Chapter 13

Library Web Site Assessment

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Libraries must increasingly compete as providers of information. Most, if not all, libraries now have a Web page that serves a variety of functions. Increasingly for some users the library web page may be their first introduction to a library. Furthermore, on-line use of library resources is becoming increasingly common. Accordingly an effective Web page design is essential. This chapter presents a Web page assessment tool, developed by the authors, based on a model used in the e-commerce sector. This tool was used to analyze the Web pages of libraries in the Australian Vocational Education & Training sector. The results clearly show both the strengths and weaknesses of Web pages. The lack of a standard method and guidelines for web page authoring is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to investigate the current state of Web site development within Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector libraries in Australia. The scope has been kept narrow to facilitate comparisons between Web sites. The different goals set for different types of Web sites would cloud issues and make direct comparisons difficult to achieve. In particular the paper aims to, develop a tool for comparing and assessing library Web sites, test the tool on selected library Web sites, identify strengths and weaknesses in the process of library Web site development and, finally, identify directions for future development.

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Much is written on the application of the Internet to commerce. Here the potential for economic gain funds and fuels a frenetic pace of development. Libraries, on the other hand, have generally been required to meet the new demands and challenges presented by the growth of the Internet with little additional resources.

METHODOLOGY

Literature Research

McClue (1997) concluded that, from the library science perspective, most reports pertained “to the assessment of information content and its organization in the Web site.” Smith (1997) proposed a set of criteria, which could be included in a librarian’s “toolbox” when selecting sites to “be linked to a resource guide, library Web site or in judging the “appropriateness of information for a particular query or user.” However, as suggested by McClure, none of this material considers the assessment of library Web sites.

McClure also indicated that, “Except for the field of computer graphics, most of the literature from the field of computer science does not deal directly with Web site design.” He also, usefully observed that, “the literature from the business field focuses on designing Web sites for customer use.”

As libraries increasingly regard their users as clients, it seemed reasonable that information produced for the development commercial Web sites could be used. Data on what is held to be good design could be turned into guides for assessment.

Abernathy (1999), for example develops some simple rules of what he refers to as Web site Wow. Windham (2000), concentrates on content. He states that “relevant and dynamic content...keeps the customers coming back.”

Gomez.com is a commercial organization which measures the quality of e-commerce Web sites. The company produces a “scorecard” for each Web site it assesses. Up to one hundred and fifty criteria may be assessed on a scorecard for a particular class of web site. Criteria are gathered into five categories as follows:
- Ease of use
- Customer confidence
- On site resources
- Relationship services
- Overall cost

The chapter How to Manage a Library Website (2000) sets out a number strategies library Web site designers can employ to improve their Web sites.

In addition to these general ideas it also offers some specific suggestions, including:
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