**Kerchner, M. D. (2006). A dynamic methodology for improving the search experience. *Information Technology and Libraries,* 25(2), 78-88.**

Keywords: Information retrieval, precision, recall, tags, website retrieval

Precision and recall have long been used as the measures for information retrieval. In recent years, however, evaluation models have been expanded to include the value of the information to the user. How well the system actually helps the user is often more important than precision and recall. If the answers are retrieved, but the user cannot

recognize them as the answers to their query; then the search has failed.

One solution that is often used to improve precision or recall is adding tags to objects based on a controlled vocabulary. A considerable amount of time and effort is involved in establishing and maintaining the tags, which often leads to a lot of inconsistency in this method. Additionally, it limits the description of the data to one view.

IRS.gov is one example of a government agency that has considered the user in improving the information retrieval process necessary to find information on their web site. IRS.gov is one of the most widely accessed government Web sites. In April 2005 alone, it received almost 16 million queries. The information seeking behaviors of users were analyzed to make the site as user friendly as possible. The assumption used was that rather than expect users to adapt to the peculiarities of a web site, the web site must adapt to the needs of the user. Users are not generally interested in becoming search experts nor intimately involved with the search process. Forcing users to refine their query to obtain better search results is not desirable in a public web site. The actual searching mechanism should be hidden behind a search box. The site must be changed instead. For example, terms were added to document titles that were commonly used by users to locate those documents but were not previously contained in the title. Inconsistencies in the use of terms were noted and corrected.

The methodology described in this paper assumes that users, especially infrequent users of public web sites, do not wish to become search experts; that intuitive interfaces and meaningful results displays contribute to a successful user experience; and that keeping business owners involved is important.