

# INTERNET AS A SERIOUS INFORMATION SOURCE

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## Key words

Internet, quality of information, trustworthy information

## Abstract

*Internet is very often used as a source of serious information. People usually use information from Internet without dealing with its quality, they understand Internet as a trustworthy medium. This practice can be quite dangerous. Without considering a quality of information one can use an information of a poor quality. Even quality of information provided by public administration authorities is sometimes not very good although e-Government belongs to the aims of information society. One of the problems is a lack of adequate laws. Thus, this fact should be considered while using information from Internet. On the other side, institutions should consider the need for providing information on Internet in a good quality and, if necessary, for example even make some organizational changes. The contribution deals with determinants of information usefulness, some of them are discussed more deeply.*

## Abstrakt

Internet je dnes zcela běžně používán jako zdroj informací. Bohužel, velmi často je považován za zcela důvěryhodný zdroj a lidé se proto nezabývají kvalitou informací, které na Internetu získají. Tento postup lze považovat za nebezpečný. Ani informace poskytované orgány státní správy a samosprávy nejsou vždy kvalitní, ačkoliv elektronická veřejná správa patří k prioritám informační společnosti. Za jeden z důvodů lze považovat nedostatek platných právních předpisů v dané oblasti. Na druhou stranu, organizace by si měly uvědomit význam Internetu jako zdroje informací a poskytovat pouze informace kvalitní, i za cenu určitých změn v organizaci. Příspěvek se zabývá hodnocením kvality informací.

## Information Requirements

Information is considered to be very valuable goods which belong to the key factors of successful business, public administration and peoples' everyday lives as well. Information is today necessary for the development of each society. However, information must meet some requirements [1]. At first, they must reach a certain level of quality. Next, they must be accessible, they must be presented in a proper way, must be secure, etc. Some of the factors are independent on the way the information is used (e.g. accuracy). On the other side, others such as completeness or timeliness depend on the way how information is used. They can depend on the user's personal work style as well. Of course, all the information properties influence the price of information. Keeping information up-to-date is a good example of a factor which highly increases the price of information. Management of data and information quality is a never-ending and long-lasting process which should result in a continuous quality of information.

Information requirements can be divided into 4 basic groups [1]:

- Information quality.
- Information accessibility.
- Information presentation.
- Information security.

All the listed factors have an influence on information usefulness. Each of the above listed factors can be separated into more characteristics. Naturally, actual requirements on

information depend on the particular situation, i.e. on the purpose and way information will be used. Some of the requirements will be deeper discussed now.

### **Information Quality**

Information quality is an overall term which contains some partial information characters. The most important of them are:

- Accuracy.
- Precision.
- Completeness.
- Age.
- Timeliness.
- Source.

The result information quality is a combination off all above listed characters.

Content correctness of information belongs to the most serious problems of providing information on Internet. The most usual reasons of information incorrectness are [4]:

- Obsolescence of information – old price lists, list of no longer valid acts, standards, etc. This is a very serious problem. Both public and private sector have many problems with providing obsolete information.
- A mistake is made during the treatment of information or during the communication process (e.g. misunderstanding).
- Intentional misinterpretation (disinformation) - a mistake is made on purpose to gain some advantage (political, commercial), better position, etc. Incompletely provided information can be considered as intentionally incorrect information too.

Nowadays, it can be seen that the quality or truthfulness of provided information is becoming more important then ability just to provide information.

Completeness of information means that provided information is complete enough to the situation, solved tasks and its recipient. In other words, information can be considered as complete if its user does not feel any need to get any additional information to solve the problem. In fact, complete information is not available in many cases so man must use incomplete information what makes his work more complicated.

Age of information is another important character. Each information can be used only for a given time. Again, it depends on the situation, information user and solved problems. In some cases is one year old information good enough, in other case is a few seconds old information obsolete [1].

### **Information accessibility**

Two factors are involved: physical availability of information and whether information is legally admissible. Both valid laws and cultural customs decide whether information admission is legal. This is a source of many troubles because the border between acceptable and unacceptable behavior is very often unclear and it depends on country or region. The speed of adopting new laws, which react on new situation and new technologies, is different in the countries of the world. It means in each country different laws are valid and behavior of institution must accept the varying law [5]. Availability of information means if information physically exists and is available in a proper form in a reasonable time. For example, information on paper is valueless, good-for-nothing if it is needed in digital form [1].

### **Information Presentation**

The chosen way of information presentation impacts on information understandability and ease of information use. Format is the way how information is expressed and organized. It

includes such things as a graphical appearance, number of decimal places, number of lines, etc. Each kind of information needs its format – in some cases numbers are better, in another cases graphical visualization (maps, charts) is better. Second issue included is a level of summarization. Level of summarization or detailedness importantly influence on information understandability. Too many details which are not needed in the given situation can make information usage much more difficult because it is quite complicated to find the proper information among a large amount of useless information [1].

### **Information Security**

Information used in the wrong way or by the wrong people can cause damage. Loss of valuable information can cause many different problems (problems range from economical to social and political) too. Thus, information must be strictly protected. There are many ways of information protection. Because of the increasing value of information more and more different ways of their protection are used. Of course, it can highly increase the costs of information protection. The task of setting up optimum protection methods (so called security policy) is a very complex and complicated problem which should be solved by a working group consisted of employees of institution and external experts [3]. Information can be supposed to be secure if the costs for breaking through the protection measures are higher than the value (price) of gained information [2].

### **Information on Internet**

Remote and equal access of all people to information belongs to the present demands. All the European countries are on their way to information society [6]. The government support of development of utilization Internet in everyday life in all branches is a very important thing. Without a computer literacy and without adequate laws Internet would be only a board for presentation of ideas but no one could take it seriously and not everyone could access it. Besides, laws concerning unfair competition, copyright, commercial code and many other had to be changed to respond to the changing situation.

All the other countries undergo the same process – changing their laws to support usage of Internet as a medium for doing business, for education, for supporting and running public administration electronically.

But not only legal environment must be changed. Organizational structure and processes of institution must be changed to correspond to needs and possibilities of electronic way of work. Old organizational structure and business processes can result into ineffective work. Even need for keeping information up-to-date and secure must be taken into account.

### **Situation in the Czech Republic**

Czech Republic as an EU acceding country adopted some laws to support development of information society and provide legal framework for e-business and e-government. The most important are:

- Act on the Free Access to Information, Nr. 106/1999 Coll.
- Act on Privacy, Nr. 101/2000 Coll.
- Act on Telecommunications, Nr. 151/2000 Coll.
- Act on Electronic Signatures, Nr. 227/2000 Coll.
- Act on Information Systems of Public Administration, Nr. 365/2000 Coll.

In according to the act Nr. 106/1999 Coll. Czech public administration authorities must provide listed information by the way which allows remote access – on Internet.

To help citizens, there is a National Program of Computer Literacy running in the country. This program is supported by the Ministry of Informatics and it provides basic courses (e.g. First time with computer, Introduction into Internet, etc.).

Another serious problem which makes access to information more difficult, is Internet connection. Monopoly of Czech Telecom slows down development of this kind of the services and keeps too high prices for the lower quality.

### **Conclusion**

Internet has become an important information source and business medium. It helps people in their lives; it can support management of firm, territory, etc. by allowing fast and remote access to information.

Internet was created as a free network. But business and public administration need some legal framework to use Internet in a serious way. Development of legal environment is a slow and difficult process which varies in different countries. The result is that institutions must accept many different laws and besides they must adopt their structure and business processes to changing situation. It is then obvious that adopting working and cost-effective e-business is a demanding process.

Quality of provided information is a little bit neglected by all. Users do not care and businesses and public administration authorities are usually not forced to provide first-quality information.

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