Archive

Campus News, Newsletters, and Events

5-6-2011

Tara Greiman '11 researches Internet's impact on regional businesses for UMVRDC

University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news

Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Tara Greiman '11 researches Internet's impact on regional businesses for UMVRDC" (2011). *Campus News Archive*. 630.

https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/630

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus News, Newsletters, and Events at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus News Archive by an authorized administrator of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.

Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Tara Greiman '11 researches Internet's impact on regional businesses for UMRDC

Summary: Greiman's work explores customers increasingly using Internet searches for rural businesses' contact information and location.

(May 6, 2011)-In fall 2010, a group of University of Minnesota, Morris students attended a statewide Blandin Foundation conference to present their research on broadband usage in rural America. The Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC) was impressed with their research and contacted the Center for Small Towns (CST), located on the Morris campus, regarding the possibility of offering one of the students an internship through the Students In Service program. Tara Greiman '11, Dayton, accepted the internship. Her project is to assess the accuracy of Internet business listings in the five counties UMRDC covers: Swift, Big Stone, Yellow Medicine, Chippewa, and Lac qui Parle.

Why is this important? Increasingly, people are using the Internet to find plumbers, restaurants, furniture stores, and other services and businesses. Many are using smart phones to search, and as people increasingly forgo landline telephones, they no longer receive phonebooks. So, if businesses want to be “found,” their information on the Internet—listings and map location—needs to be accurate. If it isn't, they will lose customers and business.

Greiman's process has been to look up business names, addresses, and associated keywords in three main search engines—Google, MapQuest, and Bing—and check for accuracy. Ben Winchester '95, research fellow at the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality, whose research prompted the project, says that “rural areas have witnessed some difficulties with online mapping services. In some cases, community assets are not present on these maps. In others, they are present, but the locations are wrong. This is especially true for those located along state highways and on rural roads. If towns in rural Minnesota are going to compete, the digital infrastructure needs to be built much in the same way roads and electricity connect our rural areas to the rest of the state.”

Greiman has been exploring 37 different cities throughout the area and has found gaps in identification and location. In the city of Ortonville, for example, 33 percent of businesses are missing from at least one search engine. And the conservative estimate for mistakes is 1.3 per business, with the wrong location and/or wrong business name being the most common errors.

Once all the information has been gathered and assessed, Greiman and UMRDC members plan to contact the underrepresented businesses to obtain correct information. Greiman says they're working on stressing to businesses the importance of having an online presence, especially in the context of prospective residents who are looking to move into the area. University of Minnesota Extension, in partnership with UMRDC, will be offering workshops to local businesses about the importance of a strong and accurate Internet presence.

The final step of the process will be to take all of the information they've collected from businesses and send it to the three major search engines. Greiman says that they feel that they're “more likely to be taken seriously if we send in one big packet than if information trickles in one business at a time.”

UMVRDC's efforts to correct the business information in their five counties are part of their overall efforts to promote economic development in the region and part of the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities program. The University of Minnesota Extension and UMVRDC are partnering to offer workshops and other business and technology assistance to area businesses in an effort to promote a stronger, more vibrant regional economy.

Students In Service is an AmeriCorps program that encourages college students to enroll as part-time AmeriCorps members. Coordinated by Minnesota Campus Compact, an organization that promotes civic engagement on college campuses in Minnesota, the program allows interested college students to work in a variety of positions to help better their communities. Qualifying activities include academic and co-curricular service learning, internships with nonprofit organizations, certain kinds of practicum hours, federal- or state-funded community service work study, and most kinds of volunteer work. Students commit to 300 hours of service throughout the year.

The [Center for Small Towns](#) is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.