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Blue Boom: An Evaluation of Web Domains

The Internet is such a convenient place to get information in many different formats and many different outlets. When looking up a topic via the Internet, it is important to know the difference in information and websites (e.g., .com, .gov, .org) so the most pertinent and relevant information is used. It also comes down to preference of information—do you like your information to come in a more interactive setting, or do you just want the straight facts? For example, when searching a topic like “Blue Moon,” many different websites come up; let’s take a look at some of the websites and how the information is portrayed.

(Dot) Org Domain

The .org website evaluated, <http://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/when-is-the-next-blue-moon>, had advertisements pop up right away and they lined the right side of the screen—obviously a sponsored website. EarthSky is an educational group of scientists who proclaim they are “A Clear Voice for Science,” reaching out to people with curiosity for science facts and the desire to be able to ask questions. They are also given the ability to ask them on this Web page. Their affiliations include, to name only a few, *Discovery News*, The National Science Foundation, Google, and The NASA Night Sky Network. These affiliations are essential to the website because they offer references that support the Web page. Underneath all the advertisements, there is a moon calendar of activity. Once the advertisements are closed down, the website is very appealing, providing a lot of photographs of Blue Moons, interrupting the content all the way down the web page, and attribution is given to the photographers on the bottom of each one. The content of the website is short in length, but gives updated insight into the folklore behind a Blue Moon—this is known because the copyright information has been updated to reflect ©2012 Earthsky Communications, Inc. The facts on the Web page take frequently asked questions and answer them. Although there are links embedded in the content, they take the viewer to other pages within the website and there are no links to any resources, making it hard to understand/reference where their information actually came from. Not even the

bottom link bar has a “Resource” link; it includes: Press, About; Team; Broadcasters; Media Kit; Subscribe; Contact; and Privacy Policy. This website, although insightful, seems to focus more on the projection, or outward appearance, of their website rather than the educational value of the website.

(Dot) Com/HTML Domain

The .com website evaluated, <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/bluemoon1.html>, also had advertisements pop up right away, but there were even more than on the .org website. Randomly chosen advertisements (e.g., Mercedes Benz and AT&T) lined the right side of the Web page and had animation, making it very distracting and hard to focus on the content. Information Please is a company that specializes in answering factual questions since 1938. The company started as a radio quiz show, then started an almanac in 1947—they have been relaying information on the Internet since 1998. The content in this website focuses more on the spiritual calendar revolving around the Blue Moon, and even though much of the content had the same information as the .org website, this one had many links directing the reader to other websites. It only provides one picture at the top of the website of a blue moon. However, this website provided many resources and gave more recognition to other sources than the .org website did. This is a better website to find factual information because they utilize the resources for educational purposes, not media as the other pages did by utilizing space for unrelated advertisements. The information is updated, according to the copyright information (©2010 – 2012 Pearson Education, publishing as InfoPlease). There was one bit of information that was in the .org website that could have been very beneficial to have in the .com website—from the definition “Blue Moon,” a blue moon is not necessarily blue; a blue moon is typically a side effect of volcanic ash. The bottom link bar is much more extensive and focuses on educational purposes, including: About; Contact; Link to Us; Advertise With InfoPlease; Terms of Use; Privacy; Homework Help; Reference Site; K-8 Kids; Poptorpica; Parenting Advice;

Teacher Resources; and Online Gradebook. The information on this website is more reliable due to the resources and background it provides.

(Dot) Gov Domain

The .gov website evaluated, http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2004/07jul_bluemoon/, had no advertisements until the middle of Web page, where a small icon asked if the reader would like to sign up for a subscription to *Express Science News*. Instead of advertisements at the top of the page, NASA has the following links: Visit NASA.gov Connect; Contact Us; Glossary; and Site Map. NASA is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration based in the U.S. As soon as the website is opened, the viewer feels comfortable in knowing that this website is purely educational because it provides the exact information on a Blue Moon—a scientific, educational overview of what a Blue Moon is and how it came to be. Instead of having pictures of just the Blue Moon, this website provides photos that explain the content. It also provides links to news stories about the Blue Moon, downloadable files, and links if you need help. This website answers questions not only on a basic level, but a technical level as well. For example, this website goes into specific detail as to why a moon can be blue, how many days there are from one full moon to the next on average, and that there are different colored moons other than blue. In a story at the bottom of this Web page, NASA calls out the .com website, previously mentioned, and says that some of their information is based on a mistake made in the 1970s that changed the original definition of a Blue Moon. This was just the beginning of the story—the rest is embedded in a link that is unfortunately broken. The link bar at the bottom of this website includes: Big Questions; Earth; Heliophysics; Planets; Astrophysics; Missions; Technology; Science News; For Researchers; For Educators; For Kids Citizen Scientists; and Ask a Scientist. This website is the most reliable and very beneficial when seeking correct and educational information.

The analysis of these three websites—.org, .com/.html, and .gov—has left a very clear understanding of how a domain formats and portrays its information. The .org domain was the least reliable when it came to verifying its facts and seemed very concerned about their outward appearance and less concerned about the educational value of their site. Even though the .org website provided a forum for questions to be asked, the .com website provided more reliable information because of its sources. The .com/.html provided a lot of the same information that the .org website did; however, the .com/.html website was, once again, more resourceful and made it easier to find factual information. But the most reliable information of all came from the .gov website. The .gov website provided a very high-level overview of what a Blue Moon is, where they got their information, and how you can learn more about the subject by leveraging other websites. When utilizing the Internet to research a topic (*i.e.*, Blue Moon), it is important to know what to look for, and to make sure your information is correct and up-to-date.