

Web Sites You Can Trust

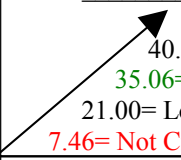
By Dax R. Norman

Whether you are a CEO, student, or parent, you need to know which Web sites you can trust, and which are junk. Most people already know that anyone can make a junk site look professional. So how do you know the real gold from the fool's gold? You can ask an expert in the topic to look at your source. But what if you don't know an expert in the topic? Then you may want to evaluate the source yourself with this worksheet and the *Trust Scale*. A scale is important because trust is relative. A Web site that scores 21 points with the *Trust Evaluation Work Sheet* may be OK for a student, but a CEO with much more to lose may prefer sources of 35 points or more. The scale includes recommended scores for student, business, and health care sources. Therefore, the trust that you assign to a Web site should be based on how you plan to use the information and your evaluation of the site.

The *Trust Evaluation Worksheet* is based on the survey results received from 66 information researchers in business, academia, and government. The low and high ends of the scale are based on the evaluation of known good and poor Web sites. The middle score of 35 is 75% of the highest possible score, which government researchers said is there average threshold for using a source. Therefore, I would expect a little less for a student paper, and a little more for something as important as health care advice.

Here is how it works. Make a copy of the evaluation worksheet, and mark yes or no next to each criterion. Then add all the yes criteria, and compare the total score to the *Trust Scale*. The process is easy and is a good substitute for an expert opinion. However, you may have to do some research to answer the questions. The tips column may help with research. Also, save your evaluations and share them with friends, and co-workers. You will have saved them an hours work and provided them with a source that they can trust.

(About the author: Dax R. Norman is a curriculum manager at the National Cryptologic School, and has a MS in Strategic Intelligence from the Joint Military Intelligence College. This article is based on primary research that he conducted for his MSSSI thesis, How to Identify Credible Sources on The Web, submitted to the JMIC on 19 Dec. 2001. The views expressed here are the author's and do not reflect the official policy of the US Government. This article was first published as "Web Sites You Can Trust." American Libraries, Aug. 2006: 36. Scale is for relative comparison. Don't use for health care decisions. Edited 19 Oct. 2008.)

<i>Trust Scale and Web Site Evaluation Worksheet</i>			
URL: _____			
 46.75= Very High Credibility 40.00= High Credibility 35.06= Medium Credibility 21.00= Low Credibility 7.46= Not Credible			
Criteria	Tips	Value	Y/N
1. Content can be corroborated?	Check some of site's facts.	5.17	
2. Recommended by subject matter expert?	Doctor, Biologist	4.94	
3. Author is reputable?	Google for opinions, ask others.	4.64	
4. You perceive site as accurate?	Check with other sources.	4.56	
5. Information was reviewed by an editor or peers?	Science journals, newspapers.	4.52	
6. Author is associated with a reputable org?	Google for opinions, ask others.	4.42	
7. Publisher is reputable?	Google for opinions, ask others.	4.02	
8. Authors and sources identified?	Trustworthy sources want to be known.	3.78	
9. You perceive site as current?	Last update?	3.78	
10. Several other Web sites link to this one?	Sites only link to other site they trust.	3.68	
11. Recommended by a generalist?	Librarian, Researcher	3.65	
12. Recommended by an independent subject-guide?	An travel journal may suggest sites.	3.56	
13. Domain includes a trademark name?	Trademark owners protect their marks.	3.45	
14. Site's bias is clear?	Bias is ok if not hidden.	3.06	
15. Site has professional look?	It should look like someone cares.	2.86	
TOTAL			
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