

Chapter 2: Community

Community

*“Because if you can’t be your own weird self on the internet,
where can you be?”*

—Felicia Day

Early Digital Communities

- Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) were local (not over the Internet) dial-in systems for chatting, downloading files, and playing games (1978)
- Usenet had groups/subgroups, like alt.binaries or rec.arts.tv (1980)
- BITNET featured email lists and chat (1981)
- BITNET chat inspired Internet Relay Chat (IRC) (1988)

Social Media

- First online social networking site was www.classmates.com in 1995.
- Founded in 2003, Myspace had roughly 100 million member profiles by 2006.
- Facebook was started at Harvard as an online version of student directories
- Twitter launched in 2006, popularizing #hashtags and @replies.

Accessibility

accessibility: designing products, services, devices, or spaces in ways that enable people with disabilities to use them to their full extent.

web accessibility: designing web content to be fully informative and functional for users with disabilities, including those using assistive technologies.

Assistive Technologies

- Speech recognition software turns spoken word into digital text
- Screen readers turn digital text into spoken word
- Optical character recognition (OCR) turns text from images or printed pages into digital text
- Speech synthesizers or text-to-speech (TTS) systems turn digital text to audio

Accessibility Strategy Examples

- Provide alternate text for images.
- Make sure navigation between links and buttons can be done with keyboard.
- Give closed captions and/or transcripts for all media with audio.
- Avoid text contained in images, or give transcriptions/alternate text for it.
- Allow multiple methods for authentication.

Testing Accessibility

- Many accessibility methods can be tested for automatically.
- Some web editors (like ours for Drupal) have tools that can be purchased to check accessibility the same as spell-checking.
- Some organizations provide tools to check an existing website:
 - <http://wave.webaim.org/>

Additional Benefits of Accessibility

- More users and traffic to site.
- Improves support for mobile users.
 - Displays better in different modes.
 - More compatible with “driving mode.”
- Indexing tools & search engines better able to gather information about site.

Accessibility Laws

- Rehabilitation Act (1973), section 508 requires accessibility for federally funded organizations
 - Government agencies
 - Public universities
 - K-12 public schools
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires web accessibility for all employees and any “place of public accommodation”

Digital Divide

digital divide: gap in resources and experiences between those with full access to internet technologies and those with no access or limited access.

broadband: high-speed internet access, defined by the FCC as 25Mbps.

Digital Divide (U.S.)

- 23% of Americans lacked home access to broadband internet in 2016.
- 13% of adults lacked any access in 2016.
- 19% of African-American and Latinx adults lacked access in 2016, compared to 11% of white adults.
- 22% of adults with household incomes below \$30,000/yr had no internet access in 2016.
- 20% of rural adults lacked access.

Digital Divide (U.S.)

- 36% of adults with disabilities lacked access in 2016.
- 29% of adults whose primary language was Spanish lacked internet access in 2016.

Digital Divide (Global)

- 3.2 billion people globally have internet access, with 2 billion of those from the developing world
- 4 billion people from developing countries lack any internet access.
- Mobile access is possible for about 69% of the world.
- 46.4% of the world has access to home broadband.

Possible Causes

- Expense of broadband access.
- Poverty.
- Some areas lack the infrastructure for cable/DSL
- Age or lack of previous tech experience.
- Poorly funded schools in lower income areas.

Differences in Types of Access

- Some have only access to slower connections, making modern web content/media impossible to access.
- Some have only mobile access, limiting them to the functions of their mobile device
- Some have intermittent access, such as at school or public libraries, leaving gaps in their ability to respond or work online.

Trolling

troll: mythical creature that lives in caves or under bridges, attacking travelers and raiding villages.

internet troll: someone who makes deliberately offensive or provocative online postings with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response from them.

flaming: a heated and hostile internet argument.

History of Trolling

- “Troll” first used to describe online users/behaviors in late 1980s on Usenet and BITNET.
- Added to Oxford English Dictionary definition in 1992.
- Usenet's alt.tasteless was a space for intentionally rude/disgusting content.
- 4chan created in 2003.

Trolling Subculture

- “Subcultural trolling” refers to semi-organized groups of internet users who think of themselves as trolls.
- Many trolling campaigns/raids have centered around 4chan's /b/ board.
- Trolling groups exploit issues others care about, to evoke emotional responses.
- Sometimes rely on dramatic media responses.

Harassment & Bullying

- Harassment and bullying online hard to get away from in a connected world.
- Often crosses lines into threats of real-world actions.
- Local law enforcement often lack resources or knowledge to respond.

Cyber-Bullying Laws & Legal Cases

- In 2008, California passed first law specifically about cyber-bullying.
- 45 states have laws against online harassment/bullying.
- No federal laws specifically against cyber-bullying. Some have been proposed, but none passed.
- Threats online are covered under pre-internet federal laws (U.S. Code 18, Section 875c.)

Internet Empowerment

- Internet community can help groups feel less isolated.
 - LGBT individuals in areas where there are few other out LGBT people.
 - Immigrants and refugees whose families and friends may be far apart.

Internet Empowerment

- Internet community may be the best/only outlet for people who can't leave their homes.
 - People with limited mobility.
 - People with immune disorders or other illnesses that make it unsafe to go outside.
 - People with mental disorders that lead them to be isolated, such as agoraphobia, PTSD, or social anxiety.