Speaking the HTML: a Step to Becoming a Web Services Librarian

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Abstract

Purpose- This paper aims to examine the extent to which librarians understand the basics of web design; to improve the IT skills of librarians by bringing html into the scene; to develop the desire among librarians, of becoming web service librarians.

1.

Design/methodology/approach- To elicit the necessary information, a questionnaire was designed and sent to the librarians in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria Nsukka. All copies of the questionnaire were returned and found useable, constituting a 100% response.

Findings- Analysis of the returned questionnaire revealed that there is a significant skills gap among the librarians in the area of web design.

Research limitations/implications- This study was carried out based on a relatively small sample of librarians in Nigeria and therefore the results cannot be easily generalized to the wide community of librarians in Nigeria. The result of this study should be able to inculcate the interest among librarians, of becoming web services librarians, thus expanding their roles and increasing their relevance in the society.

Originality/value- The study possesses three characteristics that make it different from other studies in the related area. First of all, it provides a theoretical basis for librarians to be more IT-driven, especially in the area of web services librarianship. Secondly, the study will help fill a gap in knowledge of website design using html. Thirdly, the study will assist librarians to improve their services to the clientele.

Keywords html, web services, librarian, web page design
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the advent of the web, the role of the librarian as information organizer has extended beyond the confines of his or her own library's collection. The librarian is not only expected to perform the well known traditional tasks like shelving of books, cataloguing and classification, indexing and abstracting, but also expected to "breathe" into such tasks. To "breathe" here, means to add more value, life, color to the aforementioned library tasks. In order to venture into this act,

librarians have some substantive roles to play. They need to widen their horizons and learn how to meet up with the current trends in librarianship.

In today's librarianship, there are some evolving areas which help bring the discipline into limelight. Such areas as Knowledge Management, E-libraries, Information Systems, Networking, Web designing. In his study on "Cataloguers in a global information network environment", Omekwu (2008) discussed current issues in library and information. He noted current developments in the professional horizon that impact on professional practice generally. He listed some conventional and new roles of the cataloguer (who is a librarian) as situated in the global information network environment as follows:

(i)   Knowledge segmentation
(ii)   Knowledge organization
(iii)   Knowledge authentication
(iv)   Knowledge architects
(v)   Information environmentalists
(vi)   Process manager
(vii)   Researchers
(viii) Organizational mainstreaming
(ix)   Information retrieval system designers
(x)   Systems managers
(xi)   Content management
(xii)   Software specialists
(xiii) Digital archivist
(xiv)   Web mastery

The last point talks about web mastery. This entails not only knowing what the web holds, but being able to design web pages. According to Parker (2008), librarians are experts at organizing information; therefore library websites should reflect this. Librarians have come to the stage where they will have to commence the designing of their library web pages to suite their demands and taste instead of solely depending on external bodies that may not produce the desired result.

Web designing requires the **speaking**, in other words, the mastery of **html** which is the foundation in web designing. Most web pages possess well written html codes and most web designers use html, with other applications to design their websites. Ogbomo (2004) supported the above by stating that web pages are created using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). Html is mostly used by beginners in web designing, and it is referred to as **a language to be spoken,** in this paper, because it is expected that every librarian who expects to become a web master should master the language.

Definition of Terms (html, World Wide Web)

HTML stands for **H**yper **T**ext **M**arkup **L**anguage. According to Junion-Metz (1998), *hypertext* enables you to jump from place to place around the internet using links that are created by specific HTML tags. HTML is a language specifically

designed for labeling documents that will b stored on Net and Web servers and accessed electronically via hypertext links. A *markup language* according to Junion-Metz (1998) sets up instructions within a document, to show what the document text means, what the text should do, or what it should look like. Gbaje (2008) described an html file as a text file containing small **markup tags** which tell the web browser **how to display** the pages.

The World Wide Web is a computer-based network of information resources that combines text and multimedia. The information on the World Wide Web can be accessed and searched through the Internet, a global computer network. The World Wide Web is often referred to simply as "the Web."(**Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved**).

The Librarian and HTML

The librarian is now faced with the challenges of going beyond the use of computer hardware. The understanding of some computer languages becomes of paramount importance to boost the importance of the librarian. As earlier defined the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) file can be created using a simple text editor.Ojedokun (2008) submitted that:

> *we witness today the emergence of tools that enable almost anyone*
> *to publish materials on the World Wide Web (WWW). They range*
> *in complexity, capability, and price. These include among others,*
> *editors, converters and generators. Some of these tools require the*
> *knowledge of Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML), while others*
> *draw on experience with other applications such as word processors*
> *and spreadsheets.(Ojedokun,p.86)*

Eyitayo (2008) noted that ability to use HTML and Web editor is one of he qualifications of website staffing and maintenance, and librarians are advised to commence the staffing and maintenance of their websites. Staffing and maintenance deals with the updating processes involved in website building. Expertise becomes the key issue here. The web master need not be a computer guru, an Engineer, or the like, but a librarian that is brilliant enough to master these tricks involved, who can combine his skills as a librarian and this skill of web designing.

The HTML is always started using the notepad. The following text is typed in Windows Notepad: (**Start>All Programs>Accessories>Notepad**).

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Nnamdi Azikiwe Library.</title>
</head>
<body>
This is my first homepage. <b>Welcome to UNN professional seminar series</b>
```

</body> </html>

The file name is saved with **"filename.html"**

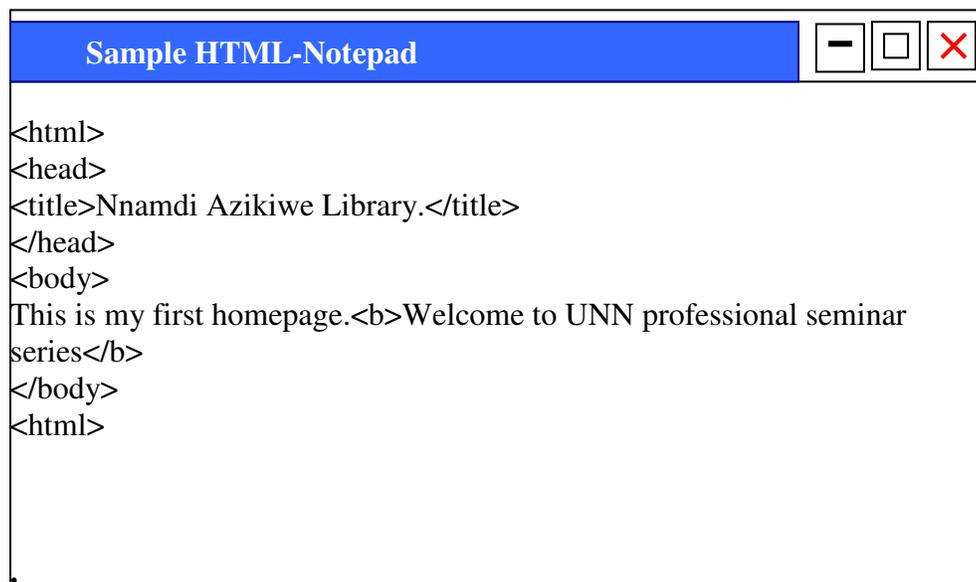Some html files can easily be edited using a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor like FrontPage or Dreamweaer, instead of writing markup tags in a plain text file. However, Gbaje (2008) advises that for one to be a skillful web developer, it is better to use a plain text editor to learn primer HTML.

4.

                 HTML elements are defined using HTML tags.

HTML Tags

- HTML tags are used to mark-up HTML ELEMENTS
- HTML tags are surrounded by the **two characters** < and >
- The surrounding characters are called **angle brackets**
- HTML tags normally come in pairs like and
- The first tag in a pair is the **start tag**, the second tag is the **end tag**
- The text between the start and end tags is the **element content**
- HTML tags are **not case sensitive**, <b>means the same as <B>

SAMPLE HTML-Notepad

Sample HTML-Notepad	▬ ❑ ✕

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Nnamdi Azikiwe Library.</title>
</head>
<body>
This is my first homepage.<b>Welcome to UNN professional seminar
series</b>
</body>
<html>
```

Fig. 1 Notepad listing HTML code for a simple Web page.

Advantages to HTML

1. **HTML** documents are small, so they take up very little space on your server and transfer quickly from your server to a visitor's browser (Junion-Metz, 1998).
2. **HTML** works with any Windows, **MacOS,** or **UNIX** computer that can run a Web browser as well as read and understand HTML documents.
3. It is easy to learn.
4. **HTML** can be learnt by connecting to other library web pages and then viewing the HTML tags that created them. This entails going to the view the source code of the website in question.

5.
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WEB PAGE DESIGN FUNDAMENTALS

According to Abate (1997),

*a web page is a screenful of text and graphics related to a particular
subject. Certain words and/or images on the page are highlighted. If
 the user selects one of these items, the current page is replaced
by a new page with information about the selected topoic or image.
The user can continue to follow the link to bring up new page.(1997,p.117)*

Web design is the art of designing a web. Ojedokun (2008) states that Web design is the arrangement and creation of web pages that in turn make up a website. The librarian as a web page designer should first of all, go back to the drawing board before starting up the design. The following points should be noted down before any web page is designed:

1. Planning and Organisation- Without planning and organization, one will end up in chaos (Breal Web Design, 2003). This planning has to be done on paper. A sketch of how the web page(s) will look like should be made.

2.A web design plan must ask the following questions and/or do the following (Donnelly, 2001; IBM Web Guidelines, 2000), among others:

- what s the main purpose or the reason for the site?
- Who are audience and what are they looking for?
- What layout should be used?
- What items-text, images, and data- should be included in the web page?
- What colors should be used?

Becoming a Web Services Librarian/ the need for one

6.

A web services librarian is that librarian that possesses the skills of web designing, development, maintenance, staffing, and web content management. With the advent of web services librarianship, there is therefore, no more need for the library to hire external hands for the issues that concern the building of the library's website. The web services librarian becomes the web master and takes up the responsibility of developing and maintaining the library website. Recently, there has been need for such librarians (web services) in different higher institutions. Since the world is becoming a global village, there is call for Information Scientists, Web masters, ICT gurus, Systems analysts, programmers, Hardware and Software engineers, etc. On Monday, September 29 2008, East Carolina University, a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina, a doctoral institution with an enrollment of over 25,000 students and approximately 4,500 faculty and staff, posted a job advertisement on their website for the post of a Web Services Librarian. Likewise, on May, 2008 the **California State University, Long Beach Library and Academic Technology Services (LATS).** In the same vein, the Columbia University Libraries, in 2007, advertised for a Web Services Librarian for the Libraries Digital Program. (See web addresses at the end of this work).

For the above posts, the Web Services librarian is expected to:

- Provide leadership in the development of the Libraries' overall web-based service program and at the same time train and work directly with library staff to help make them more effective content contributors and electronic service providers.

- Have a key role in working with technical staff on configuring and enhancing the Libraries' web content management system and on enabling the use of new technologies and architectures such as wikis, blogs, information portals, and XML-based content.

- Help plan and conduct usability testing and overall assessment of the Libraries' web services. As part of the Libraries Digital Program team, the incumbent will participate substantively in other planning and implementation initiatives, such as the institutional repository program.

- Create and modify web pages using html editors and the library's Content Management System (CMS).

WEB SERVICES PYRAMID (WESP) ----

In order of priority, the researcher has listed the following services as the core services to be rendered by the web services librarian, as represented thus:

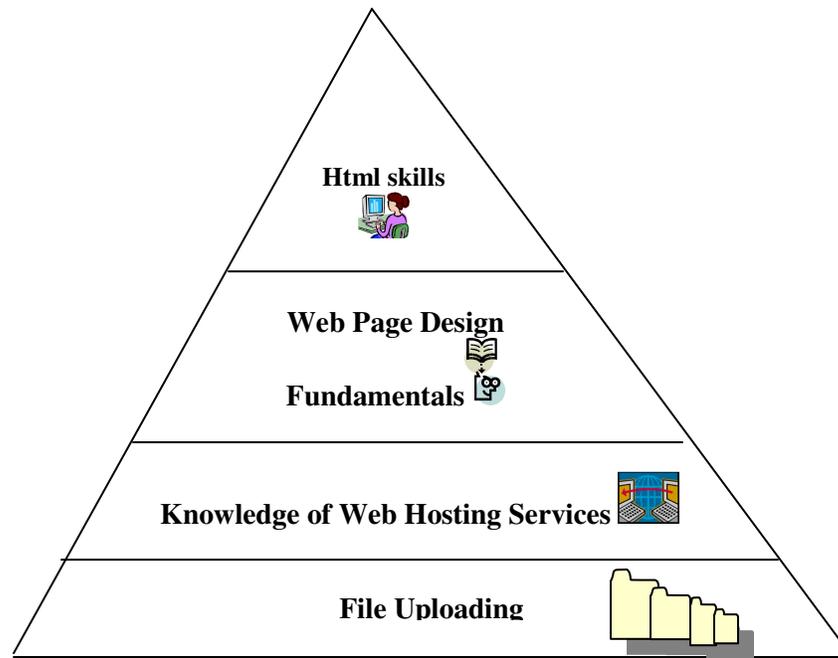**7.**

Fig. 2: Web Services Pyramid (*Helen Eke, 2008***)**

The Study and Methodology

This study sought to address the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent are librarians familiar with html and web designing?
RQ2. What efforts do librarians make to acquire this knowledge?

The study adopted a case study research design because the study gears towards a thorough understanding of a given social unit (Nworgu, 2006) which is Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Data collection tool in the study was questionnaire. The research question which guided the study were two, but in the questionnaire, the items were split into ten (10). This was in an attempt to secure more information that would enable the researcher put up a more comprehensive write-up. Thirty four (34) copies of the questionnaire were administered. Analysis was made using simple percentages and Frequencies.
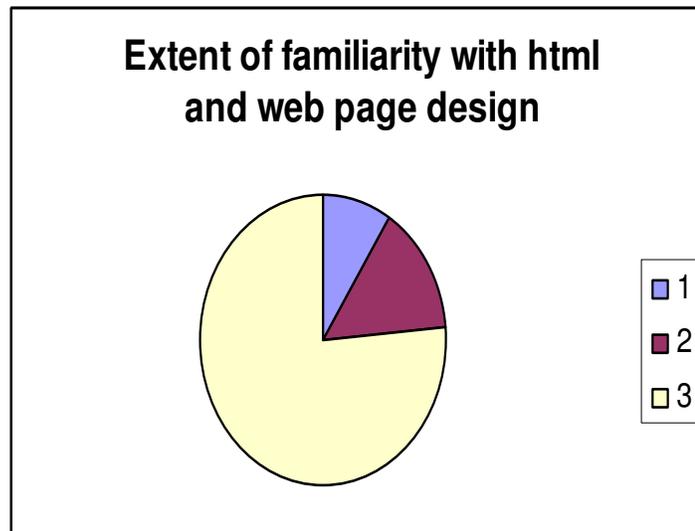
RQ1: To what extent are librarians familiar with html and web designing?

The thrust of this question was to find out the extent to which librarians are familiar with the html and web designing skills. Data in this respect were collected using questionnaire items 1-3 and the analyses are shown in table 2 below:

8.

Table 2: the extent to which librarians are familiar with html and web design

S/n	To a Large extent		To a small extent		Not at all		Total. No. of respondents
1.	F	%	F	%	F	%	
2.	3	8.82	5	14.70	26	76.47	
							34

(Representation of RQ1 in pie chart)

1. - 8.82%
2. – 14.70%
3. – 76.47%

Discussion:

From the above table, 8.82% of the respondents indicated that they are familiar with the concept of html and and web designing to a large extent; 14.70% respondents to a small extent; 76.47% Not at all. This implies vividly, that many of the librarians are not yet familiar with the concept of html and web designing.

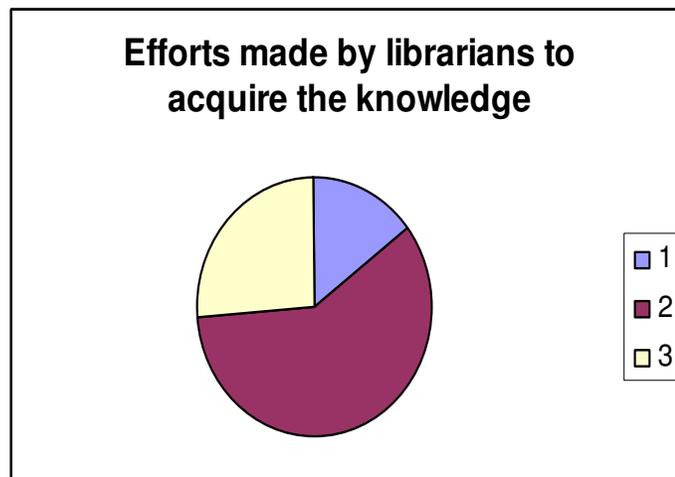**RQ2: What efforts do librarians make to acquire this knowledge?**
 Questionnaire item 4 was used to gather information on this questions as represented in table 3:

Table 3 represents the data for the above question:

9.

Table 3: Efforts made by librarians to acquire the knowledge

S/n	Reading related materials		wait for training classes		No effort(s) yet		Total. No. of respondents
1	F	%	F	%	F	%	
2	5	14.70	20	58.82	9	26.47	**34**

Efforts made by librarians to acquire the knowledge

(Representation of RQ2 in pie chart)

1. **14.70%**
2. **58.82%**
3. **26.47%**

Discussion:
It can be deduced from the above table that 14.70% of the librarians rely upon reading materials about web designing in order to update their knowledge on the subject. 58.82% librarians wait for training classes, while 26.47% do not make any attempt to master the skills.

Conclusion/Recommendation
   Findings of this study help us to know how much knowledge of html and web designing the librarians have, and also the interest developed in them towards the mastery of the subject. Librarians need to be told and taught the importance of this subject, and with this study, especially with the current job advertisements projected

in this study, the librarians in question would need to sit up and go for more training on web designing, having known the relevance of becoming web service librarians.

It is therefore, recommended that tutorials be conducted on the subject in order to equip the librarians, especially the younger librarians who are still coming to face the challenges of job search. It is additionally, strongly recommended by the researcher, that every librarian be afforded the time to attend extra classes on computer application to library services, where such topics could be treated.

10.

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http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/personnel/job/postings/481/index.html-40k

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