

Evaluating Internet Information

The Internet contains a wealth of information. Almost anyone can put up a Web page or send out e-mail. This is a great benefit, because individuals and organizations who don't have access to other, costly forms of media can make their information available to a large audience. However, while much accurate and valuable information from reputable sources can be found on the Internet, inaccurate or irresponsible information is there, too. As an Internet user, you need to know how to evaluate the information you find.

Key points to remember

Look at the Internet address.

Look at the Web page itself.

Beware fraud.

Evaluate the domain name

.com for commercial

.edu for educational

.gov for government

.net for networking organizations

.org for non-profit organizations

.mil for military

Consider the country of origin. A URL sometimes indicates the country of origin. For example, a URL ending with:

.au represents Australia.

.jp represents Japan.

.uk represents United Kingdom.

.us represents United States.

Look at the URL. Look at the Internet address. Web pages have a unique address called a URL (Uniform Resource Locator)—pronounced “U-R-L.” A URL is made of several parts. Each part is separated from those that follow by a single forward slash. URLs follow this format:

protocol://domain name/

For example, consider the following URL:

http://texasextension.tamu.edu/

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protocol domain name

Many URLs also include a filename. For example:

http://texas4-h.tamu.edu/students.html

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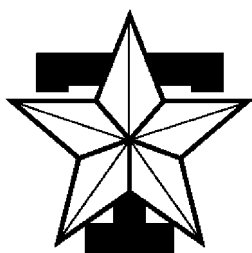
What is the class of domain? Common domains for Web sites in the United States include:

.com	Commercial
.edu	Educational
.gov	Government
.net	Networking Organizations
.org	Non-profit Organizations
.mil	Military

A tilde (~) in the Internet address often means that the information comes from an individual rather than a university department, government, or business unit. Ask yourself why the Web page might be listed under an individual's directory name instead of a department or unit.

Consider the source of the information. Look at the Web page itself. Ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Is there an author's name, title, and address on it?
- ◆ Does the address look reasonable?



Tips for using the Internet

Do business only with companies you know and trust.

Check out the company's track record.

Be careful giving out financial information (credit card numbers, etc.).

Be careful giving out personal information (social security numbers, children's names, etc.).

- ◆ Have you or your co-workers ever heard of the organization that put the information on the Web? Ask other professionals whether they know the author. You may want to phone or e-mail the author to gather more details about him or her and the extent of his or her knowledge.
- ◆ Are there misspelled words and poor grammar on the Web page?
- ◆ Is there a date on the Web page? Has it been updated recently?
- ◆ Are references and information sources cited on the Web page? You may want to check some of these references to see whether they actually support the facts found in the Web article.

Beware fraud. The same scams conducted by phone or mail can be conducted via the Internet. Keep in mind that you are the consumer, and you need to be careful.

Be skeptical of any e-mail you receive from someone you don't know or that encourages you to forward multiple copies of the message to your friends. Many Internet hoaxes and viruses (including hoaxes *about* viruses) are spread this way. Unsolicited commercial e-mail or "junk e-mail" is a common method that scam artists use. To remove yourself from junk e-mail lists, you can search the Internet for "junk e-mail" and select a site that will help you remove your address from the mailing lists.

In general, follow these tips while using the Internet:

- ◆ Do business with companies you know and trust.
- ◆ Check out the company's track record.
- ◆ Be careful with giving out financial information (credit card numbers, etc.).
- ◆ Be careful with giving out personal information (social security number, children's names, etc.).

For more information about safety and security issues on the Internet, see the publications "Child Safety on the Internet" (MKT-3377) and "Online Shopping and Security" (MKT-3379) available from your county Extension office. Further publications in this series can also be found at: <http://texasextension.tamu.edu/techtips>

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