



## Fighting Fake Facts With FUD

We info pros have always viewed building information literacy as part of our job. We're always asking, "Where'd you find that?" As more people get their news through social media or the web instead of directly from more traditional sources, we have had to expand our messaging about how to evaluate information sources.

Adding to this challenge is a growing distrust of the government and local and national news sources. (See the Pew Research Center's report, "How People Approach Facts and Information"; [pewinternet.org/2017/09/11/how-people-approach-facts-and-information](http://pewinternet.org/2017/09/11/how-people-approach-facts-and-information).) Just teaching our patrons how to recognize reliable news sources is harder than ever. And in the current political climate, where the phrase "fake news" can mean either fabricated stories or news coverage that a reader disagrees with, info pros have an even more difficult task in teaching good information hygiene.

It's time for info pros to deploy some FUD—the old sales technique of instilling Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt in the minds of customers about whether they have made the right choice. ("So, you say you're happy with our competitor, Acme Widgets? Really? You haven't had any of the problems with reliability that I've heard about? And you've actually found them to be cost-effective? Hmmm.") Rather than wagging our fingers at recalcitrant clients who insist in trusting whatever shows up in their Facebook feeds, we can start building in them a bit of *dissatisfaction* with the reliability of what they're reading.

In November 2017, Google rolled out a new feature that helps readers evaluate a publication with which they are not already familiar. When someone searches for a particular publication, the Knowledge Panel—the preformatted answers box that often appears at the top of search results—includes information about that publisher. Depending on the publication, the Knowledge Panel can include awards it has won, the topics it covers most extensively, and its political alignment. If content from the publication has recently been challenged by an authoritative fact-checker, those items are also featured in the Knowledge Panel. We can use this feature to help users compare the reliability of their favorite news sources and build a little FUD. ("So, you're OK relying on that publication, that has been fact-checked multiple times and is labeled as partisan? Hmmm.")

The growth of open access journals has created both new opportunities and new concerns. The Public Library of Science is a great example of how to increase access to research and accelerate discovery in new areas. Unfortunately, there are also predatory publishers that accept articles without

true peer review and charge exorbitant fees to authors without providing rigorous editorial services. Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado–Denver, maintained a list of predatory publishers until January 2017. (It can still be viewed at [bealllist.weebly.com](http://bealllist.weebly.com).) While it is not being updated and there is some controversy about inclusion in the list, it can be used to spark a conversation with a client who is overly trusting of unfamiliar journals.

The National Institutes of Health recently called on its stakeholders to help authors evaluate publishers and recommended Think. Check. Submit. ([thinkchecksubmit.org](http://thinkchecksubmit.org)), a coalition of publishers, editors, and librarians ([nlmdirector.nlm.nih.gov/2017/11/07/calling-on-librarians-to-help-ensure-the-credibility-of-published-research-results](http://nlmdirector.nlm.nih.gov/2017/11/07/calling-on-librarians-to-help-ensure-the-credibility-of-published-research-results)). Retraction Watch ([retractionwatch.com](http://retractionwatch.com)) is another tool for raising awareness of mistakes (or worse) in the scientific literature that are significant enough to warrant retraction of the article. It is well worth monitoring if your users are in STM fields.

Another challenge for us info pros that Marydee Ojala pointed out at the 2017 Internet Librarian conference is that we tend to be very familiar with evaluating print sources, but the web (and especially social media) is a much more visual and auditory experience. We come with a built-in skepticism to non-print sources, particularly ones that don't have rigorous editorial standards and fact-checking processes in place. As a result, we may not recognize the trust many of our clients have in a visually compelling but misleading image or video clip. To make matters worse, a particularly alarming digital manipulation technology developed by Adobe is described as "Photoshop for audio." The RadioLab podcast Breaking News ([radiolab.org/story/breaking-news](http://radiolab.org/story/breaking-news)) has more details. [*Also see Carly Lamphere's Internet Express column on page 27.*—Ed.]

One way we can teach skepticism of multimedia is by collecting examples of misleading or fraudulent news. Reverse-image searching, in which we look for other instances of an image, is a quick and simple step to judge the legitimacy of, say, a photo of a shark allegedly swimming down the streets of a hurricane-flooded street in Houston. Try creating an infographic of the most- and least- reliable resources in your clients' fields.

Watch for opportunities to create FUD in the minds of your clients so they might think twice before falling for unreliable news, click-bait content, or downright fraud.

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