

**résumé.html: A Survey of New Genre Systems
for an Old Genre**

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Over the past decade, many genres well-established in print media have migrated onto the Web. However, these genre migrations have not always been successful. For instance, the new term *brochure-ware* has emerged in response to the all-too-common practice of dumping onto the Web print documentation that serves little purpose there or attracts little audience. This legacy of weak genre performance raises the questions of why some hitherto successful genres, once transplanted to the Web, are no longer able to successfully accomplish their purpose. And, more optimistically, what would it take for a print genre to effectively achieve its purpose on the Web?

A growing body of literature has documented how new technology and media help shape genres and motivate genre change (e.g., Crowston & Williams, 2000; Myers, 2000; Spinuzzi, 2003; Yates, 1989; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, 2002; Yates, Orlikowski, & Okamura, 1999).¹ Many of these studies point to such factors as a new technology's affordances or medium's functionality, factors presumably overcoming the inertia that would lead to genre dumping. However, in many of these studies, the main dependent variable examined is the genre's new media form, especially in comparison with its print form, whereas genre purpose is assumed to be invariable (cf. Spinuzzi, 2003; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, 2002). As well, most of these studies were not designed to consider directly a genre's efficacy in achieving its purpose in its new medium (cf. Spinuzzi, 2003).

In this paper, I present the case that a genre's success or failure at achieving its purpose in a new medium like the Web is due not just to that medium's functionality or to changes in genre

¹ The most voluminous exploration of relationship between changing genres and their media has emerged from the Digital Documents track of the annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. For instance, see Bellamy, Boguraev, & Kennedy, 1999; Erickson, 1997, 1999, 2000; Eriksen & Ihlstrom, 2000; Herring, et al., 2004; Ihlstrom & Akesson, 2004; Shepherd & Watters, 1998, 1999; Yates, Orlikowski, & Rennecker, 1997; Yates & Sumner, 1997; Yoshioka, Yates, & Orlikowski, 2002.

form that take advantage of that functionality. Rather, I demonstrate that a genre's performance may be due in part to how it maintains its place in an existing and viable genre system or finds a place in a new viable genre system.

Genre Systems

What are genre systems? The notion of genre systems was introduced by Charles Bazerman, who characterized such systems as “interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings” (1994, p. 97). As an example, Bazerman offered the new employment system of genres (p. 98), which is one of the systems underlying this paper: job ads beget letters of application and résumés, which beget phone requests for interviews or rejection letters, and so on. Another example is the conference system of genres, which includes a sequence from the call for papers genre to the proposal genre to the acceptance or rejection notification genre and so forth, a system that, as Yoshioka and Herman (2000) illustrate, coordinates information and activities among diverse groups of people. As these examples suggest, one advantage of expanding our view of a genre to encompass its system of surrounding genres is that such a broader view takes in the broader range of communicators whose participation is necessary for larger-scale cooperative action (Bazerman, pp. 98-99; see also Yates & Orlikowski, 2002), such as hiring employees or holding a conference. A genre's efficacy is thereby contingent not just on its own attributes—not just how strong or weak the résumé itself is—but also on the enactment of the preceding genres in its genre system; as Bazerman writes, “Only a limited range of genres may appropriately follow upon another in particular settings, because the *success conditions* of the actions of each require various states of affairs to exist” (p. 98; emphasis mine).

Orlikowski and Yates have elaborated on Bazerman's initial notion of genre systems to

propose that a genre's change of medium could push that genre beyond the bounds of its system, thereby inducing a change of genre system or possibly even the emergence of a new genre system (1994, pp. 27-28; see also Crowston & Williams, 2000, p. 203), or simply leaving an orphaned genre unable to participate in any system and thus unable to accomplish its purpose.

Résumé Genre Systems

What about the résumé's genre system? In the case of the résumé's change of medium from print to the Web—in particular on self-published Web sites—the Web résumé would seem orphaned from any of the components of the print résumé's traditional genre system. In particular, self-published Web résumés seem largely disconnected from job ads, which is the main genre preceding the résumé in the system, and disconnected from employers, the main audience of the genre, being neither submitted to them in print nor submitted electronically to their databases. This apparent disengagement from the system that has made print résumés a viable genre may well handicap it on the Web, a disadvantage that some professional communication textbooks have pointed out to students (Anderson, 2003, p. 38; Oliu, Brusaw, & Alred, 2004, p. 604).

The self-published Web résumé would thus appear to be an example of the worst excesses of Web publishing: a print genre dumped onto the Web with little apparent consideration of the conditions that made its print antecedent viable in the first place. The genre's emergence on the Web thus raises the central questions that this paper addresses:

- What purposes, if any, is the self-published Web résumé achieving on the Web?
- How well is it achieving these purposes?
- Through what genre systems is it achieving these purposes?

METHOD

To address these questions, I conducted a survey of people who had self-published their Web résumé. Selecting a sample of self-published Web résumé authors that is random or representative is not, in practice, feasible for a number of reasons (e.g., see Introna & Nissenbaum, 2000; Roussinov et al., 2001; Weare & Lin, 2000, p.278). For instance, search engines need links to find obscure personal sites and few other sites link to self-published Web résumés.

To collect most of my sample of Web résumés, I used the AltaVista search engine, which, unlike its much better known rivals like Google, does not apply a ranking formula that prioritizes so exclusively the most popular sites. As well, AltaVista enables some country-specific searches, a feature which enabled me to avert the inevitable preponderance of Americans in many Web population samples. To expand my sample further still beyond the more prominent sites that tend to get indexed by search engines, I also conducted searches within the more proletarian population of sites posted for free by Geocities and Tripod. The results I'm reporting here are based on exactly 100 completed surveys.

RESULTS

Web Résumé Purposes

Survey results reveal that, for many Web résumé authors, the self-published résumé serves purposes well beyond those traditionally assumed for the print version of the genre. Only slightly more than half the respondents (56%) indicated that they had ever used their Web résumé for the résumé's traditional purpose, to seek new employment with an employer (see table 1).

More than three quarters of the respondents (78%) selected more than one purpose from the list of nine specified purposes. Apart from the résumé's traditional purpose, close to half the respondents had used their Web résumé for each of two other employment-related purposes: to seek clients for their self-employment (45%), or to enhance their profile among colleagues within their field of employment (42%). Both of these purposes suggest that, unlike the print résumé, whose use has tended to fade once the new employment genre system has moved on to later genres like the employment contract, the Web résumé has found uses among those already well-established in their employment.

Table 1
Reasons for Posting a Web Résumé

Reason	n
To seek new employment with an employer	56
To inform people who have no potential connection with my employment about who I am	46
To seek new clients for my self-employment	45
To enhance my profile among colleagues within my profession or my field of employment	42
To inform visitors to the rest of my Web site about who made this site	32
To make myself part of the new medium of the World Wide Web	29
To showcase my Web design skills	23
To practice how to make a Web page	21
To enhance my current employment	15
Other	28

Web Résumé Usefulness

In response to a question about the overall usefulness of their Web résumé, respondents rated their résumé's usefulness, on a scale from 0 (not at all useful) to 4 (very useful), at an average level of 2.56, which is above the midpoint (2) on the scale. A closer analysis of these usefulness ratings in correlation with the résumés' purposes could offer some indication of the efficacy of different purposes. However, since respondents selected an average of over three purposes each, purpose-to-purpose between-group comparisons are not feasible. Nevertheless, comparisons between the selection and the non-selection of any single purpose can at least partly indicate that purpose's contribution to the Web résumé's efficacy.

Whereas those who had used their Web résumé for its traditional purpose of seeking new employment with an employer rated the usefulness of their résumé at slightly higher levels (2.73 out of a maximum 4) than did those who had not used their résumé for this purpose, the difference between these averaged efficacy levels was not significant ($t=1.55$; see table 2). Similarly, no significant difference in the averaged efficacy ratings was found for those using their résumé for most other purposes.

Table 2
Web Résumé Usefulness

Web Résumé Reason	Web Résumé Reason Selected			Web Résumé Reason Not Selected			t
	n	M	SD	100-n	M	SD	
To seek new employment with an employer	56	2.73	1.06	44	2.34	1.43	1.55
To inform people who have no potential connection with my employment about who I am	46	2.61	1.19	54	2.52	1.3	0.36
To seek new clients for my self-employment	45	2.98	1.13	55	2.22	1.25	3.14**
To enhance my profile among colleagues within my profession or my field of employment	42	2.6	1.31	58	2.53	1.21	0.24
To inform visitors to the rest of my Web site about who made this site	32	2.5	1.15	68	2.59	1.3	-0.33
To make myself part of the new medium of the World Wide Web	29	2.72	1.11	71	2.49	1.3	0.83
To showcase my Web design skills	23	3.13	0.74	77	2.39	1.32	2.55*
To practice how to make a Web page	21	2.29	1.12	79	2.63	1.27	-1.13
To enhance my current employment	15	2.73	0.93	85	2.53	1.3	0.58

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

I'll be focusing the rest of this paper on the most notable exception: the high usefulness rating from the 45 respondents who had used their Web résumé to seek new clients for their self-employment. They assessed their résumé's usefulness at an average of 2.98 out of 4, significantly higher than did those who were had not used their résumé for this purpose ($t = 3.14$, $p < 0.01$). This self-employed client-seeking group overlapped considerably with the traditional employer-seeking group (32 of them, over 71%, had also been traditional employer-seekers), and hence these two overlapping groups do not offer much of a basis for between-group comparison.

However, even among the 56 traditional job-seekers, those who are also self-employed find their Web résumé significantly more useful than do those who are not also self-employed (self-employed $n=32$, $M=3.09$, $SD=0.91$ vs. non-self-employed $n=24$, $M=2.25$, $SD=1.05$; $t=3.15$, $p<0.01$).

Whereas the self-employed, for all we know, may have commonly been using *print* résumés for the purpose of seeking new clients even prior to the development of the Web, such a usage has received little attention in research and publishing about the résumé. Yet, in my admittedly unrepresentative sample, their number almost matches the number of “traditionalists.” Hence, this surprisingly effective but overlooked or perhaps unprecedented usage of the résumé among the self-employed, together with its genre systems, deserves further exploration..

Web Résumé Genre Systems

So what of the Web résumé’s genre systems? In the apparent absence of the résumé’s traditional genre system on the Web and without any foreknowledge of what new genre systems might take its place, my survey could not be designed to probe potential new genre systems in depth.

However, two sets of survey questions were oriented to discovering the kinds of activities that precede and proceed from the Web résumé; these thereby offer considerable indirect evidence of potential new genre systems.

Web Site Publicity

The first of these questions asked about the measures respondents had taken to publicized their Web site, which would indirectly indicate which kinds of genres might precede the Web résumé in a genre system. Comparisons between the proportion of self-employed and non-self-employed taking each of the six measures showed no significant differences (at the $p < 0.05$ level) between the two groups, with one notable exception: adding their Web address to a business card, business letterhead, advertizing material, or other print documents (see figure 1). This method

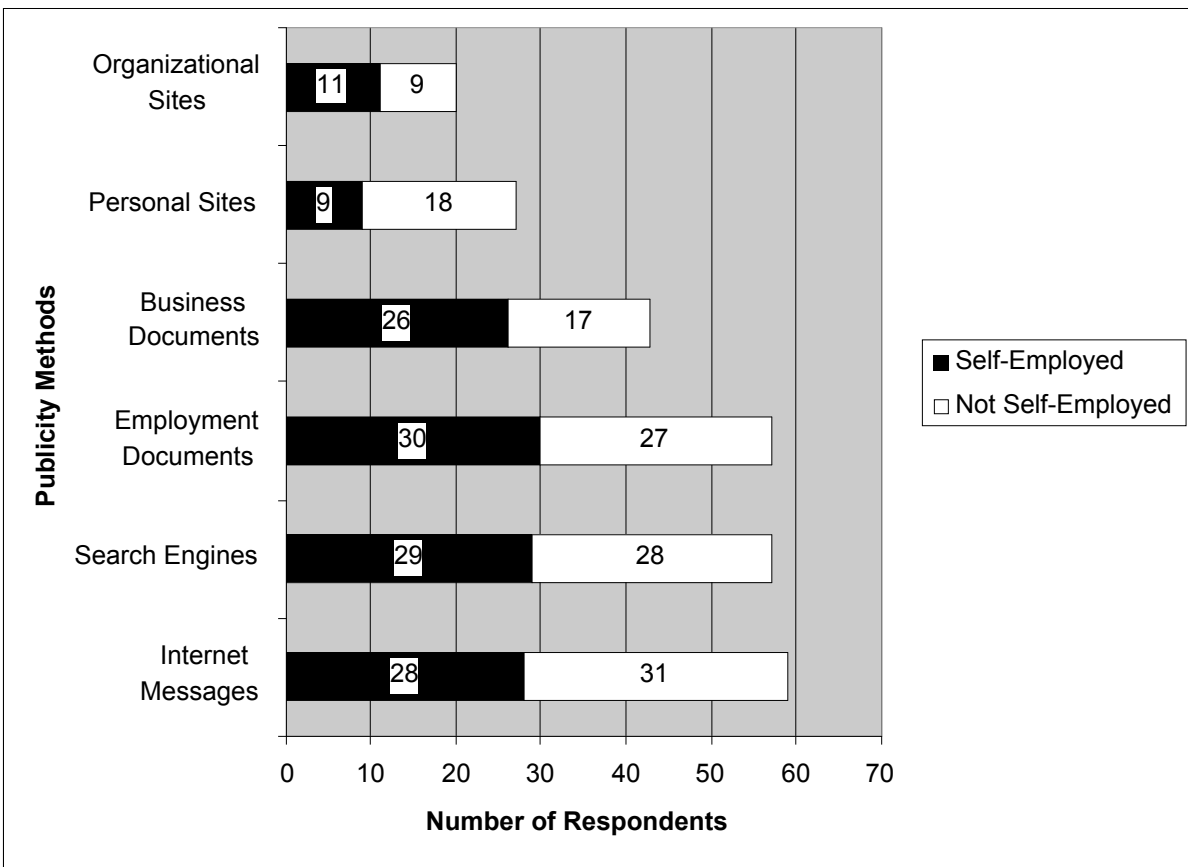


Figure 0. Number of respondents using various publicity methods

was among the more popular with the self-employed and the one that a significantly greater proportion of them used compared with those not self-employed (58% self-employed vs. 31% non-self-employed; $t = 2.78$, $p < 0.01$). Given that the self-employed, unlike the non-self-employed,

would be more likely to already be using these business-related forms and genres in their ongoing communication with potential and actual clients, these resources are readily available for their enhanced use as Web site publicity methods and as surrogate Web résumé genre systems.

Explanations volunteered by some of the self-employed illustrate how the Web résumé could fit into a genre system different from the traditional résumé genre system. For instance, a couple of the self-employed respondents associated their Web résumé with their business card. One wrote: “One rarely carries around a stack of resumé[s] [when they are] out and about, but a business card with a web address can now accomplish essentially the same thing.” Another wrote how his Web résumé offered him “an easy way to ‘hand’ someone my resume -- merely by putting a URL on a business card.” Both of these respondents suggest the business card - Web résumé genre system can overcome some shortcomings associated with print résumés, shortcomings arising from the physical burden of carrying around print résumés and the social heavy-handedness of pushing a print résumé at someone.

In these and other cases, the genre systems involve print documentation like business cards and advertizements, genre systems whose long endurance in business environments would suggest a legacy of success. This observation, together with the greater Web résumé efficacy reported by the self-employed, suggests that one factor contributing to the Web résumé’s efficacy may be its place in these alternative but viable genre systems.

Web Site Reception

To understand who, other than Web résumé authors themselves, might become involved in self-published Web genre systems, let’s now consider a second set of questions about who communicates with these Web authors as a consequence of having seen their Web site. In response, the self-employed overall reported receiving communication from a greater number of people than did the non-self-employed. As can be seen in figure 2, the sites of the self-employed, in comparison with those of the non-self-employed, were proportionately more likely to have generated high numbers of contacts; they lead in each of the three highest-level contact intervals

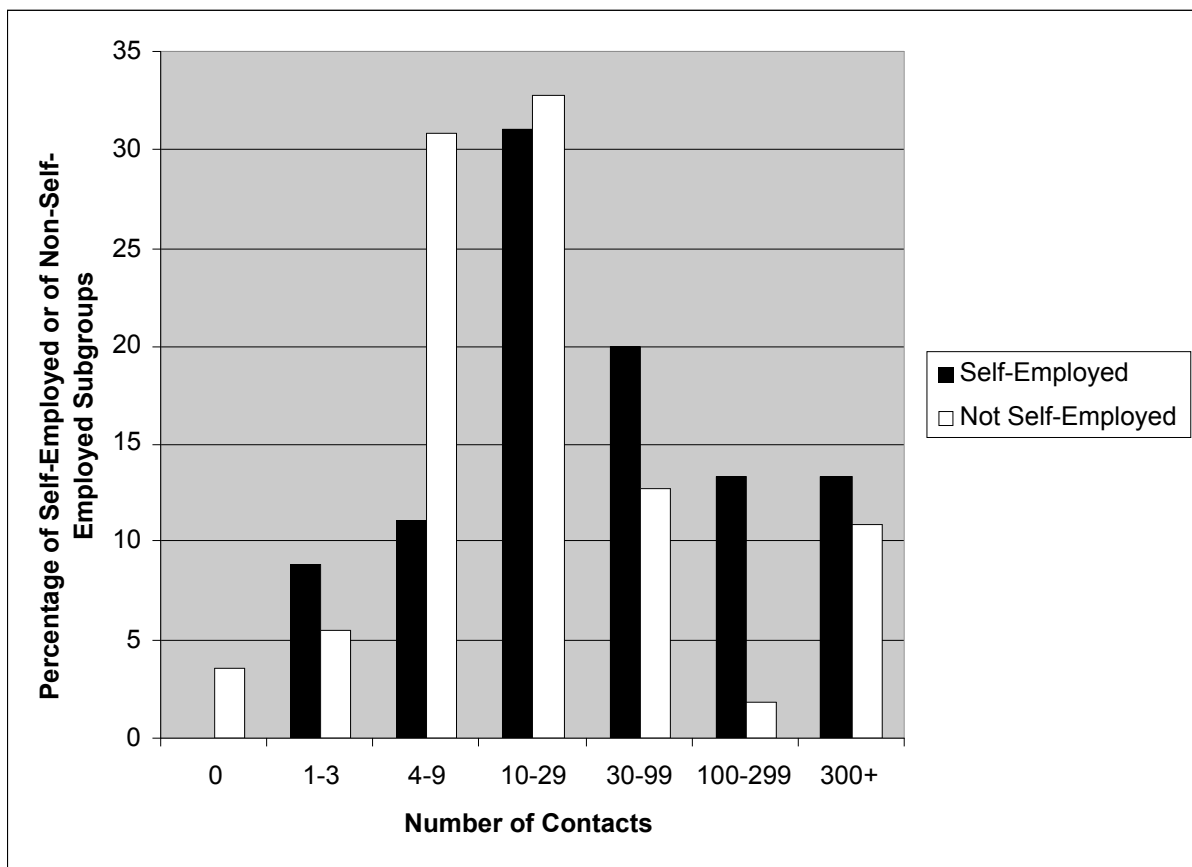


Figure 0. Distribution of contacts received by self-employed and non-self-employed subgroups.

Note: Two “I don’t know” responses, one from each subgroup, are not shown in graph.

(30-99, 100-299, 300+). For easy comparison, the seven contact intervals were grouped into two clusters: a high-contact cluster combining the four double-digit and triple-digit contact intervals

(10-300+) and a low-contact cluster combining the three single-digit contact intervals (0-9). The sites of the self-employed are found to be significantly more likely than those of the non-self-employed to fall within the high-contact cluster (80% vs. 59% respectively, $t(96)=2.18$, $p<0.05$).

A follow-up question asked respondents to categorize and enumerate their contacts according to how they were acquainted prior to the communication:

- Personal
- Workplace and professional
- Employment-seeking
- Internet
- Strangers

Again, the self-employed dominated most of the higher-level contact intervals. For each of the three highest contact intervals (10-29, 30-99, 100+), the self-employed were proportionately more numerous than the non-self-employed across almost all acquaintance types (see figure 3).

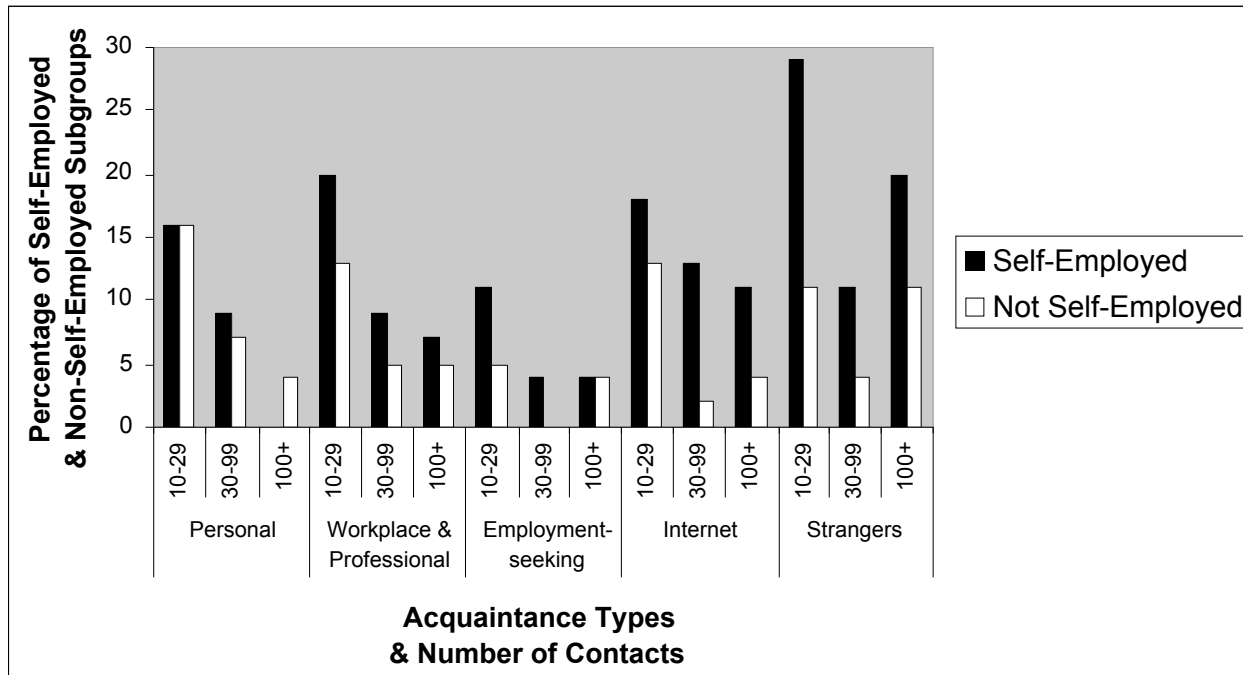


Figure 0. Distribution of contacts received by self-employed and non-self-employed subgroups according to nature of previous acquaintance.

Note: Only higher contact levels (10 or more) are shown.

In particular, the sites of the self-employed seem to draw more contact from a wider network of more distant acquaintances (whether through work or employment-seeking activities or the Internet) and even complete strangers. Put another way, a greater number of distant acquaintances and strangers sensed that the Web site or Web résumé of the self-employed is part of a genre system that invited their own contact in the form of a follow-up contact genre.

Grouping the intervals into two clusters similar to those used for the previous survey question (0-9, 10-100+), the sites of the self-employed are found to be significantly more likely than those of the non-self-employed to fall within the high-contact cluster for Internet acquaintances ($p < 0.05$) and especially for complete strangers ($p < 0.001$; see table 3). Revealingly, among all five acquaintance types, contact from these two types in particular would more likely need to have arisen from alternative genre systems, as résumés have not had a tradition or even a means

of distributing themselves among, or generating contact from, these two populations. Overall, these contact results suggest that the Web sites of the self-employed invite communication from populations whose greater diversity and distance would imply a greater diversity of genre systems.

Table 3
High-Contact Clusters for Five Acquaintance Types

Acquaintance Type	Self-Employed		Not Self-Employed		t
	n	%	n	%	
Personal	40	28	50	30	-0.26
Workplace and professional	40	40	48	27	1.28
Employment-seeking	36	25	44	11	1.6
Internet	40	48	44	23	2.44*
Strangers	43	63	49	29	3.47***

Note: "I don't know" and blank answers were omitted from these tabulations.

* $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$.

DISCUSSION

In sum, whereas a number of factors may contribute to the higher efficacy levels among the self-employed—for instance, I haven't had time to deliver a content analysis of the Web résumés or Web sites—a genre's success conditions do include the viability of its genre system. And, as I discussed earlier, a genre's migration to a new medium can induce a change in or dissolution of its genre system. Self-published Web résumés are largely estranged from the résumé's traditional genre system. However, many of those using their Web résumé to seek clients for their self-

employment seem to have tapped into different genre systems using genres such as business cards and advertisements. Such genres have a long tradition of successfully directing attention to business people and their products and services and do not necessarily imply a change of action when directing attention instead to Web sites. These Web sites, in turn, elicit contact from a broader population of acquaintances and even strangers. Hence, the Web résumé's insertion into these ongoing, viable genre systems may have contributed to its significantly higher usefulness level among the self-employed.

Generalizing from these findings, one predictor of a genre's success in its migration to the Web may be the viability of its genre system in the new medium. Genres that are likely to be estranged from their genre system may thereby be more likely candidates for failure, whereas genres that are likely to situate themselves within an existing or new viable genre system may thereby be more likely candidates for success.

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