



Improving Credibility of Information About Domain Names

Alex Tajirian

March 11, 2009

In this essay I outline technology-based techniques for improving the credibility of domain name information. Better information will directly help community members and also bring us better media coverage. Four general approaches to enhancing the credibility of information are discussed here: peer-reviewed articles, online filtered resources, blogs, and wikis. The domain name blogosphere's effectiveness on media is discussed [elsewhere](#).

Peer review and distributed filtering

Each academic discipline has its own ultimate prestigious journals where top research is published; in the world of science, *Nature* is the standout example, the most desired venue for publication of major discoveries. *Nature* and its counterparts in other fields have this in common: peer review. They publish no findings until credentialed professionals have put the findings through a rigorous examination. The professionals receive no royalties or fees, and the journals mostly rely on subscriptions to cover their expenses. And the peer review process is proprietary, closed to the public.

Most people don't know that, before Wikipedia, the Internet already had an encyclopedia. This was Nupedia, now defunct (the same condition toward which the current form of domain parking [content outsourcing](#) is headed). Nupedia was online but followed the journals' approach of expert writers and proprietary peer review. The point may be that, good as the old system is, the Internet is suited to a different approach. If so, I would say both approaches are necessary. Thanks to the Internet, the closed system is being complemented by openly distributed collaboration and filtering techniques.

Open source software makes possible an alternative approach to academic publication. An example is [arXiv](#), a repository of over 500,000 working papers in physics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative biology, quantitative finance, and statistics. In 2005, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the major funding agency for biomedical science in the United States, announced a requirement that all NIH-funded research be freely available on the Internet within 12 months of publication. Even *Nature* has experimented with posting submissions for open

comments, when the authors agree. Unlike the prestigious journals, the open-access journals do offer payment and have sources of money beyond subscriptions. The nonprofit [Public Library of Science](#) (PLOS), for example, draws on philanthropic donors and university memberships. However, as long as faculty tenure and promotion decisions are based on publication in the prestigious journals, the ability of the new review mechanisms to overtake peer review is unlikely.

Two examples of effective nonacademic online industry sites are the technology coverage site [Slashdot](#) and the movie rating site [Rotten Tomatoes](#). Slashdot has established its own moderation system, which results in an edited compilation of news abstracts. Submissions to Slashdot are typically a link to an off-site content site, coupled with a brief commentary from the author. Community members follow up the initial submission with comments, which can be in the hundreds. On the other hand, Rotten Tomatoes implements an automated system of moderators based on preset criteria. On Rotten Tomatoes views are aggregated through the “[Tomatometer](#)” and “Average Rating.”

A related peer production project is [Distributive Proofreading](#). The project provides a Web-based method to ease the conversion of public domain books into e-books. When the workload is divided into individual pages, many volunteers can work on a book at the same time, which significantly speeds up the creation process. A similar process can be applied to working papers, which can be used in conjunction with peer comments on working papers prior to posting the final version.

With regard to blogs, the author may be encouraged to summarize the comments. One reason such a feature has not yet been implemented is that blogs, with their timestamps, are largely used as journals, as ongoing records of events and the blogger’s thoughts.

Necessary improvements for domain information production

1. Peer review is not an issue for investors and speculators. Academic opinion, in general, is not an issue for them. Academics raised doubts about the Internet boom and the views of Mary Meeker, Morgan Stanley’s cheerleading analyst. The warnings were ignored, the boom collapsed, and Meeker kept her reputation. The doubters, though proven right, are little talked about. This time around, for the subprime mess, the academic skeptics were joined by some investment banking insiders and the country’s best-known business name, Warren Buffett. It still did no good.

2. Taking the average of a crowds opinion score is not a viable solution here because of biases in views.
3. Domain name wikis have not worked because stakeholders share a text without sharing an objective.
 - a. Investors and speculators have no incentive to add opposing views.
 - b. [No institution or mechanism disciplines](#) inefficient behavior.
 - c. Evidence suggests that unwelcome views get edited out of articles.
4. Existing blogs and/or new entrants must incorporate filtering mechanisms of some kind.
5. Because numbers can lie, we need to encourage analyses based on robust analytical tools provided by existing sites and new entrants.
6. We need to make [blogs ready for KO punch](#) when necessary.

Additional References

1. Yochai Benkler, [The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom](#).
2. David Weinberger, [Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder](#).