

Guidelines for Internet resource selection

By Gregory F. Pratt, Patrick Flannery, and Cassandra L. D. Perkins

Use traditional evaluation criteria in new ways

With the rapid growth of the Internet, today's library user can readily access resources from many parts of the globe and from many types of information providers. These providers may include governments, organizations, businesses, and individuals making their pet projects accessible to the world. Unlike the books and journals that have preoccupied collection development efforts for so long, Internet resources frequently lack the publishing industry's filters of need and worth, may be poorly maintained, and may be only

transiently or intermittently available. For libraries, the basic evaluation criteria of quality, credibility, accessibility, scope, and cost are still issues, but ones that must be viewed in new ways.

The guidelines which follow were developed by the Internet Working Group of the Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center Library and serve as an addendum to the collection development policy. They were developed with the belief that libraries have a responsibility to evaluate and select resources for their users regardless of the media. In addition to highlighting some of the unique challenges the Internet provides, these guidelines can serve, hopefully, as a starting point for other libraries with similar objectives.

Guidelines for Internet resource evaluation and selection

(Author note: These criteria are intended to assist in the evaluation and selection process. Resources can be acceptable without meeting all of the criteria listed.)

1. Quality and Content

Credible source as indicated by:

- Content peer-reviewed by experts in the field.
- Produced as part of the mission of a national or international organization.
- Developed by an academic institution or commercial enterprise with an established reputation in topical area.
- Resource is indexed or archived electronically (if appropriate).

Importance of resource as demonstrated by availability:

- Resource is available from or pointed to by multiple Internet sites.
- Database or document is reproduced in multiple formats (print, online, CD-ROM, etc.)

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Content is comprehensive or unique:

- Resource is known or can be shown to cover subject area well.
- Information would likely be unavailable to clients otherwise.
- Resource is full text.
- Internet version of the resource is the most current.

Content of Internet version is complete or meets client needs:

- Internet document or database record mirrors that available from other sources or in other formats.
- If the timespan or the content of the Internet version of the resource is limited, the resource is still of use.
- Because of subject area, increased demand is likely in the future (e.g., health care reform, Americans with Disabilities Act).

The resource stays current through regular updates or demonstrates ongoing maintenance.

2. Relevancy

- Resource is related to health or biomedicine.
- Library personnel or client recommended resource.
- Access is provided by other local institutions or major health science libraries.
- Usage data indicate client interest or demand.

3. Ease of Use

- If a logon sequence is required, it can be scripted or automated for clients.
- If searchable, searching is similar to that of other available Internet resources.
- If a unique interface is used, the resource is of sufficient importance that client access is still worthwhile.
- If needed, user help files or resource description files are readily available.
- The amount of user support required from Information Desk staff is minimal or acceptable.

4. Reliability and Stability

Resource is generally available; take into account factors such as:

- Internet use fluctuates during different times of day.
- Inaccessibility may not be the fault of the host site.
- An initial period of instability is common with new resources.
- Many resources are mirrored at different sites. For an important resource, it may be worthwhile to use more than one location.
- Downtimes or machine address changes are infrequent and announced (when possible).

5. Cost and Copyright

- Any subscription or access costs are reasonable and justifiable.
- It is simple to comply with restrictions on duplication or dissemination of information from the resource.

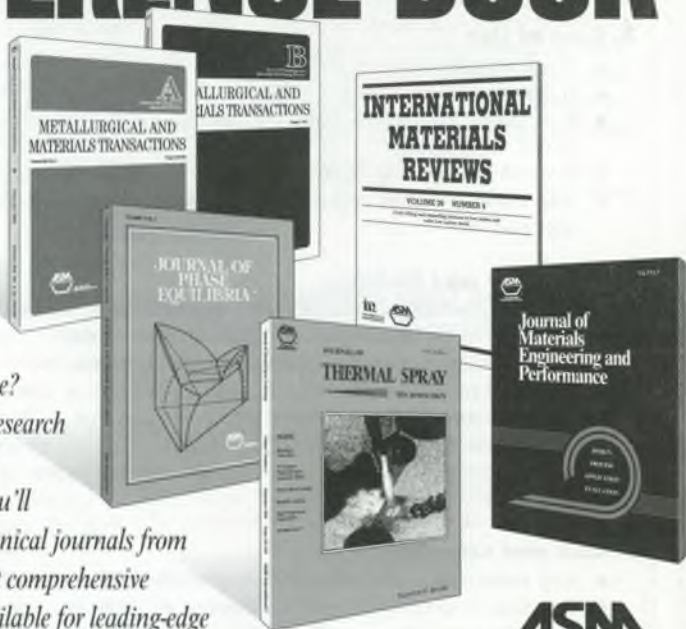
6. Hardware and Software

- Providing access requires little or no change in existing or planned hardware and software resources.

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