
Evaluating Web Resources, Services and User Attitude towards Web Based Information Services at University of Hyderabad Library - A study

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Abstract

Since the information available on the web is huge, it is necessary to develop skills to evaluate what you find on the web. It is essential because in case of print media, books, journals and other resources are evaluated by scholars, publishers and librarians. It is the LIS professional's job to evaluate the resources and find out the techniques to retrieve the relevant information. This article discusses about the web resources and what are all the techniques to be followed to identify the relevant information and what kind of web services a library can provide to the user and based on the user feedback, how to improve the existing services.

Keywords : User Attitude, Web-based Information Service, Website Evaluation

0. Introduction

The resources available via the Internet are immense. Today most of the organizations have started acting as information providers for the electronic community. The World Wide Web offers information and data from all over the world. Growth of information is alarming due to literature on multidisciplinary languages and specialization in narrow areas. Since the information available on the web is huge, it is necessary to develop skills to evaluate what you find on the web. Print media is edited one or another way before it is published, but none of this applies to web and there are no filters because anyone can write a Web page. Many web resources are not verified by editors or fact checkers and also there are no Web standards to ensure accuracy. But at the same time, it is not that all the information is not relevant. It is unchallenged fact that excellent resources also reside along side the most dubious. Most of the educational institutions have started putting their information on the web and making available the same to the public. At present, it is realized that LIS professional should be more familiar with web resources and services. Designing web site and integrating all the services on the web will give better image to the Library and LIS Professional.

1. Web Resources & Services

A revolutionary change occurred in the electronic world with the invention of high storage / computing devices and high-speed networks. This enabled the information to be created, manipulated, disseminated, located and stored with increasing ease. More and more information is produced as "born digital". It is very easy to get any kind of information, wherever it resides. There are no standard systems and filters for publishing the information through web. It is very difficult to judge the author's capability of writing the particular information and most of the information is not updated frequently and deleted without prior notice. It is very important to find out a mechanism for retrieving the relevant information because excellent information also resides. Librarians may evaluate Internet information sources in order to:

1. Decide whether an Internet information source should be linked to a resource guide or library Web site
2. To judge the quality or appropriateness of information for a particular query or user.

Many libraries now maintain Web sites that have lists of Internet information resources. Without explicit criteria for selection of these sources, libraries risk wasting their users' time with tools of dubious value.

Today millions of web sites and excellent services are available. In this, some of the web sites are personal and some relate to business, games and so on. This is because of the freedom available to anyone to publish on the web. Since finding right information and keeping all the web site address is difficult, search engines have come in to picture. To day number of search engines, meta search engines, directories and subject gateways are available to retrieve the exact web site address and information on any subject. When the search is made through search engines, it provides number of web sites and most of them are not relevant because it is a program which follows its own mechanism to retrieve the information (for example, how many times the key words are occurring), whereas directories and subject gateways are manmade indices and they will look at the quality of the site, its functionality, content and so on but contain comparatively small number of high quality links. When searching through some of the tools, it is very difficult to judge the author's potential. Many web resources are not verified by editors or fact checkers and no Web standards to ensure accuracy are fully developed. These are the major drawbacks in web resources and take users' as well as LIS professional's valuable time to search for piece of information. Recent developments like metadata have improved the relevancy of web. Most of the libraries have started designing their own web sites either through LIS professionals or computer professionals and started keeping all the information related to library and providing links to important web sites. Though there are number of drawbacks (listed below) in the web resources and designing, it can be overcome by applying some of the evaluation techniques and by following some guidelines for web designing.

2. Major Challenges in a nutshell

- Web resources normally have more number of hypertext links.
- Use of Frames (some lower version browsers will not support)
- Browser may alter the appearance of the web page
- Search Engines can retrieve pages out of context
- Marketing oriented web pages
- Blending of Entertainment, Information and Advertisement
- Software requirements may limit the access. Full access may require some additional software
- Instability of web pages. Web pages may move or disappear without notice
- Susceptibility of web pages to alteration
- Quality of web pages linked to original web page may vary (Ex: High quality page may be linked with poor quality web page)

3. Evaluation Criteria for Web Resources

Criteria for print materials can in most cases be applied to the Internet domain, but evaluation criteria may be more critical in the "vanity publishing" environment of the Internet. Print publishing involves a series of editorial checks that tends to reduce the appearance of low-quality information. On the Internet, these checks exist to a lesser degree. Though there are no standard methods for evaluating the web resources, by applying some of the evaluation techniques it is possible to get the relevant information to some extent. It is very important to assess the following items very carefully before retrieving the information through the web.

- Authority (Author's name, Qualification, professional skills)
- Purpose of the Web site
- Content
- Quality of Writing

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- Graphic and Multimedia Design
 - User Friendliness
 - Currency (Updating)
 - Uniqueness
 - Required Computing Environment
 - Searching
 - Interactivity
 - Connectivity (Bandwidth)
 - Cost
 - Accuracy

3.1 Purpose

- To identify the user need and make the service more effective
- Effective use of the library facilities and improve the status of library and LIS professionals
- Standardizing the web resources and services
- To promote efficient delivery of information economically to all the users.
- To strengthen communication and collaboration between and among research, business, government and educational institutions.
- To take leadership role in the generation and dissemination of knowledge in the thrust areas of research

3.2 Need and Importance

- Good tool for managing vast amount of information
- Providing better service by allowing access to information any number of times by any number of users
- Sharing the information becomes very easy and allows to integrate other library web sites
- Supports Client/Server architecture and integrates multimedia documents
- To Manage the change

4. University of Hyderabad Library – a profile

IGM Library is a central facility to support the teaching and research needs of the *University of Hyderabad*, a Central University established by Act of Parliament. The Library collection of nearly 2.76 lakhs of volumes of monographs and reference books, theses/dissertations and back volumes of research periodicals, and good number of CD-ROMs/DVDs, etc. can be accessed over the Net. Internet Search Facility (30 Computers) is provided at Library to meet the research requirements of the student community. At the entrance lobby, there is one computer with reading software and scanner for physically challenged students. Binding unit is fully equipped with necessary binding materials to bind the journals and other materials. Well-equipped lab is established for the PGDLAN students' practical purpose.

4.1 Web Resources and services at IGM Library

We have designed a web site exclusively for our library and kept all the information related to the Library. It will be better to follow some guidelines on how to design a library web site and what are all the services which can be provided through the web. Each Library will follow its own method for designing the library site which is designed by either library professional or IT professional. Our Web site consists of much

information regarding library automation, Inter Library Loan, Document Delivery Service, Staff Details, Rules, Functioning, Resources, Digital Library Project and so on. We have provided link for our Library database, which can be accessed over the Net. Apart from this, we have provided number of useful links through our library web site to access various databases, e-journals and so on. We are modifying, whenever there is a new service and changes in databases and activities. We are taking much care to provide crisp and clear information to the user community through web. It is the Library and Information Professional's responsibility to design a web site for library and integrate all the services provided by the library.

4.2 User attitude towards Web based Information Services

The ultimate goal of the Library is to satisfy the user requirements by providing more value added services. Providing better information service only can enhance the image of the library and LIS professional status in the society. Otherwise, LIS professional will be considered as a mere custodian of the Library. At present, number of resources and services are available on Web, which should be identified and filtered and the same should be delivered to the right user community. This can be achieved only if the LIS professional is expert in web based information services and technique to identify right information to the right community. The existing service can be improved by applying some of the techniques like getting the feed back from the user, visiting various library, interacting with experts and so on. Here to improve the existing service, we have chosen 35 students out of nearly 2500 since the user community is more. We have posted the questionnaire and received feedback and analyzed. Interviewed some of the students also personally.

5. Findings and Suggestions

The following are some of the findings that could be derived from this study.

- Internet service at Library is used more by Social Science students (40%) and Humanities students getting the second place (28.57%). There are less number of students from Life Sciences, Physics, Management and Chemistry using these services.
- Most of the students prefer printed materials than electronic material. The reason they have given is that they are getting duplicate information, need more downloading time and lead to confusion.
- In web based information services, OPAC has got the first preference, when compared with other kinds of services. 14 out of 35 have opted OPAC. E-Journals, Bibliographic search service have got second and third preferences.
- Only two members have given their opinion about meeting their requirements 75-100 percent. This indicates that electronic information will not meet 100 percent for their academic purpose.
- 17 students out of 35 have expressed that the Internet facility should be extended from one hour that is available presently to two hours.
- Most of the students (28 out of 35) are using Internet facility for their academic purpose.
- 25 out of 35 students are using Google search engine to get their information and using rediff mail for correspondence than other search engines and mails.

5.1 Suggestions

- Internet facility is used mostly by the Social Sciences, Humanities when compared to the Science students. This may be due to the workload and practical assignments for the science students. Whatever may be the cause, it is better to circulate the services existing and new web based services to the science students either circulating to their departments or pasting on the notice boards of the concerned departments. This may attract those students to visit the library web site.

- It is found that some of the students are not aware of the Library web site and services. This is because of some students are not attending the orientation programme conducted at the beginning of academic session. It should be made compulsory for all students to attend orientation class. It is better to bring it to their notice by writing the web site address in all the publications and correspondence.
- It is necessary to link some of the important search engines, Meta search engines, and subject gateways with little description and providing practical exposure to search the relevant information for both LIS professionals and user community.
- It will be better to give more links to important web sites in to the home page with little description about that particular web site so that the students will navigate the relevant web site only
- It is very important to bring other services also to the students' knowledge to make use of those services more effectively.

6. Conclusion

Web evaluation techniques are only beginning to be developed. Technology is outpacing ability to create standards and guidelines. Establishing evaluation procedures will be an ongoing evolutionary process. Web plays major role and removes the barriers. It is time for LIS professional to become expert in web related activities to provide better services to the user community.

7. References

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