

## ***Does the Site Measure Up? – Ask These Questions***

An emotional and intellectual openness to seeing Web sites and Web services for what they really are is essential if you are going to be able to evaluate them wisely. Here are some admittedly demanding questions you might ask about the sites you visit and consider posting personal information on:

1. Who is the author of the site?
2. What are the site's "Terms of Use," or what is included in its "Acceptable Use Policy"? What do these terms and policies state with regard to who owns user-contributed content?
3. Does the site have a privacy policy?
4. Does the site distribute tracking cookies, and, if so, what information do those cookies collect, and for what purposes?
5. If the site collects personally identifiable information, does it do so securely? How long does the site keep the data it captures, and will it notify its users in the event of that information's disclosure? Does the site indicate whether its owners mine the data it collects for marketing purposes?
6. How is the site supported financially? If it is supported through advertising revenues, who are its advertisers and what do they sell? If, instead, the site is supported through donations, is it a registered not-for-profit organization under the corporation laws of the United States or of a country that operates under the rule of law?
7. Does the site have verifiable physical contracts to guard against phishing or other kinds of fraud?
8. If the site contains academic material, does it operate under the auspices of a reputable college, university, research foundation, or think tank?
9. What is your visceral sense of the site? Does it appear to be nasty, venal, or destructive in its sensibilities, or does it promote learning, citizenship, and pride in ourselves and our communities?

As you know, the reality of the Internet is often coldly indifferent to the lives we live and the goals we cherish. For that reason, you should actively evaluate the sites and services you encounter. Remember to employ the critical-thinking skills valued in academic research whenever you use the Internet—publically, professionally, or privately.