Assessing the quality of library websites

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What is meant by "Quality"?

Definitions

- Fitness for purpose
- Conformance to requirements
- Quality is meaningful only in relation to the purpose and end use of the product.
- The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs (ISO 8402)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
<td>A library service meets its most basic purpose</td>
<td>Making key information resources available on demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features</strong></td>
<td>Secondary characteristics which add to the service but are beyond the essential core</td>
<td>Alerting services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td>Consistency of the service’s performance in use</td>
<td>Keeping up the speed of delivery services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conformance</strong></td>
<td>The service meets the agreed standard</td>
<td>Dublin Core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Durability</strong></td>
<td>Sustainability of the service over a period of time</td>
<td>No broken web links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currency</strong></td>
<td>Up-to-dateness of information</td>
<td>OPAC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is meant by „Quality“?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Attributes</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serviceability</td>
<td>Level of help available to users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>Visual attractiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usability/Accessability</td>
<td>Ease of access and use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance/Competence/Credibility</td>
<td>Good experience with staff’s knowledgability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy/Responsiveness/Empathy</td>
<td>Accessibility, flexibility and friendliness of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Clear explanation of services and options in language free of jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived quality</td>
<td>The user’s view of the service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is meant by “Quality“?

Example:

- Complaint service
- Physical library, Website
- Opening hours, Website structure
- Correct reference answers
- Reference service
- Signposting, Website
- Satisfaction surveys
### Quality attributes or criteria

**We might add:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Variety offered</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILL</td>
<td>Broad collection, Reference service in walk-in, mail and chat form</td>
<td>Quality in services offered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How does that apply to websites?**
User expectations

What they want:

- to find a specific information (e.g. opening times)
- to perform an activity (e.g. a renewal)

What they do:

- scan headings till they find something interesting
- scan texts (not reading consecutively)
- print long texts

Users‘ expectations when accessing a website

- at once
- quick
- self-explaining
Website quality

- contents
  - language
  - structure
  - design
  - navigation
Basics: How to access the library

- contacts (address, phone, mail...)
- way to the library
- opening times
- staff contacts

Services: How to use the library’s services

- online catalogue
- loan service
- document delivery
- electronic publications
- online reference
- links
- forms for critics, proposals
Contents

News

- events, exhibitions
- new acquisitions
- changes relevant for use (opening times, server down)
- user training programmes

General: Background information on the library („about us“)

- profile of the library (mission, history, statistics...)
- organization
- special collections
- projects
- publications

Information on the website

- last update (on every page)
- webmaster
- help function
- search function
- frequently asked questions (FAQ)
- page in other language
short and to the point: reading on the screen is 25 % slower than on paper
Most important topics / features first

- contacts, opening times
- most-used services (catalogue, reference...)
- search function
- sitemap, index
- news

Is that done?
## Lending service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible directly via the homepage</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible with 2 clicks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• from „services“</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• from „use“</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• from „A – Z“</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible with 3 clicks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not to find</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possible differentiation of user groups

**All libraries**
- first-time visitors
- disabled persons
- external users
- library staff
- other libraries

**Public libraries**
- children, juveniles
- seniors

**Academic libraries**
- first-year students
- postgraduates
- faculty
- alumni
- senior students

In 20 libraries: 4

Presenting contents

Public libraries

Academic libraries

All libraries
Searching possibilities

- site map
- index (a-z)
- search function

Search can relate to

- catalogue search
- portal search
- library website search
- institutional website search
- Internet search

But what is searched?

Must be clearly labelled
website structure and design

- **flat hierarchies:** maximum 3 clicks to the required information
- **homogeneous design** for all pages
- Coordinated design with the institution's websites
- All pages clearly labelled; title and location in the website structure
- Links in the text: must be recognizable as links and change color after use
- **Back button functions** on each page
  - Back to top
  - Back to homepage

Navigation should show:
- Where I am
- Where I came from
- Where I can go now
functional, not decorative
might communicate information better than text
quick loading necessary
logo graphics can be misleading (click)
can be clearer than a long explanation
several small tables are better than one complicated
makes sense if a process is simulated
but: users may suspect advertisements
Accessability

Design for all

"...designed in a way that can be easily read by all users of the library, be they physically visiting the library or accessing it remotely and regardless of any disability or access preference they may have." (P.Brophy)

- clear distinction between content and structure
- users should be able to access contents irrespective of hardware or browser
- simple layout of pages
- ALT tags used for images
- links should have a description
- background colors should be contrasting

W3C Web Content Accessability Guidelines 1999
Accessability

Design for all: Frames

- frame-set-based pages: not barrier-free for visually handicapped persons
- CSS-stylesheet-based pages:
  - content parts and navigation can be separated
  - barrier-free if implemented without framesets

checking software for accessibility
Usability evaluation

Do users find the site easy, pleasant and efficient to use and navigate?

Evaluation without direct user cooperation
- **heuristic evaluation**: audit by a small expert group
- **cognitive walk-through**: Experts construct a "user scenario" and perform tasks of an imaginary user
- **transaction logs**: evaluation of use data as to frequency of use, most-used pages, ways of searching ...

Evaluation with user cooperation
- **web surveys**: show satisfaction rates, purposes of search, problems...
- **group tests**: moderated groups work on specified task
- **thinking aloud**: a test user's thinking out loud when using the website is recorded on tape
- **observation**: users perform a set of tasks and are observed either by video or by an observing person
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality criteria</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
<th>Library websites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reliability</td>
<td>objectivity and accuracy of contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conformance</td>
<td>conformance to standards (W3C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>durability</td>
<td>sustainability of the service (no broken links)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>usability</td>
<td>accessibility, readability of texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>currency</td>
<td>up-to-dateness of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assurance, competence</td>
<td>reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>courtesy, responsiveness, empathy</td>
<td>- quick updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- correct information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- homogeneous design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- contact to webmaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>complaint services, polite language</td>
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</table>
Quality criteria

Libraries
- communication
- aesthetics
- speed of information delivery
- variety of services

Library websites
- short, to the point, jargon-free
- attractive design
- quick loading, flat hierarchies, self-explaining structure
- services for specific user groups, broad systematic link collection
### Possible performance indicators for library websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of successful searches</td>
<td>online survey, interview after search, tests, observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of clicks necessary to find a specified information</td>
<td>tests, cognitive walk-through, proxy users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of important issues accessible via the homepage</td>
<td>cognitive walk-through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pages not visited during a specified time</td>
<td>log analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of website visits per capita <em>(ISO 11620)</em></td>
<td>log analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of population reached by website services <em>(ISO 11620)</em></td>
<td>online surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User satisfaction with the website <em>(ISO 11620)</em></td>
<td>online surveys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Take heed you do not find what you do not seek

English Proverb