Representing Professional Identities with Self-Published Web Resumes . . . and Plenty of Digitalizable Cultural Capital

Text of a paper presented on March 23, 2007, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New York city

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Despite increasing equity in Internet access, evidence is emerging that different genres available for representing identities on the Web--personal homepages, various subgenres of blogs, Web resumes--tend to attract authorship from different demographic subpopulations. For instance, the resume, in its print form, is widely used by most occupational groups to represent professional identities and accomplishments, and if there were no digital divide, we would expect that a similarly diverse population would self-publish their résumés on the Web. Yet my analysis of a diverse sample of one hundred people who self-published their Web résumé found that most originated from just a few occupational clusters. My presentation thus aims to answer the question, Who self-publishes their Web resume, and why?

In a few minutes, I'll describe my survey of these Web résumé authors and the results of my analysis of their résumés. First, to explain this digital divide among Web résumé publishers, I draw on the theoretical perspectives of social and linguistic theorist Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu on Symbolic Profit and Cultural Capital

In Bourdieu's economic reasoning, the discourse we produce is assessed not so much for its meaning but as "signs of wealth" in discursive markets (1991, p. 66). We, in turn, orient our discursive investments to the opportunities available in various markets, investing where we anticipate we might gain symbolic profit, and otherwise refraining from investing (1977). *Symbolic profit* can be produced through investments of various forms of capital:

- *economic capital*, or our financial wealth;
- *social capital*, or our social network from which we can draw obligations; and
- *cultural capital*, or our accumulated store of knowledge and skills, our body's training and deportment, our physical possessions and less-physical cultural acquisitions such as academic degrees (1986).

For Bourdieu, our portfolio of these various forms of capital determines which markets we can invest in profitably (1991). So which form(s) of capital can be invested profitably in the Web market? Though our social capital can be usefully tapped within social networking sites, much of our social and economic capital becomes indiscernible on the broader Web because it cannot be displayed readily within the Web interface. But cultural capital can be displayed readily. Our knowledge and skills can be represented digitally through the literacy to write and to design a Web site and the computer skills to publish it. Our body and our physical possessions can be represented digitally through photographs, audio files, and video clips. Less-physical cultural acquisitions such as academic degrees can be represented through official terminology (e.g., *Ph.D.*), quantitative measures (e.g., grades), and publicly-recognized symbols (e.g., graduation

regalia), and such capital can be represented readily on the Web through words, numbers, and pictures. I refer to all such cultural capital as *digitalizable* cultural capital.

If, as Bourdieu maintains, we invest discursively in those markets in which we anticipate that our discourse will gain us symbolic profit, then those who have such *digitalizable* cultural capital and who can display it appealingly in the Web interface may be more likely to invest in the Web market—that is, to publish a Web site publicizing their cultural capital.

Web Résumés in the Web Market

One way we can profit from such cultural capital is by offering it in exchange for employment and thereby a paycheck—economic capital. And one of the main genres in which we summarize such cultural capital as our knowledge and skills and our educational degrees is the print résumé. Given the competitive employment market, we might expect that many people producing a print résumé would fast produce a Web résumé too. But self-publishing a Web résumé entails an additional investment of time and labor and hence would be pursued primarily by those who feel they might profit somehow from such an additional investment.

As I'll show in a few minutes, those in my study who rated their Web résumés to be most useful—most profitable--tended to come from a cluster of occupations whose work involves producing cultural capital that can be readily and appealingly displayed in the Web's digital interface, through such forms as text, graphics, sound clips, video clips, and computer scripts—that is, their work involves producing *digitalizable cultural capital*.

Methods

First, I'll describe how I sampled and surveyed people who had self-published their Web résumé, and then analyzed their Web résumés.

Collecting a random or representative sample of self-published Web résumés is not feasible because many such résumés remain hidden from search engines, so I aimed instead to collect a nonprobability sample of Web résumés that is diverse. I used the AltaVista search engine, which, unlike more popular search engines such as Google, does not use a ranking formula that gives precedence to just the most popular sites. Additionally, AltaVista enables some country-specific searches, a feature which enabled me to avoid a sample dominated by Americans. To expand my sample further still, I also conducted searches within the more proletarian population of sites posted for free by Geocities and Tripod. The resulting sample is, of course, not representative of the elusive Web résumé population, but its diversity can unearth issues that merit further exploration.

I received exactly 100 survey responses, and then I downloaded respondents' Web sites to provide a stable corpus for further analysis.

Results

Participants' Occupations

To determine the occupations of those who self-publish Web résumés, three coders independently analyzed the résumés . In cases in which the three coders' classifications diverged, the occupational category was determined by the majority classification. Our classification scheme was adapted from the Standard Occupational

Classification (SOC) system devised by the U.S. Department of Labor. The SOC consists of a hierarchy of occupation types in which the top level comprises 23 major occupational categories (see Appendix A). Roughly half of these 23 occupational categories could be informally characterized as white collar, and the other half blue collar.

Two of the 23 major occupational categories accommodated two-thirds (n = 66) of the sample (See Appendix B):

- computer and mathematical occupations (39, all of whom worked in computer-related occupations, not mathematics)
- arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations (27, roughly half of whom worked in such computer-intensive occupations as graphic design or Web design).

Three additional categories accommodated most of the rest of the résumés:

- management occupations (9)
- architecture and engineering occupations (9, almost all engineers)
- education, training, and library occupations (5, mostly professors).

Some white-collar professionals who usually have access to computers in their workplaces and who are generally perceived to command considerable cultural and economic capital, such as professionals in the legal and healthcare fields, were nevertheless almost absent from the sample. More remarkably, blue-collar workers, who comprise about half of the SOC's 23 categories, were almost entirely absent from the sample. No participant's primary occupation was deemed to be among the blue-collar occupations, though a couple of participants did blue-collar work in addition to their

primary occupation.

As I explained, the sampling method was not designed to gather a representative sample of the world's self-published Web résumés, so the precise occupational distribution of the sample should not be generalized to the Web as a whole. However, it seems unlikely that the resources used in sampling—primarily AltaVista, and secondarily Geocities and Tripod—would selectively favor the résumés of two occupational groups amongst the endless kinds of Web pages they search or host.

Digitalizable Cultural Capital

An initial glance at the sample's two dominant occupational groups might suggest that skills with computers are the sole determining factor accounting for who does, or does not, post their résumés to the Web. For instance, the sample's most populated occupational category, computer and mathematical occupations, was made up almost exclusively of software programmers, systems administrators, and other computer-intensive workers. Similarly, the sample's second-most populated occupational category, arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations, included many computer-intensive workers such as graphic designers and Web designers.

However, this second-most populated occupational category included not only computer-intensive workers, but also twelve participants in occupations that have not traditionally been perceived as computer-intensive: Three actors, two writers, two painters, and others in the performing arts and fine arts. An additional three participants in this occupational category balanced computer-intensive design work such as Web design with less computer-intensive artistic work such as printmaking and music. Thus,

of the 27 participants in this occupational category, more than half (15) worked wholly or partly in occupations not traditionally regarded as computer intensive.

To help determine the efficacy of the Web résumés, one survey question asked respondents to rate the overall usefulness of their Web résumé, on a scale from 0 (not at all useful) to 4 (very useful). The average rating of the sample overall was 2.56. But even though the collective computer involvement of the arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media group was diluted by the substantial presence of less computer-intensive artistic and cultural workers, participants in this occupational category reported that their Web résumés were significantly more useful to them than participants in the computer and mathematical occupations category did (2.96 vs. 2.31, respectively; $t = 2.00$; $p = 0.034$).

This curiously strong showing among an occupational group that has only a mixed involvement with computer use, together with the absence of certain white-collar occupations involving regular computer use, suggests that factors other than computer skills may play a significant role in determining who self-publishes Web résumés. One characteristic shared among those in the occupational category arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations, whether the computer-intensive graphic and Web designers or the less computer-intensive artistic and cultural workers, is that they have cultural capital that is readily and appealingly displayable on the Web. For the computer-intensive graphic and Web designers, such digitalizable cultural capital includes images of their design work as well as the design of their own Web sites. Figure 1 shows the elegantly designed homepage of graphic artist and designer Athena Cooper, which introduces her portfolio and features a thumbnail screen capture of one of her recent Web design projects. Her site includes more than three dozen images of her work

across such diverse areas as Web and graphic design, computer modeling and texturing, and drawing and painting, as well as more than a dozen video clips showcasing her animation and video editing work.

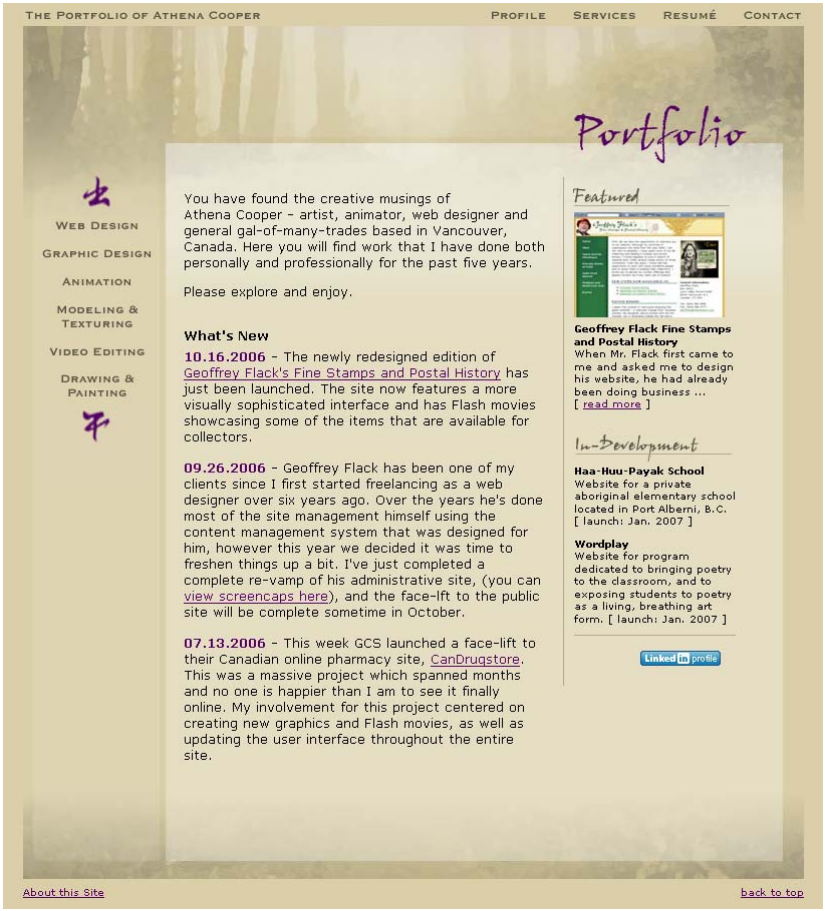

Figure 1: The homepage of graphic artist and designer Athena Cooper, at athena.adwin.ca, introduces her portfolio and features a thumbnail screen capture of a recent Web design project.

For the less computer-intensive artistic and cultural workers, their digitalizable cultural capital could include video clips of their acting, photographs of their art works, excerpts of their writing, and so forth. For instance, the sample includes three actors. One actor includes links from his résumé to a page of photographs of himself in one of the movie productions in which he was a lead, as well as to film sites for three other movies in

which he was a lead. In addition, his site homepage links to pages devoted to pictures of him from various productions, for a total of 41 photographs of his acting work across his site. In response to a survey question, this actor explained how he understands visitors to be viewing his site: “Basically, someone will either stumble onto or be directed via search engine to my web site. When they want to look more closely at my qualifications, my resume provides that. It appears that about 25% of all folks who have visited my web site look at my resume. About 50% look at my headshots and character shots on my pictures page... About 20% read my News page, which is updated weekly.” In another survey response, he explained that posting what I’m calling digitalizable cultural capital is now standard for actors: “I see [my Web résumé] as an absolute necessity in our changing world. Things happen too fast for the mail…. Many of the casting agencies are now using that medium exclusively.”

In contrast, many white-collar workers whose occupations involve regular computer use and who are perceived to be endowed with considerable cultural capital in employment markets outside of the Web tend not to have the kind of cultural capital that is readily and appealingly displayable on the Web. We might wonder, for instance, what material doctors or lawyers or accountants would post on their Web sites to accompany a résumé.

Further evidence of the importance of digitalizable cultural capital comes from quantitative measures of the size of the Web sites encompassing these résumés—including not only HTML files but also files in various graphic and media formats, computer scripts, and so forth. The vast majority of the résumé sites had total file counts in the double or triple digits (See Appendix C). The median site size was 99 files. Such

numbers suggest that, unlike the print résumé, which is accompanied conventionally by only a cover letter, the Web résumé is accompanied by a great number of genres, all necessarily digitalized.

When asked to distinguish between their print and Web résumés, many respondents mentioned genres that accompany or link from their Web résumés, such as the text of their publications, screen shots of their Web design work, thumbnail images and photographs of their other visual work, sound clips of their music, downloads of their computer scripts—that is, their digitalized cultural capital. For instance, one explained that her Web résumé includes "photos, sound clips, links to other sites (thumbnails), overall design and colour that a paper copy doesn't have, and generally more detail on each subject[.] EVERYTHING is included and organized whereas when I hand out a one or two page resume to an employer I cull it to reflect what I think that employer is looking for rather than give them the whole thing and let them wade through it. I use the online resume to grab the content for other more specific resumes that I may hand out." Some also suggested that it was the impracticality of showing such digitalizable cultural capital with a print résumé that lead them to create a Web site. For instance, one respondent, an aspiring photographer, pointed out, "[T]he web gives me the opportunity to put out my portfolio, which I would not be able to do otherwise." Another respondent, a software developer and Web designer, explained, "When designing my resume, I wanted to convey a lot more information than is on the 'standard' print resume of one or two pages. For example, I provide a dozen samples of source code I have written, in their entirety -- something that would have required several dozen pages [in print]." By contrast, the many other workers who have print résumés but not much other material

that could be readily and appealingly displayed on the Web perhaps do not bother investing time and effort to establish a Web presence for what is in effect their modest stock of digitalizable cultural capital. The criteria of digitalizable cultural capital could thereby be a factor in Web résumé publishing, encouraging primarily those with such capital to invest their time and labor in a Web site, and perhaps correspondingly discouraging those with too little to make the Web investment profitable.

Summary

In sum, in accounting for who publishes their résumés on the Web and finds such a Web venture to be symbolically profitable, a key factor appears to be the amount of digitalizable cultural capital produced in one's occupation. Compared with generic one-page print résumés and their accompanying employment letters, the Web résumés and their accompanying Web sites studied here were large—evidence that their producers had substantial amounts of digitalizable cultural capital to display. Those in occupations that involve producing digitalizable cultural capital were prominent within the sample not only by sheer numbers but also by the high efficacy with which they rated their Web résumés. By contrast, there was almost no representation in the sample from blue-collar occupations. Even white-collar occupations typically assumed to be well-endowed with both cultural and economic capital, such as many professional occupations, were almost absent from the sample; their capital is presumably not the kind that would be readily digitalizable for the Web market.

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Appendix A

The Standard Occupational Classification

The Bureau of Labor Statistics within the U.S. Department of Labor devised the Standard Occupational Classification. It consists of the following 23 major categories (see http://www.bls.gov/soc/soc_majo.htm), each of which is further subdivided into more detailed occupational categories:

Management Occupations
Business and Financial Operations Occupations
Computer and Mathematical Occupations
Architecture and Engineering Occupations
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
Community and Social Services Occupations
Legal Occupations
Education, Training, and Library Occupations
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
Healthcare Support Occupations
Protective Service Occupations
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
Personal Care and Service Occupations
Sales and Related Occupations
Office and Administrative Support Occupations
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
Construction and Extraction Occupations
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
Production Occupations
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations
Military Specific Occupations

Appendix B
Number of Web Résumés, by Occupation

Occupation	N
Computer and Mathematical	39
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	27
Management	9
Architecture and Engineering	9
Education, Training, and Library	5
Life, Physical, and Social Science	3
Business and Financial Operations	1
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	1
Community and Social Services	1

Note: Total does not equal 100 because 3 participants' sites either could not be accessed or no longer featured a résumé, and because raters could not agree on one participant's primary occupation and judged another participant to be a student without a clear occupational track.

Appendix C
Distribution of Web Sites, by Size

Number of files	N
1-9	8
10-99	42
100-999	42
1000+	5