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# Qualities of a Library Website: Evaluating Library Websites of New IITs

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper is intended to be written on the evaluation of the library website and its content quality. A website of an establishment should truly represent the philosophy and purpose of the establishment. In the case of a library the website is the only way to make the services available to the last users in the row. The paper focuses on the importance of a quality website for a library regardless of the nature of the library. It also emphasizes on the accuracy and authenticity of the contents provided on the website. Evaluation criteria for a quality website have also been discussed. Finally, a comparative study of the contents available at the websites of eight new Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) has been presented. The paper may be said to be a single source guide in developing a website for a big/small library.

**KeyTerms:** Library website, Web contents, Library users, Weblogs, Wiki, IIT libraries.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this era of technology, many of the libraries don't have their own websites. For an establishment the importance of a website cannot be over emphasised. An organization without a website can be said to be locking a very significant factor in its development. Nowadays people want to explore the services and products of an organization on their desktop, and explore its services in order to make up their mind whether or not to deal with that organization. A website not only lends credence to its services but also creates a confidence among its users that they are going to be provided with services of very high order.

For a new library user, library website is the first and foremost starting point for visiting the library and exploring its resources and services. Once you show your presence on the web, the size of the library does not matter. It is because the importance of a library website cannot be overlooked. Even though there are many libraries which do not have the library website because of various reasons. You need not have a big and bulky website to promote the services of your library, but you can have a simple

and pin-pointed site, showing the comprehensive view of your library.

## AIMS OF LIBRARY WEBSITE

Just like for any business establishment, a website is a must for a library. As Poll said, "Libraries have started to offer a new virtual "entrance" to their services: the library website". The main aim of a library website should be to focus on its users to provide them the best services. Apart from this, four main aims of a library website should be:

- Providing a guide to the availability of learning resources the library holds, and services the library provides
- Providing the people a way of their rights to exploit these resources
- Providing a platform to the patrons to start their search process to avoid ambiguity in accessing the resources
- Providing a device to make the users aware and competent enough to be able to use the library resources as self dependent learning resource users.

Besides, the above said specific aims a library website can also fulfill the following purposes:

- To publicize the resources and services of the library and make the users aware about them.
- To enhance the access to the resources of the library services and sources from anywhere irrespective of users' geographic location. Also to overcome the difficulties in accessing the resources of a conventional library system.
- To provide a single window to user oriented subject-specific sources and services to meet their specific needs. Also to provide various types of resources to users working in different subject areas.
- To offer an efficient and effective way of accessing from a collection of a large number of electronic resources the library has.
- To make available other resources and tailor-made products, such as subject bibliographies, search guides etc.

## EVALUATION OF WEBSITE

In general, there are following five criteria for evaluating any website as stated on the Tutorial page of Berkley Library, University of California<sup>2</sup>.

- ❑ What can the URL tell you? - When you search for any topic in your browser, it gives numerous hits which may or may not interest you. Before you choose a site to click, be sure about the relevancy of the site. Ask yourself the questions as to whether is it a somebody's personal page, its domain etc. Then choose pages most likely to be reliable and authentic.
- ❑ Scan the perimeter of the page, looking for answers to these questions - The user must check the authenticity of the contents. There must be some link which gives the introductory information about the authority of the page. These links may be called 'About us', 'Know us' etc. The page should be regularly updated which may vary depending upon the subject of the site. Besides this, also get the answers to some such questions as the author of the page and his expertise on the topic written.
- ❑ Look for indicators of quality information - The article of the site should refer to other related articles or materials for further clarity on the topic. These are referred to as 'Related links,' 'Additional sites,' etc. If the footnotes are given, explore them and make sure the validity of these notes. These footnotes should also be authentic and written by experts of the subjects. The publisher of the page should be a well known name on the subject. There should be proper place for copyright information and reproduction permission.
- ❑ What do others say? - The site 'alexa.com' can solve many of your issues regarding the traffic of the site, contact and ownership, related links to other similar contents on the web which are visited by people who visited the target site. There

is an archive called 'Wayback Machine,' that tells about the history of the site. To evaluate the contents/publisher of the page an authentic directory such as 'About.com' can help. You can search the name of the author of the web using any search engine. Also find the answers to questions whether the page is listed by a reputed directory or what types of comments are given by other people regarding the publisher/contents etc.

- ❑ Does it all add up? - After getting all these practice steps and before reaching a conclusion think about all that you have learned so far. Take the help of your personal intuition and listen to your inner voice about the authenticity of the contents of the site. Before you decide, think about the purpose of the contents. In case of any doubt you can consult your guide/mentor and seek his/her advice. You may ask yourself some such questions whether the page is satiric or ironic and could be harmful to your study and what credibility of the contents is, etc.

## QUALITIES OF GOOD WEBSITE

It is the traditional library which the user visits to use the services provided by the library and resources held by it. A new way which the library provides to get acquainted with its services and resources is its website. The users visit the library through this virtual gateway and use many of these services. They can use these resources from any place irrespective of their location. A good combination of content, design and accessibility of a website is the quality of a good website. This quality improves the performance and usability of a library and its website. When we talk about a user's perception about the library, the library website plays an important role. When people say that the library brochures and bookmarks are outdated, they are true in the sense that now the library website is its face. Unlike posters, bookmarks or brochures a library website is a living entity. Through a website, a library can showcase its resources printed as well as online, and can endorse its services and collection among the users. Services range from 'Circulation' to 'Reference' and 'Inter Library Loan' to 'Library Events'. A library website hosts various types of useful information such as library timings, various policies and procedures, directions, the library personnel directory, and basic information about the staff and more.

It is the website which corresponds to a virtual space to collect, organize and present the information. When organizing this virtual space, it must represent the needs and requirements of the users. The library website must be user friendly, updated, relevant and easy to understand so that a user may not be confused in searching for his desired information. It should be not only be informative but a learning tool also.

A library website must be comprehensive enough to give space for showcasing all resources it has, and services it provides. If you start a new service it should find a place on the website with a proper description. A library website must be effective with proper space for graphics and text. It must not too flashy or too insipid for a user. The contents of the website should not be in a ticklish language, rather words from the day-to-day life which are easily comprehensible.

While developing a library website the specific needs and usage behaviour of the potential users of the library must be considered. These needs vary from user to user and library to library. A new user generally visits the library website for membership-related queries such as registration, getting library card, membership fee etc. If the user gets satisfied with the desired information he/she again visits the website for more specific information. In a very short span of time the user must be able to extract the answers to the desired queries.

#### □ Homepage

Before designing the homepage, it would be advisable to visit and research the websites of other libraries so that the qualities of a good website may be incorporated in your website and the drawbacks may be avoided. While visiting the other websites, keep some points in mind regarding which information is to be sought and behave like a potential visitor, and not as a professional. This research will help you to meet your objectives in designing a good website.

It is truly said that first impression is the last impression. Just as you enter a room to be interviewed, your dressing sense matters, in the same way the layout of your website design and the content management on the website leaves the impression on the mind of your potential user. In essence, it is the homepage which makes the user linger on the website.

It should not have a clutter of information which may make it difficult for the visitor to know what the prime objective of a library is. The solution to this mess is simplicity. Thus, the work of a homepage is to organize the information in a simple way, forcing the visitor to stay on the page. The information should be precise and sorted out in a pleasant way making it convenient for the visitors to scan the website for browsing their desired information.

Homepage of a website is its most significant part. It should focus on providing efficient services, user friendly interface and answers to frequently asked questions. Neilson said, "A company's homepage is its face to the world and the starting point for most user visits<sup>3</sup>."

A homepage should be a proper combination of text and graphic images. If it has too many images or other flash elements it will take more time to load, which annoys the visitor and he is most likely to leave it. Again Neilson (as cited in Poll & te Boekhorst, 2007) asserted, "If the homepage does not correspond to users' needs and terminology, they will either leave quickly, or they may spend much time by "clicking the wrong link and being lost forever in the wrong part of the site" or "Scouring a site for a term that the site doesn't use and doesn't cross-reference"<sup>4</sup>

The front page (homepage) of a newspaper is different from that of a website which gives place to the most significant news at the front page. The purpose of the homepage is to make the visitor click more options on the website by presenting an attractive short introduction about various links on the website.

The homepage must not contain the general information in which the user is less interested such as history and development, objective etc. of the library. Instead, the information on homepage should be concise, and must give the overview of the

services. It should be occupied only by the relevant information which fulfils the purpose of the user's visit to the library website. Providing access via subject is the main feature of an academic library website. It will satisfy the specific needs of students and other visitors of the institute. Here, the easy access to e-journals/databases to users will increase the usability of the library website.

Generally when the user finds a search window on the homepage the only question that strikes the mind is about the expansion of the search. The search window may be only for library contents, or to the whole website of the parent institute or the global network i.e. internet. When a search window is provided on the homepage, there should be a clear indication as to the purpose for which the search window has been provided. It will greatly help the user to save their time before using the search window.

An ideal 'Library Homepage' may have 7 essential menus:

- Databases - Alphabetical list of databases and a window to search the name of a particular database.
- Journals - Alphabetical list of journals and a window to search the name of a particular Journal.
- Subjects - Alphabetical list of subjects. This link contains the links to all the material (all forms and formats) having library pertaining to that subject.
- Libraries - if the library has more than one branch then this feature may be used.
- My Account - It's for members of the library. It provides the login window for members, and general rules and procedures for quick access.
- Services - various types of services provided by the library.
- Hours - library hours specifically. For eg. if there is any holiday or if any cut/extension in opening hours on a particular day.

#### □ Site Design

Once you decide the layout of the homepage, now it's time to move on site design in which you decide on how the contents of the site will be organized. The page with more information and contents attracts the visitor most. Site design is the next place where the visitor puts himself after viewing the homepage. It is the place which can make or break your site. While navigating through the site the visitor should not face any difficulty in finding his desired information. He should be able to find what he is searching for at a glance.

The common terminology should be used while directing for a common information such as 'About Us' for introduction about our self; 'Contact Us' to provide the contact details; 'FAQ' to provide in advance the answers to expected questions, etc. These links could be found on most of the sites with the same terminology so that the visitor clicks these links for correct answers to their questions. If the contents are also managed, it is also helpful for visitors to easily locate their desired information.

#### □ Content Design

When you are sure about the site design of the website, it's time to

think about the content which you want to put into the layout of your website. As Barr and Weiss added, "Content may be king, but provocative content is the ace"<sup>5</sup>. After all, a potential user does not visit a library website for attractive backdrops and other smart looking features. It is the content of the website which is the heartbeat and which makes your website a lively place to stay. At first glance, the place should provide only relevant information in an abridged form. At the same time, the short text but with no quality makes the visitors bored which prevents them from visiting it again.

Any institute may have a wide variety of content and it is the responsibility of the library to best leverage this collection. In order to do this, the library has to assess what are the most important assets which should be given maximum exposure to ensure the visitors' return on the webpage.

While designing a library website, ad banners must be avoided totally to give it a purely scholarly view. If it is necessary (due to various reasons) to display ad banners at your site, it should not be overlapped with contents of the site. Also the pages should not be bombarded with tons of ads, which mars the contents of the site. There must be a balanced view of both contents with a clear way and ad banners in a moderate mode.

Your language should not only be informal and simple but friendly also. Here you are trying to make the potential visitor as your regular visitor. So, avoid using the scholastic language.

#### CURRENT TRENDS

With the proliferation of the advanced technology the website is not a one-way interaction. Today it has become a two-way communication in which users not only use but contribute to the contents of the site. To change the library users to the contributors of the webpage contents, the library should use the features of Web 2.0. By integrating the features of Web 2.0 into the library website, the user not only uses but also participates in the development of the contents of the library website. They can use, create, share, comment, rate or even further enrich the contents already posted on the website. This feature is called weblog or simply blog. A library can use the weblog for News, Event alert, seeking users' opinion on special issues like new service; new section etc. A library should exploit the following features of a weblog:

- The most recent posts are automatically displayed on the top of the page.
- Easy to post on daily basis.
- Each post with a number of 'Tags' can be accessed by many access points at the same time and with a single access point (Tag) many posts can also be retrieved.
- Automatic statistics creation
- Offers RSS feed
- Month wise creation of archive section.

In weblog, each post gives space for comments to ensure the users' participation and to encourage their involvement in content development.

Besides weblog, 'Wikis' can also be used for collaboration of the

users. Wikis are generally used to provide access to detailed information such as course curriculum, materials of a research project etc. A good example of wiki would be a library which is involved in documenting the local history of a city. In this project, the people of local community can contribute a great, and can help to authenticate the contents.

Besides this, another feature of using Web 2.0 is 'Social Bookmarking' and 'Podcasts'. In social bookmarking users put their tags to the resources available at the website. In this, these resources may not necessarily be in e-form only. These may be the printed documents available in a library and the tagging may be done through OPAC of the library. Users define their tags to the resources of their interest in which other users of similar field might be interested.

Podcasts digitally collect and organize audio/video files. These files are stored at a web feed address. If people want to have direct access to these items for downloading, they can subscribe to this feed. The use of podcasts in libraries is described in Davidfree-wiki. Libraries use podcasting for various purposes such as library use instructions, news in audio form, audio/ video recording of library tours, university lectures, audio/materials for courses and special research projects<sup>1</sup>. In India, so far no such library has come to be known which may be using podcast.

Today everyone who is using a smart phone, laptop or any other device which can be connected to the internet is available at social networking website. Among the student community this trend is extremely popular and this class of the society is happy to connect through this virtual social space with other people. Using social software, the main aim of a library must be to extend the communication with the patrons and to increase participation in shaping the library and achieving its goals. It should also aim at reaching its users in novel ways and encouraging them to be involved in the content development.

#### ❑ Comparative Study of Library Websites of IITs

The Ministry of Human Resource & Development (MHRD) has established eight new Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) during the period 2009-10. These are -

- Indian Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar (IIT-BBS)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhi Nagar (IIT-GN)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad (IIT-H)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Indore (IIT-I)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Jodhpur (IIT-J)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi (IIT-Mandi)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Patna (IIT-P)
- Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar (IIT-RPR)

All these IITs are presently at developing stage in terms of infrastructure and other sorts of amenities, and the library is no exception. The libraries are also in the developing mode, and they are yet to go a long way. All the libraries of new IITs have their own websites. In order to assess the level of quality, library websites of these institutes were surveyed in August, 2014. An analysis of these websites is tabulated with regard to the presence of various library services and other features.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Library Websites of IITs

Library Services & Miscellaneous	IIT-BBS	IIT-GN	IIT-H	IIT-I	IIT-J	IIT-Mandi	IIT-P	IIT-RPR
Library Webpage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Books Display	Under Process	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Web-OPAC Facility	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NF	Yes
Online Book Reservation	Yes	Yes	No	NF	NF	Yes	NF	NF
Checking Borrowing Books Online	Yes	Yes	NF	Yes	Yes	Yes	NF	Yes
ILL Service	No	Yes	No	NF	Yes	Yes	NF	No
Access to NPTEL Video Lectures	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Frequency-Updating Library Webpage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Library Webpage Maintained by	Library Staff	Library Staff	Library Staff	Library Staff	Library Staff	Library Staff	Library Staff	Library Staff
Book Recommendation	NF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
List of Print Periodicals	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institute Publications	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
List of Print Journals Holdings	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
List of E-journals (A-Z)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
List of E-journals with Archives	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
List of E-journals with Link	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
List of Subscribed Full-text Online Databases	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
List of Subscribed Bibliographic Online Databases	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
List of Free E-journals (Respective Discipline)	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
List of E-books	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Link to Institutional Repository	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Article Alert	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
CAS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
SDI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Library Rules	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Borrowing Rules	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
No. of Library Staff	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
List of Library staff	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Member of consortium	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Name of consortium	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
No. of e-journals by consortium	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Librarian	No	Yes	No	No	NF	No	No	No

NF-Not Found

OPAC=Online Public access catalogue

ILL- Inter Library Loan

NPTEL- National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning

CAS- Current Awareness Service

SDI - Selective Dissemination of Information

The above-mentioned study of the websites shows that none of the website qualifies the criteria of a quality website. If one website has one feature, it misses another one, and it applies to websites of all the new IITs. As mentioned earlier, this may be attributed to the recent origin of these IITs.

## CONCLUSION

Before the advent of WWW, the library had to strive hard to reach the users to find out their interests. There were different individual and collective efforts to satisfy their day-to-day needs. With the proliferation of internet, it has become easy for the library to present the information treasure the library has to the user.

A library website is vital in the sense that it helps to build a long relationship with the patrons. Without a website a library cannot prove its significance to its potential users. Without projecting

such an image, it is hard for any library to establish a credible relationship with the users. If a library uses the potential power of a website, it is easy for it to establish its strong relationships with the users. The website should be updated on a regular basis. If any new service or product is launched, it must be highlighted on the front page of the site. It must use the advantages of new techniques and be ready to adopt any new technology. A lot is happening on the web world daily and the library should strive to keep abreast of all these changes. These changes may be at social or economic level. Further, the library staff should be aware of the happenings in the web world. The staff should also be trained with new skills and techniques. In essence, if a library invests considerably in terms of time and innovation to enrich the library website, it will be worth it, and it will be highly rewarding to the potential users, paying back to the library with a great 'return'.



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