IDEA GROUP PUBLISHING
701 E. Chocolate Avenue, Hershey PA 17033-1240, USA
Tel: 717/533-8845; Fax 717/533-8661; URL-http://www.idea-group.com
ITB8492

Copyright Idea Group Inc.

Chapter VI

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Web Sites

Ruth V. Small
Syracuse University

Marilyn P. Arnone
Creative Media Solutions, Inc.

Copyright Idea Group Inc.

As millions of people "search-and-surf " the Internet, seeking needed products and services or just exploring to see "what's out there," businesses are concerned that their Web sites will: (1) attract both searchers and surfers, (2) interest them long enough to thoroughly explore the site, (3) motivate them to purchase their product or service, and (4) encourage them to return to the site and/or recommend the site to others. As the number of commercial Web sites continues to grow at an explosive rate, this competitive market requires effective interface design guidelines and evaluation criteria.

Copyright Idea Group Inc.

Although there are a number of resources that provide guidance on the structure and content of Web interfaces, they typically focus on content. Some focus heavily on content and validity issues (Does it have the right information?), while others focus on functionality issues (Does it work the way it is supposed to?). Few have a theoretical foundation, offer diagnostic methods for assessing and interpreting results, and provide detailed feedback for improvement. Furthermore, few, if any, emphasize the *motivational* aspects of Web sites, i.e., those features that stimulate curiosity and engage the user's interest, while providing relevant content and an easy-to-use interface. These features help to motivate customers to visit, explore, and return to a Web site.

Copyright Idea Group Inc.

As businesses spend more and more money and effort designing commercial Web sites, the issue of motivational quality becomes critical. While the number of companies offering Web evaluation services continues to grow, most of those services involve an expert or experts assessing the quality of the Web site and offering ways to improve it, largely from a marketing perspective. A need for tools that allow businesses to assess motivational quality *from the user's perspective* becomes paramount. In response to this need, the Web site Motivational Analysis

Copyright Idea Group Inc.

This chapter appears in the book, *Evaluation and Implementation of Distance Learning: Technologies, Tools and Techniques,* edited by France Belanger. Copyright © 2000, Idea Group Inc.

Checklist for Business (a.k.a. WebMAC Business)© was developed to help diagnose, analyze, and assess the motivational quality of Web sites.

This chapter specifies essential criteria that can be used by: (1) Web designers as guidelines for creating motivating Web sites and (2) businesses interested in evaluating their existing Web sites. It also provides detailed descriptions of WebMAC Business and related instruments.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE WEB RESOURCES

Because of their dynamic, interactive nature, networked electronic information resources like Web sites require different criteria for evaluation than other types of media, such as print or video. There are two general categories of criteria that are essential for Web sites. They are *critical content* and *motivational quality*. Let's begin by taking a look at those features that address critical content.

Critical Content

Critical content criteria may be thought of as the "bottom-line" elements of Web site evaluation; i.e., the overall content must be both *valid* and *appropriate* for the intended audience (Small & Arnone, 1999). Validity refers to the credibility of the information, the site authors, the site sponsors, the accuracy of the content, etc. Appropriateness addresses issues such as whether the content is on the specifically desired topic, the level of background knowledge required, etc. If either of these characteristics is absent, the user will likely not spend much time at the Web site. Therefore, content is the first concern that must be addressed in evaluating a Web site.

In addition, there are a number of content features that characterize the relevance of a Web site, i.e., information and interface characteristics of the site. Schamber (1993), synthesizing and building on the work of Taylor (1986) and others in the information science literature, describes several content-related features that affect the relevance of documents within a system, many of which are also likely to have a direct or indirect impact on the motivational quality of a Web site. Some of these content-related features are:

- logical organization of information;
- accuracy of information contained within the Web site
- ease of intellectual access to information within the Web site;
- clarity of directions on how to use the Web site;
- interesting and useful information;
- current, up-to-date information contained within the Web site
- credibility of information contained within the Web site and related links
- appropriate type, amount and difficulty level of information.
- an interface that provides both help and orientation;

Although these are important criteria for assessing a Web site, focusing on the site's content fulfills only part of what is necessary for effective Web sites. Now let's take a look at the other half of the essential criteria equation— motivational quality.

Copyright Idea Group Inc.

9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/evaluating-effectiveness-web-sites/22195

Related Content

Use of Mobile Phones to Help Prevent Child Maltreatment
Katelyn M. Guastaferro, Matthew C. Jackson, Shannon Self-Brown, Julie J. Jabaleyand John R. Lutzker (2015). *Encyclopedia of Mobile Phone Behavior (pp. 906-922).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/use-of-mobile-phones-to-help-prevent-child-maltreatment/130202

The Journey of the Tourism Industry From Digital Marketing to Metaverse Network
Betül Garda (2023). *Economic and Social Implications of Information and Communication Technologies (pp. 134-150).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-journey-of-the-tourism-industry-from-digital-marketing-to-metaverse-network/316044

In Pursuit of Continuous Improvement: The Case of a Software Company
Marco Liberato (2016). *International Journal of Social and Organizational Dynamics in IT (pp. 34-56).*
www.irma-international.org/article/in-pursuit-of-continuous-improvement/157292

Founding an Organization Theory of Work Policy as Imperative Regimes of Regulated Freedom for ITC Development
Raymon R. Bruce (2012). *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development (pp. 39-55).*
www.irma-international.org/article/founding-organization-theory-work-policy/69973

Readiness for Implementing an E-Voting System in Ethiopia: A Gap Analysis From the Supply Side
Lemma Lessaand Mekuria Hailu (2023). *Handbook of Research on Digitalization Solutions for Social and Economic Needs (pp. 243-255).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/readiness-for-implementing-an-e-voting-system-in-ethiopia/319605