@ WORK

Credible Dot.com

By William Powell

Photo by Eyewire

When it comes to Website design, I have my nits to pick, my pet peeves, and thankfully I'm not alone. I have proof that 1649 people out there share my frustration when a Web designer fails to include something as simple as the company's phone number and address. Stanford University's Persuasive Technology Lab ◁⑴ **www.webcredibility.org** with sponsorship from Makovsky & Company, conducted a study analyzing the key factors that determine a Website's credi-

bility. It found that something as minor as misspellings or the absence of a phone number can easily undermine the integrity of an otherwise sound design—and a trustworthy company.

To determine the credibility of a company's Website, the study focused on these factors: expertise, trustworthiness, sponsorship, and miscellaneous criteria. Though the obvious factors, such as professional design and quick response to customer service queries,

were among Internet users' concerns, others included comprehensive and attributable information, search capabilities, and a clearly stated privacy policy. Confirmation emails, live chat, printer-friendly pages, and frequent content updates were also key concerns for users.

Breaking the respondents into U.S. and European users, U.S. users placed more importance on privacy, giving a higher credibility ranking to Websites that provided privacy policy statements, confirmed transactions via email, and presented author credentials.

"If Websites were cars, it would be the trusty Toyota not the flashy Ferrari that would win the Web credibility race," says B.J. Fogg, who runs the Persuasive Technology Lab.

So, how do you go about making your own Website trustworthy and credible? The study found that a significant number of respondents deemed sites trustworthy if they'd had a positive experience in previous visits, so a good first impression is key though early skepticism can be overcome. Consumer WebWatch

◁» **www.consumerwebwatch.com** a grant-funded project of Consumer Union, recommends these guidelines to ensure that a first visit to your Website isn't someone's last:

Identify. Websites should clearly disclose the physical location where they're produced, including an address, a telephone number or email address, as well as ownership, purpose, and mission.

Advertising and Sponsorship. Sites should clearly distinguish advertising from news and information, using labels or other visual means.

Customer Service. Relevant financial relationships with other sites, all fees, and return policies should be prominent.

Corrections. Sites should diligently seek to correct false or misleading information.

Privacy. Policies should be easy to find and clearly, simply stated.

◁» **Source/CyberAtlas**

Will It Work? How Well?

I didn't know whether to laugh or be scared out of my shorts by a recent announcement that the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency would begin awarding contracts for its Total Information Awareness system: a DARPA-funded project created to uncover "terrorists' information signatures"—or the intent of an attack—before the actual attack takes place. Though that sounds well and good, it's DARPA's approach that's worrisome. The proposed system will work around a massive database composed of petabytes—one petabyte equals 1024 terabytes—of data that would include such personal information as credit card activity and medical records for all U.S. residents. The system would then hunt for patterns that could result in terrorist activity. Sound familiar? Think Spielberg's *Minority Report* with a giant database instead of three psychics floating in a pool of goo.

What's more promising, and less menacing, is DARPA's insistence on the use of groundbreaking technology for, as it says, "development of collaboration, automation, and cognitive aids technologies that allow humans and machines to think together about complicated and complex problems." In fact, DARPA has warned grant applicants that not a dime will be spent on technology developed through the evolution of existing technology. Should the project succeed, just a drop of the potential trickle-down technology could hold huge potential for the learning industry. That is if DARPA shares.

Wireless and Falling

It's hard to admit when you're wrong, but last fall a wireless future full of

》》》 promising applications and users seemed so near ⒼⓄⓉⓄ **"Anytime, Anywhere" (Trends, November 2001).** Not so, reports *PC World.* A study carried out by Solomon-Wolff states that the number of people interested in wireless Internet fell 17 percent. Though 39 percent of users expressed interest in wireless Internet technology in January 2001, a mere 22 percent felt the same in January 2002. Also of note, a meager 6 percent of Internet users claimed that they connect wirelessly.

However, the Solomon-Wolff report shares a positive outlook with studies conducted earlier in this year, such as market research firm In-Stat/MDR's "Wireless Data Adoption in the Enterprise." Both think that wireless adoption will pick up considerably in 2003, as new technologies and applications are rolled out and drawbacks such as geographic coverage and connection reliability are overcome. The In-Stat/MDR report claims that about 6.6 million users accessed business data wirelessly by the end of 2001. It expects that number to increase to nearly 40 million by 2006.

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@Work *covers Internet technology trends, news, and tips. Send comments, questions, and items of interest to atwork@astd.org.*

QuickTip

When you absolutely, positively have to make sure an email reaches its recipient, you can request a return receipt. Email marked with this feature triggers a return message once it has been opened. Most major email programs such as Outlook, Netscape Messenger, and Eudora have a return-receipt feature built in.

Microsoft Outlook 2000 users can request a return receipt in three steps:
1. From the message composition window, select File.
2. Select Properties.
3. Under the General tab, select Delivery receipt requested.

Just a note: The return receipt feature can be refused by other Outlook 2000 users, and compatibility conflicts between servers and email applications can prevent you from successfully receiving your returned receipt. So, test first. If you do encounter problems with the feature, try a third-party site such as CertifiedMail ◁») **www.certifiedmail.com.**

By the NUMBERS

Altavista, Google, Hotbot—you have your favorite search engine, I have mine. If you're an experienced surfer, chances are you use it daily. Here are some quick numbers from Pew Internet and American Life Project's study of U.S. search engine usage ◁») **www.pewinternet.org.**

33: number of adults (in millions) who present queries on a search engine in a typical day

85: percentage of Internet users who have used a search engine

29: percentage of Internet users who use a search engine daily

52: percentage of Internet users who use email daily

30: percentage of men likely to do a vanity search (search their own name)

24: percentage of women likely to do a vanity search

25.9 average number of minutes per user per month for Google.com. Visit ◁») **www.searchenginewatch.com** for more information on search engines, as well as tips for power searching.