

To a High IQ!

Information Quality Applied to Internet and e-Business Information

by
Larry P. English

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In this quarter's column, I am sharing an excerpt from my forthcoming book, *Information Quality Applied: Best Practices for Improving Business Information, Processes and Systems*, which will be released mid-2008. This book shows how we can measure and improve several major information value circles, from the Customer Life Cycle, Product Development, the Supply Chain, 'Budget-to-Profit,' 'Employee-Hire-to-Retire,' 'Value-Centric-Information-and-Systems-Engineering,' and others.

This article is an excerpt from the chapter entitled, "*Information Quality Applied to Internet and e-Business Information*," specifically addressing the quality of web-based information and web content.

INTRODUCTION

The information an organization provides to its public is often neglected as "documentation" or a necessary evil.

Remember that in e-Business, the Information *is* the Business! and a web visitor's first visit to a site may represent their first "Moment of Truth" about an organization as Jan Carlzon would say. A Moment of Truth is an opportunity when a Customer, in this case an e-Customer, has to make an impression about an organization.¹ Will this first impression be a positive or negative experience? Remember also that you don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

In this article, I will share tips for improving both web-based document and web content process quality.

DEFINING A PROJECT FOR WEB CONTENT PROCESS IMPROVEMENT (TIQM P5.1)

The first step to improving your web content process is to identify the critical processes that require improvement.

Several processes immediately come to mind as possibilities:

- Web site design
- Document and content development processes. These should be standardized as much as is possible.

¹ Jan Carlzon, *Moments of Truth: New Strategies for Today's Customer-Driven Economy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 3.

Follow your organization's normal project planning procedures to establish a process improvement initiative.

Identify the process owner who is accountable for the process and for implementing improvements and identify those who are part of information production (information producers, transcriptionists or translators) who will participate in the root cause analysis and process improvement definition activities.

Identify the facilitator for the process improvement.

Develop the project plan for conducting the process improvement activities of the Plan-Do-Check/Study-Act cycle.

PLANNING FOR WEB CONTENT PROCESS IMPROVEMENT (TIQM P5.2)

Analyzing Causes of Out-of-date, Inaccurate Content, or Misleading Information Presentation

The first part of planning is to analyze and identify the root cause or causes of the problem effect you seek to solve, such as "out-of-date content."

To analyze the root causes, we must understand the needs and expectations of the e-Customers and facilitate the identification of precipitating causes to drill down to the root causes.

For example, root causes for outdated content can include:

- Lack of attention to the information subject
- Lack of management accountability for web content produced in their area
- Lack of change control procedure for dated information
- Lack of content producer's understanding of e-Customer needs
- Lack of content producer's understanding of content domain
- Lack of writing skill, concept design, or presentation skill
- Time or deadline issues with getting content out

Use the Ishikawa Cause-and-Effect Diagrams to define the IQ effect (problem) and to collect, analyze, and identify the applicable root cause or causes.

Defining Process Improvements to Eliminate Out of Date Content

The second part of planning is to define process improvements that eliminate the cause of defects described in the IQ effect.

For example, preventive actions for outdated or inaccurate content include:

- **Hold managers of content producers accountable** for the quality and currency of web content. Once managers have accountability written into their job descriptions and are held accountable for information quality, and once training and resources are provided to information producers, then you may hold content producers accountable for their information content.

- **Verify the accuracy of information** gathered from external information sources.”
 - Corroborate information from independent sources
 - Use peer reviews to assure accuracy, completeness, and non-bias
- **Understand the “shelf life” of the information and create a schedule for the information to “expire.”** If there is a known time of expiration, then calendar events can trigger a review to update or archive.

At this time:

- Assure the information update process is timely to keep information current (e.g., new price for a current product);
- Replace with correct, current information, such as when a new-and-improved product replaces a previous product;
- Archive or delete information with no replacement, such as a discontinued product.
- **Monitor information subject to IQ decay** (going out-of-date) and verify information against its accuracy source on an appropriate time interval.

If there is no arbitrary time frame controlling when data goes out of date, such as when a product is retired, the product retirement process must communicate to the content steward to update or remove the information.

Lack of Visibility of Information Problems

There are times when the information problem is not visible at all.

The lack of visibility is caused by the fact that e-Business takes place in the invisible reality of cyberspace. There is so much information on line that it is difficult to control and each e-Business entity must do its part.

Preventive actions to address this problem include:

- **Make the problems visible by creating internal real-time monitors** that can detect “run-away or out-of-control transactions.”

Create thresholds of reasonable transaction limits, updated for sale or promotion events, to allow you to identify abnormal transaction patterns, both high and low.

Then analyze the data associated with any run-away transactions to see if an information quality issue is the cause, and take corrective action as necessary.
- **Test web links on a regular basis** to ensure they link correctly and remain current and relevant.
- **Create incentives for your e-Customers to call your attention to problems** in your web information rather than to the attention of other people.

For example: If a product sales price is “too good to be true,” encourage people to tell you with an offer to the first one or two customers who identify it to have the item at its “advertised” price, and give them a gift certificate equivalent to its correct price that they can spend on anything else.

This type of incentive makes it more likely for them to tell you rather than their email lists of family and friends! Incentives of this nature will save you relationship problems and profits by making it possible for you to learn and correct the problem early.

CONCLUSION

Because the Internet and e-Business processes are hidden from store clerks, errors can go unnoticed, and sales of “super bargain” prices may cause runaway sales and costs of recovery. The opposite occurs if prices are overstated, causing missed sales and opportunity loss.

To a High IQ!!! Let me hear about your experiences at
Larry.English@infoimpact.com

About the Author



Larry P. English, Co-Founder of the IAIDQ, is President and Principal of INFORMATION IMPACT International, Inc., Brentwood, TN., and author of *Improving Data Warehouse and Business Information Quality*, called “the Information Quality Bible for the Information Age,” by Masaaki Imai, the creator of the Kaizen quality system of continuous process improvement.

He provides consulting and training to help Information Professionals increase their value to the enterprise. Mr. English provides certification in his TIQM methodology, developed from the application of Deming, Kaizen, Crosby, and Juran quality management system principles. For details, email TIQMCert@infoimpact.com.

© 2007-2008 INFORMATION IMPACT International, Inc.