

3.1 Policies

The policies for Web sites should cover the document formats to be used (HTML, CSS, etc.) together with other aspects relating to the services provided. For example, there should be linking policies which could address the policies on linking to the site (which often, but not always allows this) and links from the site.

In addition documented policies should also cover Web site accessibility. Addressing accessibility on its own could, however, result in the usability of the Web site being overlooked, so similar policies should be developed for usability. The policies should also describe the technical architecture which is being used to implement the policies. If, for example, the Web site should be in XHTML 1.0 Strict, then it would clearly be inappropriate to use Microsoft Word as the authoring tool!

The policies should also document permitted exceptions. For example, a Web site containing information about presentations may contain links to PowerPoint slides. If only the PowerPoint slides are to be made available, or if non-compliant HTML files derived from PowerPoint are to be made available, this should be stated. It is important to note that the policies should be based on *achievable* aims and not unachievable aspirations.

3.2 Checking Procedures

It is important to define systematic procedures which will ensure that the policies are being implemented successfully. The QA Focus Web site, for example, has made use of W3C's Log Validator tool [6] and a URI interface to checking tools [7]. Not all compliance tests can be carried out using automated tools. Testing the accessibility and usability of a Web site will require manual testing. However there will still be a need to document what such manual checking processes will cover.

4. WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The current World Wide Web has many flaws, with a great many resources failing to comply with HTML standards. As we move towards a richer, more structure Web based on XML it will be essential that quality assurance is built into development processes – unlike HTML, XML applications formally require string adherence with the standards and may fail to render if this is not the case. However, even when a resource does comply with standards it does not mean that the user experience will necessarily be a happy one. Thus, a combination of supplier QA and user satisfaction assessment are needed. However, linking the subjective perceptions of users with the QA practices of suppliers is not a simple task. The next stage of work is to model the relationships between user satisfaction and supplier initiatives (such as QA procedures). One way in which this might be done is through quality function deployment (QFD): “a structured and disciplined process that provides a means to identify and carry the voice of the customer through each stage of product and or service development and implementation” [8]. However, issues of standards and interoperability suggest that the relationship between user satisfaction and QA will not be a unidirectional and linear one but more likely a two-way interaction in which each of the aspects form and shape the other. One potential area of work for applying the procedures outlined in this paper is Web

accessibility. Approaches to checking Web accessibility for compliance with WAI Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are well documented (e.g. see [9]). However there is a need to establish how well compliance with WCAG relates to positive subjective perspectives by users with disabilities. We are currently exploring possibilities of applying our methodologies in this area in the domain of local government e-services.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This short paper has proposed a quality framework that comprises user perceptions of Web site quality (E-Qual) with a lightweight quality assurance framework (QA Focus). The main contribution of this paper is the recognition of a need to combine user and supplier views of quality and QA into a coherent, lightweight, end-to-end framework for Web site quality. A further contribution is the recognition that Web accessibility standards implemented by suppliers need to be supplemented with a subjective evaluation by users with disabilities.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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7. REFERENCES

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