Web Resource Evaluation Techniques

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Additional Web Evaluation Materials

Materials to accompany this presentation are available at
http://www.mtateresearch.com/web_wisdom_home
Topics Covered

- The Importance of Web Evaluation
- Review of Five Traditional Evaluation Criteria
- Adaptation of the Traditional Evaluation Criteria to Web Resources
- Additional Challenges Posed by Web Resources and How to Cope with Them
Reliance Upon Web–based Information Increasing

• Quality of Web resources varies tremendously

• Criteria needed to evaluate Web resources
  – Some traditional evaluation criteria still useful
  – New criteria also needed
Five Traditional Evaluation Criteria

1. Accuracy
2. Authority
3. Objectivity
4. Currency
5. Coverage
Criterion #1: **Accuracy**

How reliable and free from error is the information? Are there editors and fact checkers?
Accuracy of Web Resources

• Almost anyone can publish on the Web

• Many Web resources not verified by editors and/or fact checkers

• Web standards to ensure accuracy not fully developed
Criterion #2

Authority

What are the author’s qualifications for writing on the subject?

How reputable is the publisher?
Authority of Web Resources

- Often difficult to determine authorship of Web resources
- If author’s name listed, his/her qualifications frequently absent
- Publisher responsibility often not indicated
Criterion #3

Objectivity

- Is the information presented with a minimum of bias?

- To what extent is the information trying to sway the opinion of the audience?
Objectivity of Web Resources

Web often functions as a “virtual soapbox”

Goals/aims of persons or groups presenting material often not clearly stated
Criterion #4

Currency

Is the content of the work up-to-date?

Is the publication date clearly indicated?
Currency of Web Resources

- Dates not always included on Web pages

- If included, a date may have various meanings:
  - Date first created
  - Date placed on Web
  - Date last revised
Criterion #5

Coverage

• What topics are included in the work?

• To what depth are topics explored?
Coverage of Web Resources

- Web coverage may differ from print or other media coverage

- Often hard to determine extent of Web coverage
Use These Criteria to Evaluate Actual Web Pages

1. Accuracy
2. Authority
3. Objectivity
4. Currency
5. Coverage
But Also Remember…

The Web Presents
Additional Evaluation Challenges
Challenge

Use of Hypertext Links

Quality of Web pages linked to original Web page may vary
Coping Strategy

*Use of Hypertext Links*

Evaluate each Web page independently.
Challenge

Use of Frames

Each Frame Displays a Separate Web Page
Coping Strategy

Use of Frames

Evaluate *Each Frame* Independently
Challenge

Search Engines Can Retrieve Web Pages Out of Context
Coping Strategy

Search Engines Can Retrieve Web Pages Out of Context

Always try to return to the "home page" to determine source of information
Challenge
Marketing-Oriented Web Pages

In other media, there usually are clear visual and/or audio distinctions between advertising and information.

The Sound Off

And Now a Word From Our Sponsors
Challenge

Marketing-Oriented Web Pages

On the Web, distinctions between advertising and information can become extremely blurred
Try to determine if advertising and informational content are supplied by the *same* person or organization.
Challenge:

**Blending of Entertainment, Information, and Advertising**

The Web has brought *infomercial* concept to new **heights**
Coping Strategy:

Blending of Entertainment, Information, and Advertising

CAVEAT EMPTOR
Challenge

Software Requirements May Limit Access to Information

- Full access may require additional software

- Browsers may alter the appearance of Web Pages
Coping Strategy:

Software Requirements May Limit Access to Information

Be aware that software limitations may:

- Alter how much information is obtainable
- Alter the appearance of information obtained
Challenge

Instability of Web Pages

Web Pages May Move or Disappear Without Notice

User may not be able to refer back to a Web page
Coping Strategy

Instability of Web Pages

• Try to determine the stability of your source

• Document source to the fullest extent possible
Challenge

Web Pages Susceptible to Alteration

- Accidental alteration
- Deliberate alteration
Coping Strategy

Web Pages Susceptible to Alteration
ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

Applying This Knowledge When Using the Web as a Research Tool
Web Page Evaluation Procedure

Step 1: Identify type of page

Step 2: Use appropriate checklist

Step 3: Based on checklist criteria, determine relative quality of page
Web Page Evaluation Procedure

Step 1: Identify the Type of Web Page

- Advocacy
- Business/Marketing
- Informational
- News
- Personal
- Entertainment
Web Page Evaluation Procedure

Step 2: Use the Appropriate Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHECKLIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Web Page Evaluation Procedure

Step 3: Based on the checklist criteria, determine the relative quality of the Web page

The greater number of checklist questions answered “yes”, the more likely the page is of higher informational quality.
Web evaluation techniques are in development

Technology is outpacing ability to create standards and guidelines

Establishing evaluation procedures will be an ongoing evolutionary process