Information: Truth or Fiction?

How do you know?

Why Do We Search for Information?

- Information is that which reduces uncertainty in our lives
  - One could say, then, that misinformation can be information because it can reduce uncertainty for someone at the time—even if it isn’t correct
- Information gives us a deeper understanding of the world
  - Misinformation may give us a skewed view of the world
  - But remember, information to one person/culture may be misinformation to another
- We have an immediate need for information
  - A research paper, a project, etc.

Where do we go to find the information we need?

- Our friends
- An expert
- A bookstore
  - Either in person or through the web
- The library
  - Again, either in person or through the web (e.g. UW Gateway)
- The Internet
  - Search Engines (Google)
  - Directories (Yahoo)

The “Trust and Credibility” Problem

- You decide to go to the Web to get your information
- The Web consists of billions of Web pages
- These Web pages are written by several million individuals
  - Professional Web Designers
  - Researchers, doctors, scientists, lawyers and other professionals
  - High school students, elementary school students
  - General Public
  - If you have access to web server space and an IP address—you’re on!
  - There are no controls for who publishes, what is published or the quality of the content put out on the Web
The “Credibility” Problem

The billions of pages that are out there are searched by several hundred million users.

Question:
How does a user know which sites to believe?

Really, how does a user decide?

- You tell me
- Take out a piece of paper, write your name on it
- Answer the question for yourself.
- We’ll collect at the end of class
- You will not be graded on your answer.

What is Credibility?

- According to BJ Fogg and his research partners at Stanford, credibility is a perception based on 2 factors:
  - Trustworthiness and Expertise
    - http://www.webcredibility.org/
  - Highly credible web sites have high levels of perceived trustworthiness and expertise
- Different kinds of credibility:
  - Presumed
  - Reputed
  - Surface
  - Experienced

What do People think makes a web site credible?

- In 2001, a report* was released by BJ Fogg and his colleagues from Stanford University:
  - Web survey results were studied to identify what is people think makes them think a web site provides credible information.
  - The results broke down into the following categories...

Is anybody there or am I just talking to myself?

- Evidence that they are connecting to a real person or organization...
  - Site provides quick response to users (e.g. sending an email to confirm a transaction)
  - Physical address is listed
  - Phone number is listed
  - Email address is listed

Ease of Use and Show of Expertise

- Ease of Use
  - Ability to search archives (past content)
  - Arranged in a way that makes sense to you

- Evidence of Expertise
  - Site lists the authors credentials
  - Site lists citations and references

Trustworthiness, Currency...

- Evidence of trustworthiness in a web site
  - Linked to by a site you think is believable
  - States its policy on content
  - Represents an organization you respect

- Evidence of Currency
  - Site is frequently updated

No More Ads, PLEASE!

- Commercialism of the site is at a minimum
  - It is easy to distinguish ads from content
  - No automatic pop up windows with ads
Misunderstanding Off the Web

- One sees misinformation passed in many forms. Some might be:
  - Incorrect facts regarding historical information
  - Inaccurate financial information related to “scams” and other shady business dealings
  - Gossip
  - Not enough depth to the coverage of the topic
  - Inaccurate associations based on lack of understanding of the environment...
Will the real WTO please come forward…

WTO

http://www.wto.org

WTO

http://www.gatt.org

http://www.tctubantia.nl/CDA/vegapportal/1_2078_1654_772741_00.html
Truth or Fiction?

http://zapatopi.net/afdb.html
http://www.tass.net/
http://147.129.1.10/library/research/AIDSFACTS.htm

Summary

- Information is NOT Democratic.
  - Not all equal
  - Some information is better than others (more credible)
- Take into consideration WHY you want the information when you go out to search for it
- Since there are no checks on general web content, if you REALLY need accuracy, double check it against other sources
- We have ways to evaluate sites using criteria covers all forms of credibility
  - But many of these can be exploited
- Misinformation spreads like wildfire, on and off the web
- We judge two things on sites:
  - The information provided
  - The person or organization represented

Readings/Assignment

- Chapter 7 in the FIT course pack for Wednesday
- Assignment 2 will be up this afternoon on the site
  - Due next Monday
- Project 1, Part 1 due Friday by noon
  - Bring hardcopy to class OR
  - Turn in to Information School Student Services Office
    - MGH 470