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'60% BMC men don't even access official e-mails'

Viju B, TNN 30 September 2009, 02:37am IST MUMBAI: Two years ago, the BMC became one of the first civic bodies in the country to provide internet connectivity to all its ward offices. With it came the hope for citizens of being able to reach officials online with their complaints on a host of civic issues. But a look at BMC employees' internet usage patterns over just 20 days has revealed that only around 40% actually used their official e-mail ids.

Officials from Class III level onwards have been given e-mail ids. Data provided by the BMC's IT cell shows while 2,897 official ids were created by the department, on an average only 1,172 e-mails were sent daily. The ids were created by the department to enable citizens to lodge online complaints at the ward offices and different departments in the civic corporation,

Data also reveals that on an average 312 e-mails bounced from these ids and 479 e-mails were rejected every day. "This shows BMC officers are not comfortable using the internet. Though the BMC's IT department has provided the ward offices with good infrastructure, there is not much awareness or inclination to use the computer facilities available," said RTI activist Milind Mulay, who had filed a query on this issue.

However, senior BMC officials said use of official e-mail ids cannot be considered a yardstick for the department's internet usage. "It is a known fact that most officers use personal e-mail

ids. The BMC has one of the most customer-friendly IT systems. Today citizens can renew even Shop and Establishment Licence contracts online," said Vijay Balamwar, director of the BMC's IT department. But he added that the department will now request all employees to use official ids.

BMC officials also admitted that the civic corporation has done little to promote the use of online facilities among its employees or even citizens. "The civic diary does not mention the official id of any of the complaint officers at the ward level. How are citizens suppose to know the personal ids of officials?" Mulay said.

Activists also said that most BMC officials refused to take online RTI queries though this is permissible under the Act. "The public information officer of G-north sent me a letter stating that there is no provision to send the information by e-mail. I checked with complaint officers of other wards and they said they do not have access to the e-mail facility," Mulay said.

A senior BMC official admitted that only one 1% of the public information officers have been provided with official e-mail ids. "That is, in fact, the case in all government departments. At least in the BMC, we are trying to improve the situation," the official said.