

Rx for Consumer Health Information: The Magic is in the Right Source

Evaluation of Internet Health Resources ^{1,2}

What should you look for in a website to determine that it provides effective health communication?

ABCs of evaluation

- **Accuracy** – Are sources of information clearly provided?
- **Authority** – Is the author of the information evident?
- **Bias** – Is there emotional language! Who sponsors the website?
- **Coverage** – How does the information compare with other sources on the same topic, including those in print?
- **Currency** – Is the information up-to-date? Can you tell when it was written?
- **User-friendliness** – Is the website easy to navigate?

Accuracy – Determine the accuracy of the information on the website.

- ✓ **Accuracy:** Is the content valid, without errors of fact, interpretation, or judgment? Is the information cited correctly?
- ✓ **Availability:** Is the content easily accessible by visitors to the website?
- ✓ **Balance:** Does the content present the benefits and risks of potential actions? Does it recognize different perspectives?
- ✓ **Consistency:** Does the content remain consistent over time? Can it be verified with information from other [valid] sources?
- ✓ **Cultural Competence:** Is the content sensitive to issues regarding selected population groups (e.g. ethnic, racial, and linguistic) including, educational levels and disability issues? Is the site appropriate for the intended audience?
- ✓ **Evidence based:** Does the content refer to relevant scientific evidence that has undergone comprehensive review and rigorous analysis?

Authority – Determine who is responsible for the website content, i.e. **author**.

Who is the author?
Is the author an organization or company?
Are the author's qualifications clearly stated?
Is this author qualified to write on the topic?

Information is compiled and adapted from the following sources:

1. Covello V.T., & Sandman P.M. (2001). Solutions to an Environment in Peril. In: Wolbarst A. (Ed.), Risk Communication: Evolution and Revolution. (pp. 164-178). Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

From: **Attributes of Effective Health Communications**. Accuracy: The Content is Valid and Without Errors of Fact, Interpretation, or Judgment. www.linksmedia.org/shared/.../Modules.../SpokespersonsFinal10_3.doc Accessed 14 Feb 2010.

2. Kapoun, Jim. "Teaching Undergrads WEB Evaluation: A Guide for Library Instruction." (July/August 1998). C&RL News. (pp. 522- 523)

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Bias – Determine if points of view are presented objectively and in a clear and balanced manner.

- ✓ **Understandability:** Are the reading or language level and format (including multimedia) appropriate for the specific audience?

Coverage – Determine if the information on the website is complete.

- ✓ **Reach:** Is the content available to the largest possible number of people?
- ✓ **Reliability:** Is the content credible, and kept up-to-date?
- ✓ **Repetition:** Is delivery of access to content continued or repeated over time, to reinforce the impact with a given audience?

How in-depth is the site?

Is it complete and accurate?

Are the links (if any) evaluated and do they complement the documents' theme?

How does the site compare with other sites on the same subject?

Does the site contribute something unique to the subject?

Do illustrations, video, or audio add value to the site?

Currency – Determine how well maintained the information is.

- ✓ **Timeliness:** Is content provided when the audience is most receptive to, or in need of, specific information?

How well is the site maintained?

Does the site tell you when it was last updated?

Summary

If the site is from a credible authority,

If the information can be verified by other reputable sources,

If the page is current and updated regularly (as stated), and the links (if any) are up-to-date,

If the page provides accurate information and it is objective in its presentation,

Then you have a resource with all the key elements for effective health communication.