

VISA LOTTERY SERVICES REPORT FOR DV-2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BY J. STEPHEN WILSON
CREATIVE NETWORKS
WWW.MYGREENCARD.COM
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In our annual survey of immigration web sites that advertise visa lottery services, our goal was to satisfy 3 major goals: 1) estimate the extent of fraudulent advertising in the industry, 2) provide independent ratings of green card lottery web sites using objective, measurable criteria, and 3) suggest best practices for site operators. We also identify reasons why lottery entrants may need to use a service or agent to register their lottery application.

In this study, we rate each provider by processing fee, information content, and services they provide to registrants, and summarize all our data in a final point total. We also include overall statistics for each parameter we review.

Among the findings in our calendar year 2005 report:

- We identified 73 web sites that advertise visa lottery services. Of these, 22 sites redirect to other URLs when the applicant registers for the lottery. We excluded those sites that redirect from our report, leaving 51 web sites in our analysis.
- We located 13 sites that were duplicates or clones of existing web sites but are registered under a different URL.
- Only seven sites (13%) earned “red flag” penalties indicating either understaffing, negligence, or potential fraudulent activity. Most were penalized in our review for posting obsolete rules from past visa lotteries. However, some have multiple unresolved complaints about their service, or attempt to mimic an official U.S. government site with similar images and icons.

- The average fee charged by green card lottery service providers was \$45.50 for one person and \$70.12 for two persons (family applications). There was no correlation between the fee charged and the quality of the service provided, based on our criteria.
- The top ranked services offer toll free telephone numbers, accept paper-based applications and standard photographs, have immigration attorney contacts, offer multiple natural language translations of their entire site, and notify winners directly.
- Lower ranking services fail to post occupational requirements, have no telephone number, and do not notify winners.
- Several green card lottery services appearing at the top of well-known search engines under searches for “green card lottery” actually rank the *lowest* in our review. Many sites with low ratings had the best-designed web sites.
- Among our key recommendations for visa lottery web site operators are:
 - Provide an easy to find “about us” page with contact information (e-mail address and telephone number).
 - Provide an easy to find link to service fees, without requiring the user to fill out their application first.
 - Provide immigration attorney contacts to answer questions, either via e-mail, chat, or by telephone.

- Provide a link to the Department of State O*Net occupation page or list those occupations that require two years of training or experience.
- Provide entrants with a tracking number or other means to obtain the status of their entry.
- Accept paper applications and standard photographs from entrants.
- Warn entrants about sending in their application too close to the registration deadline.
- Do not imply to be associated with a U.S. government agency. Post a disclaimer on the home page if you use government images.
- Do not claim to increase the chances of a registration being drawn since the lottery is based on a random computer drawing.
- Do not list obsolete eligibility information.
- Do not offer to accept payments in advance for more than two years, since personal information and lottery rules can change from year to year rendering this information obsolete.

Lottery Service Web Site Classifications

We classified the green card lottery service web sites in this review as follows:

- Immigration Law Firms (L)
- Visa Sites (V)
- Dedicated Green Card Lottery Sites (G)

Immigration Law Firms handle multiple immigration issues and provide green card lottery assistance as an additional service but usually for a larger fee. Although they may also process immigration forms, they tend to focus on immigration case law. We generally review law firms only if they display “green card lottery” links prominently on their home page.

Visa Sites process immigration forms of all kinds, including student visas, H1-B visas, green cards, and green card lottery applications. They often have immigration attorneys available to help the entrant (usually for a fee) and can be quite useful to immigrants if they use the latest forms available at the CIS web site.

Dedicated Green Card Lottery Sites specialize in processing green card lottery applications. If they provide other services and forms, we classify them as a Visa Site.

All three types of sites can include immigration news and/or discussion panels. Some also have links to job, travel, schools, books, and housing information that could be of interest to immigrants. Our current opinion is that an established, Green Card Lottery site with good service (including immigration attorney contacts and a telephone number with live assistance) is the best choice. This is because they are usually prepared to handle the extra heavy application workload during the green card lottery open registration period. Their sites are easier to navigate since they not cluttered with visa information that the entrant does not need. However, an Immigration Law Firm is unlikely to be disreputable but the cost can be significantly higher. A Visa Site is between the two extremes, but many charge for forms that are free at government web sites. All three site types should have easy to find links to immigration attorneys and the capability to track an application once the entrant has mailed (or e-mailed) it to them.

MyGreencard.com Review Criteria

Site Redirection. If the site we examine *redirects* lottery applicants to another URL, we removed the first site from consideration in our review. For example, h1base.com redirects green card lottery applicants to dvlotterycenter.com. In this case, since h1base redirects to another site we do not review them here. We review *only* the final site with posted prices (dvlotterycenter). This site must also be the site that confirms the registration and provides support for the lottery entrant.

Related Sites. If the site has another URL with similar or identical information, we list that site in our spreadsheet, but mention that the second site is a “duplicate” or “owned by” the first site. For example, usafis.org has cloned their site under the following names:

- green-card-application.org,
- greencard.org,
- official-green-card.org,
- us-green-card-lottery.-org, and
- usimmigrationvisaservice.com.

Service (Maximum 6 Points)

Since we are rating green card lottery *services*, we weighted this category most heavily at 6 points out of 10.

Accept Standard Photographs? Some sites only accept digital photographs. If the site does not accept standard hardcopy photos we do not award a point. Furthermore, sites should not require the entrant to register just to get an answer to this basic question.

Immigration Attorney Contact? The web site should have an immigration attorney available to respond to questions, for no charge or for a reasonable fee—depending on the complexity of the question. We feel that appropriate legal advice should be available. A “yes” is worth 1 point. If we are uncertain whether the site has access to an attorney, we do not award a point.

Languages? Foreign language translations can be extremely useful for those who do not read English well. We list up to three of those languages if they are available. If the service has a minimum of three full translations we award 1 point. Note that we *do not* award a point if only the home page or portion of the site is translated. Typically, this is done merely to get the attention (and business) of foreign language readers. The best sites translate the entire web site, including the instructions for completing the green card lottery application. Some use automatic translation software, such as Babel Fish, Systrans, or Google to perform the

translation. This much less effective than a natural human translation.

List Telephone Number? A telephone number should be available if doing business with a reputable lottery service. A “yes” is worth 1 point. If we cannot easily find the phone number, we do not award a point. A toll-free telephone number is worth 1 more point. Several have a 24 x 7 toll free hotline.

Site Design? We award 1 point if the site is well designed and the information is easy to locate. Ideally, they also provide information or links for immigrants, such as how to get a job or find an apartment in the United States. Most sites receive a point here unless the site has exceptionally poor navigation, unreadable formatting in Internet Explorer, or have multiple “annoying” popups. We do not (yet) test against other browsers such as Safari.

Fees (Maximum 2 Points)

Under fee, we list fees for two persons for (1) year, one person for (2) years, and two persons for (2) years if available.) Two person entries are sometimes called “family” or dual applications. We DO NOT list prices beyond two (2) years. Low prices are worth two points out of 10.

Some sites give discounts for entering early or for sending referrals. Other sites publish different prices for online entries versus applications sent by mail. If two prices are listed, we only list fees for applications sent by mail, reflecting our bias toward sites that provide truly useful services.

If prices vary according to the entry date, we use the price listed for November or the latest date the service accepts entries. We do not list discounted prices for early entries.

For example, americandream.de lists three separate prices depending on the date the entrant submits his or her entry. We only list the (higher) \$55 price reflecting their deadline.

Fee Less Than or Equal to \$40? A price of \$40 or less for one person for one year is worth one point for reasonable fees.

Fee Less Than or Equal to \$20? A price of \$20 or less is worth an additional 1 point for extremely low fees.

Information Content (Maximum 2 Points)

Information Content is worth 2 points out of 10. We look for the following:

Is Complete Eligibility Info Available? Many sites do not provide the minimal State Department information freely available at www.travel.state.gov. If they do provide this information, it is usually located in an "FAQ" (Frequently Asked Questions) link. Alternatively, they should direct to the State Department web site.

They must also list required occupations for those without a secondary school education, or provide a link to the U.S. Department of State O*Net occupation page at: http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1319.html. A "yes" here is worth 1 point.

List Information for Lottery Winners? If the site provides advice for lottery *winners* either via links, a booklet, or as a service, this makes the site much more useful. After all, what good is it if the entrant wins the lottery, but fails to get their green card, or cannot get their family members into the United States? A "yes" is worth 1 point. Very few sites include this additional information.

What Is Included

Included with the full report are the following: 1) an 18 page summary, 2) the latest edition of our e-book **WIN THE GREEN CARD LOTTERY!** and 3) a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with eight (8) separate worksheets containing the following data:

- **All_Data** – Lists all the web sites listed alphabetically by URL. This master color-coded worksheet with all the raw data in our study includes: Fees (one person–one year, 2 persons–one year, one person–two years, and two persons–two years); Languages (up to three); individual points for each review criteria for each site; Comments (including "red flags"); and Contact Information (site name, address, phone number, fax number, and email address if available).
- **Related Site URLs** – Lists all the web sites we reviewed, including whether the site redirects to another URL. In our study, if a site links to another URL we only include the linked to site in our analysis. We also include "Related Site" information. Related sites are defined as sites that are owned by, or are a duplicate of another URL.
- **byTOTALthenFee** – Lists lottery services sorted first by Total Points (maximum 10), then by Fee (one person – one year). Data is graphed in an easy-to-read scatter plot format. We also include a table and bar chart displaying Average Total Points for each Site Type (Dedicated Green Card Lottery site, Visa site, or Immigration Law firm).
- **byFeeThenTotal** – Lists services sorted first by Fee (one person–one year) then by Total Points. Data is presented in scatter plot format.
- **ByServiceThenFee** – Lists services sorted first by Service rating (maximum 6 points), then by Fee (one person – one year). Data is presented in scatter plot format. We also provide Average Service ratings for each Site Type. This information is listed in table form and in bar graph format.
- **BySiteTypeThenFee** – Lists services sorted first by Site Type then by Fee (One person–one year). We also provide Average Fees by Site Type, presented in both table and bar graph.
- **ByFee-2personsOneYear** – Lists services sorted by Fee (Two persons–one year). Data is presented in scatter plot format.

We also provide Average Fees by Site Type, presented in table and bar graph.

- **ByInformationThenFee** – Lists services sorted by Information Content (maximum 2 points) then by Fee (one

person-one year). Displayed are bar graphs listing Average Information Content rating for each Site Type.

About This Report

Visa Lottery Services Report for DV-2007 is available from Creative Networks at www.MyGreencard.com/order.php for \$150 USD. Free media copies are available on request.

MyGreencard.com conducts visa lottery web site reviews in June of each year and publishes an annual report in July-August. For further information, please contact: J. Stephen Wilson: swilson@mygreencard.com (+1-805-452-4037).

MyGreencard.com is also the publisher of **WIN THE GREEN CARD LOTTERY! THE COMPLETE DO-IT-YOURSELF GUIDE TO THE USA DIVERSITY VISA LOTTERY**, by Marybeth Rael and J. Stephen Wilson; edited by James T. Daly, Attorney at Law. Price: USD \$9.50 for the electronic version. The 2005 edition is also available in hardcopy format at Amazon.com and elsewhere for \$19.50.