

# **Developing Participatory Web Site for Community**

## **I. Introduction**

R.Putnam's insight description of contemporary American communities (2000) gives us an ample evidence of community deterioration in U.S. Robert Putnam has identified a large number of "civic indicators," all demonstrating a marked decline in "civic associations" in the United States over the past thirty years (2000). At the same time, participation in the political process, the traditional approach for addressing public problems democratically, is at an all-time low. The reasons for the declining trends are found in various social, economic and psychological factors. Increased social mobility, expanding urbanization, and extreme individualism are blamed as major causes for the trends in U.S. (Schuler, 1996).

## **II. Significance of the Topic**

Building Community website is an effort to overcome these phenomena of community deterioration. It also intends to provide some alternatives to solve problems that most local communities are suffering such as education, economic, health and communication channel etc (ibid). The rationale to build a Web site for local community members defines a community website, therefore, as a communication technology intended to improve living conditions of local community members, through which the

feeling of community or community cohesion might be able to be increased. Even though many agree that the technological potential of the Internet in improving living conditions of local communities cannot be dismissed, there are few criteria for building adequate community Web pages for the localities. This paper, therefore, tries to suggest a possible way of thinking about the guidelines for building community Web site. To do this, some criteria for evaluating Web sites are first. After then, we will explore alternative

### III. Discussion

Who, Why and When are main concerns on Web design. Who made the Web page (Authority), For what purpose (Objectivity), and Is the page updated periodically (Currency) are common concern among Web designers<sup>1</sup>. The quality of information on the Web page is also important criteria to evaluate a Web page to the extent the accuracy, and objectivity also should be checked.

Table 2.1) New Mexico State University Library's Evaluation Criteria

Accuracy	Is the information reliable and error-free? Is there an editor or someone who verifies/checks the information
Authority	Is there an author Is the author qualified? An expert? Who is the sponsor?
Objectivity	Does the information show a minimum of bias?

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<sup>1</sup> New Mexico State University Library <http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/evalcrit.html>  
Duke Library's [http://www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/evaluating\\_web.htm](http://www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/evaluating_web.htm)

	Is the page designed to sway opinion?
Currency	Is the page dated? If so, when was the last update? How current are the links? Have some expired or moved?
Coverage	What topics are covered? What does this page offer that is not found elsewhere? What is its intrinsic value?

During the early time when the Internet was about to rapidly expand to our society, several technical criteria was suggested as tips for evaluation of Web design, which focused more on navigational environment. Jacob Nielsen, who is a principal with the Nielsen Norman Group and prominent Web analyst, introduced in early time of the Internet. His criteria are much related to uses of technologies such as scrolling, Animation, and Marquees etc Table 2.2)<sup>2</sup>. This shows the fact that when the Internet was first introduced, lots of new technologies had been exercised to build Web sites.

However, as time goes pass, instead of focusing technical consideration, new concept of Web design criteria began to be introduced.

Table 2.2) Top Ten Mistakes in Web Design

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Using Frames</li> <li>2. Gratuitous use of Bleeding-Edge Technology</li> <li>3. Scrolling Text, Marquees, and Constantly Running Animations</li> <li>4. Complex URLs</li> <li>5. Orphan Pages</li> <li>6. Long Scrolling Pages</li> </ol>
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<sup>2</sup> Jacob Nielsen (<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9605.html>)

7. Lack of Navigation Support
8. Non-Standard Link Colors
9. Outdated Information
10. Overly Long Download Times

Emphasizing human interface based on active interpretation of user behaviors and their environment has increasingly made. According to “first principles of Web design”<sup>3</sup> a Web site should concern user efficiency and human interface through which productivity of uses of the Web site can be improved. Tog also brought out the importance of user involvement in a Web site development. “This simple truth is why it is so important for everyone involved in a software project to appreciate the importance of making user productivity goal one and to understand the vital difference between building an efficient system and empowering an efficient user”(Tognazzini, 2001). To achieve the user participation and improve productivity of a Web site, the key is “close and constant cooperation, communication, and conspiracy between engineers and human interface designers” (ibid). This concept of user involvement in developing a Web site is very crucial when one build up community website which is supposed to fulfill the need of all community members.

Even though the general evaluation models suggested above can evaluate the

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Tognazinni's first principles for web design  
<http://www.asktog.com/basics/firstPrinciples.html>

finalized product of Web construction, the criteria hardly ascertain how users are involved in the process of developing the Web site or how successfully collaborations are processed during the project period between Web designers, users and contractors. Process evaluation is the most critical issue when we are talking about community website if we consider the nature of community. Communities consists of 'different individuals, in different positions, with different backgrounds, different interests, possessing different resources, and facing different contingencies (Rothenbuhler 2001) rather than sharing more common things. The issue of 'What divides them' should be concerned (Downing, 1999). This 'difference' inhibited in the community members necessitate extensive research on the needs, difficulties and conditions of lives of local community members before directly diving into building community website. However, community member's participation in developing Web site should not be limited to preliminary stage which means that they will not be considered to participate in other stage of development of the Website such as implementation, evaluation etc. On the contrary, from conceptualization of the Web site to final evaluation, local community members should be able to participate in the process to ensure that the Web site serves the local community properly. For this reason, William M.K Trochim's Web evaluation

<sup>4</sup>model shows possible alternative to general ‘top-down’<sup>5</sup> Web building principles.

#### **IV. Summary**

It is clear that communities need to be responsible to a large degree for addressing their own problems and this is being done in many different ways by individuals and group. Besides looking in--at their problems and at their resources-- communities also need to be looking out. For those looking in and looking out their problems activities can be initiated and more invigorated through the proper uses of technologies. Therefore participatory Web building for a community should guarantee the space for the active user involvement in throughout the process of Web building.

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<sup>4</sup> William M.K Trochim’s Web evaluation

<http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/webeval/webeval.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Top-down is opposed to “bottom-up” principle which concerns the people who will have beneficence from a given service or products. If a community Web site is built up by the community members, for the community members and through the participation of community members, that is bottom up style. On the contrary, only a couple of Web technicians get together and build up a community Web site within their capability, that is top-down principle. These two concepts are often used to illustrate communication projects.

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This paper is written by Young-Gil Chae for the course EDC38G Interactive Multimedia Design & Production at the University of Texas - Austin