"Wikipedia Celebrates 750 Years of
American Independence":
The Transportation Librarian and Information Literacy

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The American Association of State Highway
and Transportation Officials

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Information Literacy

- Technological expertise and information literacy don't automatically blend together.

- An unprecedented number of transportation professionals are highly techno-savvy. They need training, however, on how to adequately vet the research they find on the Internet.

- Online resources place tremendous amounts of information within easy reach of the transportation workforce. To make the most of these services, however, we must invest not only in the availability and accessibility of that type of information but also the guidance to ensure that it's accurate and complete.

The Challenges

- Younger employees, as well as those who will someday join the workforce, have grown up constantly tethered to technology. They are entirely comfortable with the Internet, perhaps too much in some cases (e.g., uncritically cutting and pasting information for various websites into their term papers).

- Our respective organizations therefore face a greater-than-before challenge when it comes to securing information that is unbiased, complete, up-to-date, and reliable.

- We live in an information-rich world, but there are dangers in accepting facts and figures at face value and as entirely valid.
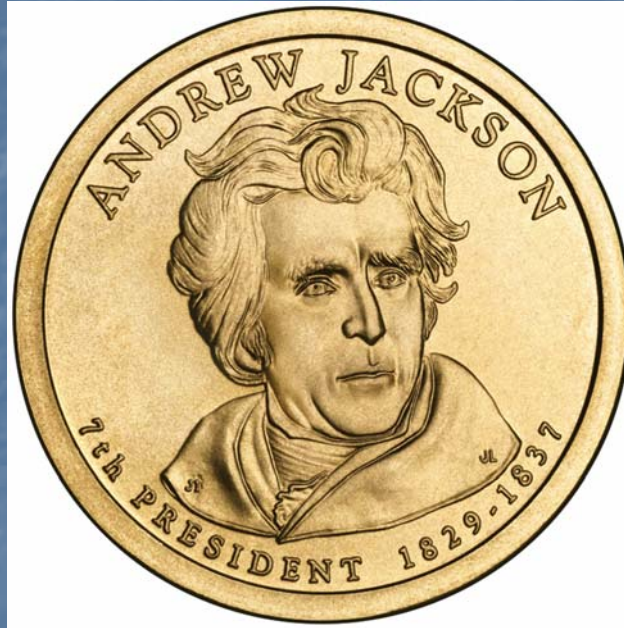
"One man with courage makes a majority."
Andrew Jackson
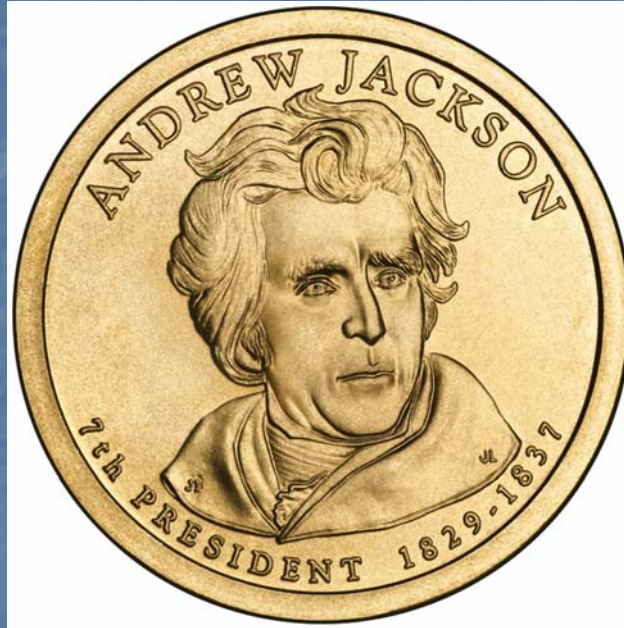
The biggest problem with these words of wisdom is that . . .

He never said or wrote them!

A classic example of historical error; a 19th century biography of Jackson contained the phrase "Desperate Courage Makes One a Majority" on the title page of each volume.

http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/210485

Information Literacy

- Taking and using any piece of easily accessible information without first appraising its quality can lead to wrong answers and faulty assumptions.

- It's vital that we verify the origin, credibility, and age of information found online and elsewhere. Those of us in the transportation library community have a pivotal role in helping our colleagues accomplish all of that.

Questions

- How can we help encourage and foster information literacy within our organizations?
- What constitutes good retrieval?
- What are the best online starting points (basic terminology, names, feel for a subject)?
- Where can one go for the most in-depth, authoritative sources?
- How can we help our colleagues to become even better finders and users of digitized information?
- What are the tactical solutions for nurturing an information-literate workforce?
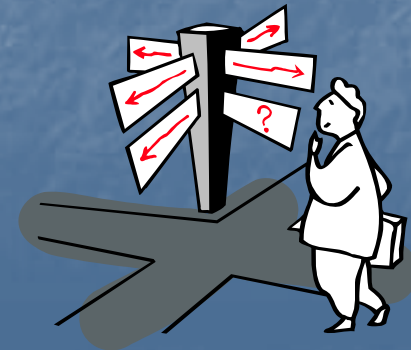
How to Get the Job Done

- Explore all possible avenues.
- Identify stakeholders, cultivate their support, and get their buy-in.
- Initiate, or plug into, events during which you can spread the word (brown-bag lunch presentations, new employees orientation).
- Share via e-mail or other means of interoffice communications helpful hints or "best practices."
- Establish a long-term information literacy program for your colleagues that will underscore how all of this is more than just some "project of the month."

What Non-Transportation Organizations are Doing

- SWISS RE – Sandra Gisin, who oversees knowledge management at this reinsurance company, commends younger employees for their high-tech savvy and skills. On the other hand, she has also noted negative experiences when those employees routinely use information from the top link of a Google search result. The company has therefore begun training to teach workers how to more carefully analyze online information.

- DOW JONES – In response to similar concerns, this business news organization has initiated in-house training programs for its journalists emphasizing how they shouldn't rely on Web sources without first checking their origins and verifying their reliability in other ways.

Information Literacy is . . .

- The cornerstone of an organization's knowledge management.
- Crucial to the long-range strength and survival of an organization.
- A lifelong professional development need.
- As critical a business skill as project management or interpersonal communication.
- Essential in today's world, not just because of existing and emerging technologies and demographic trends but also in light of what's happening both online and offline globally.

September 11, 2001

"In the days and weeks after the attacks, people yearned for authoritative, reliable information about a wide variety of topics: terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, biological attacks, coping with grief, donating to victims' families, etc. Libraries played an important role in meeting this sudden demand for information on so many diverse subjects."
Judy Matthews and Richard Wiggins
"Libraries, the Internet and September 11"
http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_12/matthews/index.html

Questions? Comments?

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