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January 16, 2008

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Computer Literacy Doesn't Mean Information Literacy, Report Says

The next generation of college students, more wired than any other, might not be as good at Internet research as you may think.

A [new report](#) from the Joint Information Systems Committee, a British higher-education research institute, says the “Google Generation” (those born after 1993, who can’t remember a time when the Internet wasn’t widely available) may be computer literate. But that doesn’t make them *information* literate. Some of the key problems the study found include:

- Young people don’t develop good search strategies to find quality information.
- They might find information on the Internet quickly, but they don’t know how to evaluate the quality of what they find.
- They don’t understand what the Internet really is: a vast network with many different content providers.

The report details the implications of these problems for library professionals. It says library resources should be more unified with Internet tools like Google, and adapt to the changing ways younger generations gather information.

In the context of a [recent report](#) from the Pew Internet & American Life Project that says more 18- to 30-year-olds use libraries than other age groups (mostly to use computer resources), it seems there will be an even greater need in the future for librarians to teach [information-gathering skills](#). —*Hurley Goodall*

Posted on Wednesday January 16, 2008 | [Permalink](#) |

Comments

1. Think of the web as a huge library, with much of its content not having been peer reviewed and edited. To make effective use of such a library, a person needs to do higher-order analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These are mental tasks, where high levels of skills are developed through good education and hard work. These ideas come from Bloom’s Taxonomy, which was first published more than 50 years ago. That was, of course, long before we had a Web and search engines.

— David Moursund Jan 16, 05:35 PM <#>

2. I question the apparent assertion that young people are (universally?) computer literate. Being able to use a computer to perform a few tasks (type a Word document, surf the Web, use an IM client, etc.) does not mean that one is literate anymore than the prevalence of cars in America means that most Americans are “automobile literate.” It seems to me that one should know more than just how to superficially use a tool to be considered literate.

— Kevin Guidry Jan 16, 06:09 PM <#>

3. My question is, is this news to anybody? Librarians and academics have known this for years!

— David Jan 17, 08:19 AM <#>

4. I have noticed just in the last week that the verb, “google” is becoming generic. People are using it to describe applications that actually don’t involve the search engine, Google. It is rapidly becoming the ONLY search engine used, and this is frightening. It’s a wonderful resource, but our information needs to come from a variety of sources, not just one.

— Jane Jan 17, 08:49 AM <#>

5. I retired almost ten years ago after many years of reference work. I found nothing new at all in the announcement at hand. The authorities, whomever they may be, have always said the students knew much more than they did know about computers and their use – it saves lots of administrative attention to real problems.

— Roger Horn Jan 17, 09:29 AM <#>

6. How about adding the notion of “fluency” to the estimate of skill? User participation in the creation of information is certainly a way to demonstrate validity. The tools of active participation are more nuanced than the tools of search.

— Curt Madison Jan 17, 11:22 AM #

7. literacy, competency and fluency work in our program as labels indicating level of information ability.

— Walt Lessun Jan 18, 10:09 AM #

8. Nor does it mean they can yet fathom the Dewey Decimal System (at least not to the fourth & fifth numbers past the "dot"); much less the mysteries of our "Lock-a-Shelf" dvd system,* etc. Oh yeah, and let's not forget their atrocious spelling (which they hope our UN-Google-like catalog will correct). Basically, they still need Us as jack-of-all-troubleshooting Gatekeepers to the Lost ARKives; at least for the next nanosecond or two. Stay tuned! —FWH

*which mostly requires a pre-automation-type Slow-w-w hand/finger to operate successfully.

— Frank Hawthorne Jan 18, 11:07 AM #

9. Google became a generic verb many years ago. I really think our current students are familiar with Google, but I'm not even sure they're "computer literate" in any other area. Many of them don't know how to use Microsoft Office applications like Word and PowerPoint. (I won't even get into Excel, since it appears to be more of a specialized tool than I originally thought.)

I wouldn't get too worried about Google and Big Brother just yet, though. Yahoo! and MSN are both still in business, so not everyone has abandoned in favor of Google.

— Carlo Jan 18, 03:38 PM #

10. Now we need a study that will reveal what it will take to motivate students to become computer literate.

— jms Jan 20, 11:25 AM #

11. Whoops. I meant to write information literate in the internet world.

— jms Jan 20, 11:28 AM #

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