

# Harnessing Quality Information on the Web

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## **Abstract:**

The present paper attempts to discuss various characteristics of information on the Web. It describes some of the criteria that are being used by Information Professionals to evaluate information on the Web. In order to harness quality information, the primary step is to evaluate information on the Web. The Library and Information professionals have a vital role to play in this context. The library professionals have the ability to access, store and disseminate scientific information on a variety of subjects and have the skills to operate databases and maintain it. They have no responsibility to protect the interests of users by way of providing quality information service based on the Web. With the emergence of World Wide Web, the Internet has become an inseparable part of the modern library and the librarian can only exist in the coming century if he becomes a net librarian or a web librarian.

**Key Words:** Web Site Evaluation Criteria, Quality Information,

## **Introduction:**

People have dreamt of the concept of a universal database of knowledge - information that would be accessible to people around the world and link easily to other pieces of information so that any user could quickly find the things most important to themselves [1]. Berners-Lee initiated the creation of the Web in 1989, when he wrote and circulated for comment a project proposal for a networked Hypertext system for CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (French), European Organization for Nuclear Research, now known as the European Laboratory for Particle Physics). The project proposal was based on the need to enable people to share documents, work, and ideas across groups, and allow interaction between those groups. Although the Web has been spectacularly successful in its current form, it has really lived up to its original goals? Is the current form of the Web all

that it was intended to be, or was it intended to be something more? [2]. In order to get answers to these questions, it is essential to understand the current status of information on the Web.

### **Information on the Web:**

The web was originally developed to allow information sharing within internationally dispersed teams, and the dissemination of information by support groups. The WWW initiative has taken off and become the emerging leader in Internet information systems. Today, almost anyone can publish a Web site and, unfortunately, there are so far no formal standards for minimal acceptance criteria for these Web sites. Consequently; information on the web exists in various kinds and purposes, having many levels of quality or reliability. These variations can be viewed as characteristics of information on the Web, and some of them are discussed below:

### **Characteristics of Information on the Web:**

- Most of the information generally retrievable through the Web has not undergone any form of peer review, editing, refereeing or quality control procedures.
- The personal home page phenomenon continues to explode: as information can be created and made instantly available to a worldwide audience. Consequently, there is considerably more vanity publishing in the networked environment.
- There is a lack of audience focus - it is often unclear how appropriate material may be for a lay or, conversely, to an academic or professional audience.
- Much information is ephemeral in nature, yet search engines continue to retrieve and point to it beyond its useful lifetime.
- The information exists in a variety of kinds of such as facts, opinions, stories, interpretations, statistics.
- It is created for many purposes like to inform, to persuade, to sell, to present a viewpoint, and to create or change an attitude or belief.

- The information on the Web can be a great help to accomplish research on many topics.
- It is easy, cheap or even free to publish documents or pages on the web.
- The content of a resource at a given URL may alter significantly from one instance of viewing to the next; the resource itself may no longer be accessible at the original URL - or even be temporarily or permanently removed from public view.
- The way information looks on the Web depends on the equipment you are using and the way that your equipment is set up; so different people will see the resource in different forms.

There is no government agency or other authority that screens and controls the information posted to the Web. The Web encourages the open exchange of ideas, which is why access to the Web has been banned in some countries. However, this means that users must evaluate the information they find on the Web because the quality of information is so variable. There are several criteria available to evaluate information on the Web; some of them are discussed as follows.

### **Harnessing Quality Information on the Web**

The Web is criticized with good reason, for the sheer volume of unevaluated information that it possesses. To use information with any confidence, it must be able to critically evaluate how good that information is. A large portion of the information made available on the nets lacks good indications of its quality. Information that is well presented makes the quality determination easy for the searcher. There are a number of criteria available to judge the quality of information on the Web. The objective of Web site evaluation is also to judge the quality of information made available. It is interesting to note that most of them are available on the Web itself. It certainly indicates the awareness among the web community as well as the significance of quality information on the Web. The evaluation criteria of accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency and coverage traditionally applied to other media apply equally to the Web. This is as just anyone can publish on the Web, and

because of the speed with which information appears on and moves around the Internet, some of these criteria must be applied in greater depth, or additional criteria introduced when evaluating online resources. There is no single set of criteria that can be applied to evaluate information under all circumstances. Under these circumstances, it will appropriate to look at more than one criterion for information evaluation. With these points of view inform evaluation criteria, practiced by some of the well-known information professionals are discussed below.

### **Criteria for Evaluating Information on the Web**

Dragulanescu Nicolae-George, [3] who is Fulbright Visiting Scholar at University of Pittsburgh, USA Quality Auditor of European Organization for Quality Assessor of European Foundation for Quality Management developed a set of criteria for evaluating Web sites. According to his CRITERIA, which presented in the next table, an ideal Web site has to be found instantaneously and be interactive; the information it provides to its users has to be simultaneously credible, current, objective, accurate, dense and comprehensive, in order to satisfy all stated and implied needs and requirements of all its users.

#### 1. **ACCURACY** (extent/ degree of information exactness and correctness)

- Does the author mention his information sources? -Is it possible for you to check if these sources are legitimate?
- Is the author's background related to the covered topics?
- Did the author indicate clearly the research method and how he collected and processed data (only for research-based data)?

#### 2. **AUTHORITY** (extent /degree to Which the author could be considered an expert in his field).

- Is the author known?-

- What do you know about the author (as for example: his/ her background, position, affiliation, publications, etc.)?
- Is it possible, for you, to determine the author's expertise and credibility?

3. **COVERAGE** (extent/ degree to which topics was observed, analyzed and reported)

- -Are all site's topics explored in depth?
- Are all sites' links relevant, appropriate, comprehensive and operational?
- How relevant and comprehensive is, for you, the site's information?

4. **CURRENTNESS** (extent/ degree to which the distributed information is belonging to the time now in progress)

- When was created and reviewed (last time) the site?
- Is the copyright date displayed?
- Are all mentioned resources available?
- Are all of site's links relating to correct INTERNET addresses?

5. **DENSITY**

- Is text or graphic content predominant on each page? (extent/ degree to which)
- Is enough comprehensive, for you, text/graphic information displayed on comprehensive and relevant each page? information is displayed on
- Did you find useful enough, for you, the displayed text/graphic? each site's page)
- How much advertising information is included on site's pages?

6. **INTERACTIVITY** (extent/ degree to which is operating the bi-directional communication between user and author)

- Is it possible, for you, to find at least one e-mail link to Web site author or to the webmaster?
- Is this link active? -Is this link quickly operational?
- Did you receive an answer to the message you sent to author/ webmaster?

7. **OBJECTIVITY** (extent/ degree of site's author objectivity versus his subjectivity)

- What is the real goal of the site?
- What is the real purpose of the site's author?
- Are you confident enough in author's objectivity?

8. **PROMPTNESS** (time delay needed for site finding and its pages displaying )

- Was the site URL found quickly enough?
- Is it possible to change immediately displayed pages?
- Is it possible, for you, to, contact, within a reasonable delay, all provided links?

The evaluation criteria given by Dragulanescu Nicolae-George are really useful and helpful to all.

The Social Science Information Group (SOSIG) [4] Internet Catalogue is an online database of high quality Internet resources. It offers users the chance to read descriptions of resources available over the Internet and to access those resources directly. The Catalogue points to thousands of resources and each one has been selected and described by a librarian or academic. The resource falls within the scope of the SOSIG Internet Catalogue are evaluated in terms of content, form and process as mentioned in the following table.

**1. Content Criteria** 1.1. Validity 1.2. Authority and Reputation of Source 1.3. Substantivizes

1.4. Accuracy 1.5. Comprehensiveness 1.6. Uniqueness 1.7. Composition and Organization

**2. Form Criteria** 2.1. Ease of Navigation 2.2. Provision of User Support 2.3. Use of Recognized Standards 2.4. Appropriate use of Technology 2.5. Aesthetics

**3. Process Criteria** 3.1. Information Integrity 3.2. Site Integrity 3.3. System Integrity

BIOME [5], is a collection of gateways, which provide access to evaluated, quality Internet resources in the health and life sciences, aimed at students, researchers, academics and practitioners. BIOME is created by a core team of information specialists and subject experts based at the University of Nottingham Greenfield Medical Library, in partnership with key organizations throughout the UK and further afield. All of the resources in BIOME have been

evaluated according to the BIOME Evaluation Guidelines, which have been produced by the BIOME Special Advisory Group for Evaluation (SAGE). Accordingly, the quality of a resource relates to three aspects: its context, content and format. The context, mean the intended scope and audience of a source, its authority and reputation, and how it compares to other resources. The content refers to the information itself - what is covered, and whether the information is accurate and current. Format broadly incorporates the accessibility of the resource, its design, layout and its ease of use.

From the above discussion, it is clear that, the evaluative approaches to the Web, start with an assumption that the Web information resources, however dissimilar they might be, share in fact a number of common characteristics or features. However, there is no single set of criteria that can be applied to evaluate information on the Web. Beyond the general points set out above, appropriate evaluation criteria will depend on the need of the user, and on the aims of the resources concerned. The Library & Information Professionals can play vital role in harnessing quality information on the Web. They have the ability to access, store and disseminate information on a variety of subjects and have the skills to operate databases and maintain it. They are very well aware of the importance of information evaluation and acquired skill to carry out such work. Identifying information quality is an essential aspect of using the Web for research. Library and Information Professionals have developed rules for what constitutes "quality information" in a traditional resource.

**Role of Library & Information Professionals:** Producing database is one thing, but ensuring their quality is another. For some years now, there has been an increasing concern amongst librarians about this issue. Librarians have drawn up sets of criteria and brought pressure to bear on database producers. The process illustrates the wider responsibility that information professionals have for protecting the interests of their users. [6] Typically the non-professional searcher will go to one or two familiar search services, and put in a single keyword. When the inevitable happens- millions of unrelated hits, mostly from American sites – further action may include adding another word or two, perhaps selecting the phrase option. An informational professional may well take a different approach, perhaps using the

advanced features of the same search services, perhaps constructing a Boolean search statement to enhance the accuracy and relevance of the result retrieved, and reduce their number to a manageable size.[7] Locating information on the Web is becoming more and more problematic. Search engines overwhelm users with vast quantities of information much or most of which is not precisely what was wanted and browsable catalogue take a lot of time to use and now often index only a fraction of the relevant material, but a librarian should know how to search and evaluate web resources for library references then only these can be fully utilized for library services. With the emergence of World Wide Web, the Internet has become an inseparable part of the modern library and the librarian can only exist in the coming century if he becomes a net librarian or a web librarian [8]. According to Alastair Smith [9], librarians may need to evaluate Internet information to "decide whether the information sources should be linked to a resource guide or library Web site", or "to judge the quality or appropriateness of information for a particular query or user". They have now responsibility to protect the interests of users by way of providing quality information service based on the Web. With the emergence of the Web, the Internet has become an inseparable part of the modern library and the librarian can only exist in the coming century if he becomes a net librarian or a web librarian.

### **Conclusions:**

Currently the main use of the Web is the transfer of information. This can be simple to make any information available, just in case someone might want that information or to make specific information available that the public wishes to know. The creators of web sites need to think about the information they are willing and able to give their visitors. After all, if a visitor doesn't get something from a web site, they will not come back. Users of the Web were initially impressed that they found useful information of any kind. Now that anyone with access to a server and a passing knowledge of HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) can put information on the Web. It is essential to evaluate and re-evaluate the information on the Web regularly. New information or changing circumstances will affect the accuracy and hence evaluation of previous information. The aim is to identify positively high quality

information rather than to reject information, which does not meet the quality criteria on the Web. Quality is a very broad, generic and subjective concept. However, there are hallmarks of what is consistently "good" quality information. Quality marking for digital content creates confidence in the user. Finally, as the Web grows and users become more familiar and comfortable with the technology, it will become second nature to question and evaluate sources. Using the Web will require analytical and evaluative skills, rather than the simpler information location skills to which most of the users were accustomed. Only now has the technology caught up with the concept of a universal database of knowledge, these dreams, making it possible to implement them on a global scale.

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