

Value and the Art of Web Résumé Maintenance

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Introduction

In dealing with the life cycle of print genres, professional communication researchers and instructors have traditionally emphasized pre-publication processes: discovery, drafting, revising, editing, and so forth. However, the few longer-term studies of professional genres on the Web show considerable post-publication work (Leichty & Esrock, 2001; Eriksen & Ihlstrom, 2000).

This incongruity between academic and professional emphases can be seen in the disparate approaches to the résumé. Professional communication textbooks have wisely cautioned students about relying on a Web résumé to get them a job (Anderson, 2003, p. 38; Oliu, Brusaw, & Alred, 2004, p. 604), but they have less wisely tended to treat the Web résumé as simply a re-engineered print résumé (e.g., Anderson, 2003), leaving intact print's emphasis on the hopefully short interval during which its author is seeking a job. However, Web authors themselves often maintain their résumé on-line for years, regardless of whether they are seeking a job or not, because their résumé serves other purposes. Yet despite calls for research on how the résumé might be changing in its transition to the Web (Popken, 1999), little research has actually been done on Web résumés or their authors' maintenance practices.

Survey Methods

To address this research gap, my paper reports on authors' activities following publication of their Web résumé. This research draws from a survey I undertook of 100 authors of Web résumés.

To collect my sample, I used the AltaVista search engine, which, unlike its much better known rivals like Google, does not use a ranking procedure which prioritizes so exclusively the most visible sites. To expand my sample further still beyond the elite class that tends to get found by search engines, I also conducted searches within the more proletarian population of sites posted for free by Geocities and Tripod. Moreover, I opted not to reject the many résumés that looked abandoned, often for several years, in the hope that even a small response rate from authors of these seemingly abandoned résumés might shed light on why some people go through

the trouble of publishing a résumé but then not maintain it. For instance, in closely examining the Web résumés of a subset of my sample of prospective participants, I found that about one-third showed no clear evidence of activity during the preceding two years; one site had a last-revised date of May 12, 1995!

Prospective participants received an e-mail solicitation requesting that they complete a 10-minute Web-based survey. These survey solicitations received what, at first glance, may seem to be a surprisingly low response rate of just under 20%. Indeed, the number of defunct e-mail addresses, revealed by a tally of the e-mails that bounced back to me, almost equaled the number of completed surveys. Such a rate of bounced e-mails offers further evidence that many Web résumés have indeed been abandoned, and should caution us that the survey results I report here tend to be drawn from the subpopulation most devoted to their Web résumés. Nevertheless, the majority of Web sites I encountered did offer evidence that they were being maintained, which indicates that Web résumé maintenance is an activity that deserves to be better understood.

Survey Results

First, I will report respondents' purposes for maintaining their résumés on-line over the long term and then survey the range of their reported post-publication activities:

- " updating their résumé s content,
- " redesigning their résumé,
- " and publicizing their site.

Throughout, I ll emphasize those activities that show some correlation with the Web résumé s perceived usefulness.

Web Résumé Purposes

If Web résumés are used solely like print résumés primarily to get jobs then the issue of their maintenance is moot, since they would need not be maintained once their authors have found satisfying employment.

However, only slightly more than half the respondents (56%) indicated that they had ever used their Web résumé to seek new employment with an employer.

By contrast, the vast majority of respondents had used their Web résumé, at some point or other, for one or more purposes that require long-term maintenance. For instance, close to half

the respondents had used their Web résumé for one of two long-term employment-related purposes: to seek clients for their ongoing self-employment (45%), or to enhance their profile among colleagues within their field of employment (42%). Both of these employment-related purposes, if they are to be relevant and effective, demand ongoing maintenance as sustained as the employment itself.

The Web résumé has also been appropriated to serve long-term purposes entirely outside the genre's traditional domain of employment. Almost half the respondents (46%) report using their Web résumé as a way of presenting themselves to people who have no connection with their employment, again a seemingly unprecedented use of the genre but perhaps a use that fills a genre vacuum where few other well-established genres for self-presentation have been established (Killoran, 2003). As well, between a third and a fifth chose among a set of reasons those with no precedent with the traditional print résumé, uses that directly relate to the instrumentality of the new medium, but uses that invite an ongoing Web presence, such as . . .

- " To inform visitors to the rest of their Web site about who made this site
- " To make themselves part of the new medium of the World Wide Web
- " To showcase their Web design skills

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

Participants were also asked to rate how useful their Web résumé has been to them on a scale from 0 (not at all useful) to 4 (very useful). The overall average rating was 2.56, well above the midpoint on the scale. However, those who had used their Web résumé for its traditional purpose of seeking new employment with an employer did not rate the usefulness of their résumé at significantly higher levels (at $p < 0.05$) than did those who had never used their résumé for this purpose ($M = 2.73$, $t = 1.55$).

Only two purposes were correlated with significantly higher usefulness ratings, and both of these purposes require the Web résumé's on-going maintenance. One is those respondents whose Web résumé purpose was, among others, to showcase their Web design skills. They rated their résumé's usefulness sharply higher (3.13) than did those who had not used their résumé for this purpose ($t = 2.55$, $p < 0.05$). Given how quickly Web technology has evolved and how briefly each generation of Web design standards has lasted before it in turn has been surpassed by a new generation (Cooke, 2003), showcasing one's Web design skills would presumably require that one

monitor the medium's changing technology and design standards and in response change one's site regularly.

The second Web résumé purpose correlated with significantly higher usefulness ratings was to seek new clients for one's self-employment. Those who had used their résumé for this purpose assessed their résumé's usefulness at an average of 2.98, significantly higher than did those who had not used their résumé for this purpose ($t= 3.14, p<0.01$). Given the need of the self-employed to continually attract new customers and clients, they would presumably need a continuously up-to-date display of their skills and work achievements, and almost half of my survey respondents have appropriated the well-maintained Web résumé to serve this purpose.

Web Résumé Usefulness

<u>Web Résumé Reason</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Résumé Usefulness</u>
To seek new employment with an employer	56	2.73
To inform people who have no potential connection with my employment about who I am	46	2.61
To seek new clients for my self-employment	45	2.98**
To enhance my profile among colleagues within my profession or my field of employment	42	2.6
To inform visitors to the rest of my Web site about who made this site	32	2.5
To make myself part of the new medium of the World Wide Web	29	2.72
To showcase my Web design skills	23	3.13*
To practice how to make a Web page	21	2.29
To enhance my current employment	15	2.73

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

Web Résumé Currency

If Web résumés are to continue serving such purposes, then they must be currently up to date and then updated whenever new career-related developments warrant it. My survey asked about such

updating statuses and practices. First, respondents were asked how up to date their Web résumé was with their most recent career information. A majority of almost three-fifths indicated that their Web résumé was currently up to date. Generally, those who claimed their Web résumé was currently up to date also rated their résumé s usefulness significantly higher than did those whose résumé was out of date (2.78 vs. 2.24, $p=0.0016$), with a sharp fall off in usefulness after the first 6-month out-of-date interval.

Web Résumé Currency / Status

Current Status	Résumé	
	n	Usefulness
Currently up to date	59	2.78
Up to 6 months out of date	18	2.83
6 to 12 months out of date	12	1.58
1 to 2 years out of date	6	2.00
More than 2 years out of date	5	2.00

Respondents were also asked how many times in the past they had updated their Web résumé s content and also how many times they had redesigned their Web résumé.

Web Résumé Updates

Updates	Résumé	
	n	Usefulness
0	4	2.00
1 - 3	32	2.16
4 - 9	36	2.58
10 - 19	16	3.06
20+	12	3.08

Results show the sample s updating activities could be roughly divided into thirds: one-third updating 0-3 times, another third 4-9 times, and a final third, power updaters, 10 or more times.

Coordinating these results with the duration of time since respondents had first posted their résumé on the Web, on average over 4 years prior to the survey, suggests that Web résumés tend to be updated perhaps a couple of times per year. Analysis shows a direct correlation between the number of times a Web résumé has been updated and its perceived usefulness, with the usefulness rating generally rising with each interval of updates. For instance, if we divide the sample between the double-digit power updaters (who updated 10 or more times) and the single-digit casual updaters (fewer than 10 times), we find that the power updaters rated their Web résumé significantly more useful than did the casual updaters (at $p < 0.05$; $n = 28$, $M = 3.07$, vs. $n = 72$, $M = 2.36$; $p = 0.03$)

In contrast with Web résumé content updates, participants redesigned their Web résumé much less often. About a quarter never redesigned their Web résumé, another quarter redesigned once, another quarter twice, and another quarter three or more times. However, as with résumé content updates, a direct correlation is found between the number of times a Web résumé has been redesigned and its perceived usefulness, with the usefulness rating rising gently with each redesign.

Web Résumé Redesigns

Redesigns	n	Résumé Usefulness
0	27	2.26
1	28	2.43
2	23	2.57
3	6	2.67
4+	15	3.20

Web Résumé Publicity Methods

If a Web résumé is to serve any of the purposes discussed earlier, then it must of course attract an audience, which suggests that authors must take some measures to publicize their site. The survey asked respondents about the measures they took to publicized their Web site and presented four Internet-based publicity methods and two print-based publicity methods. These publicity methods are listed here in descending order of popularity. Three types of publicity methods are almost

equally the most popular, each employed by 57%-59% of respondents:

- " drawing on their personal Internet-based communication by adding their Web address to their e-mail signature, or mentioning their Web site in e-mail messages, chat room messages, or other Internet-message forums;
- " making use of the Web s well-established search tools by submitting their site s Web address to search engines or directories;
- " and using their Web résumé s print cognates by adding the Web address to a print résumé or job application letters.

Web Résumé Publicity Measures

Publicity Measures	n	Résumé Usefulness
Adding my Web address to my e-mail signature, or mentioning my Web site in e-mail messages, chat room messages, or other Internet-message forums	59	2.58
Submitting my Web address to search engines or directories (examples: Yahoo, Google, etc.)	57	2.79*
Adding my Web address to my print résumé or job application letters	57	2.89**
Adding my Web address to my business card, business letterhead, advertising material, or other print documents	43	2.95**
Seeking to get my friends or acquaintances to link their own personal or professional Web sites to my site	27	2.30
Seeking to get the Web sites of organizations that I am associated with (examples: my employer's or college's site, professional association sites, etc.) to link to my site	20	2.95
Other	17	2.35

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

As might be expected, those who rated their Web résumé s usefulness highly also reported using a greater number of these publicity measures. For instance, dividing the usefulness ratings along the mean into two almost equal groups, those who rated their résumé s usefulness above average reported using on average almost one more of these seven publicity methods than did those who rated their résumé s usefulness below average, a difference that is statistically very significant (for

usefulness = 3 or 4, $n=52$, $M=3.21$ vs. for usefulness = 0, 1, or 2, $n=48$, $M=2.35$; $p=0.006$).

However, not all of these publicity methods show a correlation with Web résumé usefulness. Interestingly, among the six response options, it was the two print-based publicity methods that showed the strongest correlation with résumé usefulness, whereas most of the Internet-based methods showed little or no significant correlation with résumé usefulness at the $p<0.05$ level. Specifically, those who publicized their Web site by adding their Web address to their print résumé or job application letters, or to their business card, business letterhead, advertising material, or other print documents, also rated their Web résumé s usefulness significant higher than did those who had not employed such publicity methods. For instance, a couple of respondents expanded on how they use their business card. One explained that a Web résumé provides a quick easy way to direct potential employers to something that informs them about my employment history. One rarely carries around a stack of resumés [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. The only Internet-based publicity measure to show a significant correlation with résumé usefulness was submitting the Web site address to search engines or directories. One respondent, a self-employed graphic designer, illustrated how her work gained credibility by its prominent search engine placement : Through some act of God I am on the first page of 700,000 of [G]oogle listings just by entering graphic artist That fact has spoken volumes to potential clients on my effectiveness as a web designer.

Web and Print Résumé Production Process

Finally, there was one long-term maintenance practice that I had not anticipated in designing my survey but that emerged in some of the respondents answers. We might assume that most Web résumés originated from a pre-existing print résumé file which was converted to a Web format. Indeed, the circumstantial evidence of so many pdf files in my initial AltaVista searches, as well as the many pdfs and even MS Word files on respondents sites, suggests that many print résumé files are indeed being dumped online, and perhaps that, even when résumés are converted to a distinctive HTML Web format, the pre-existing print résumés are being used as sources of content for Web résumés, with details, hyperlink, etc. being added or subtracted. But in an inversion of this temporal sequential process, a few respondents commented that they had found their

comprehensive, up-to-date Web résumé to be a useful source for each new print résumé.

For instance, one respondent wrote, I use my web resume as source for print version. I.e. web version is up to date, print version is built from it. Useful in this regard. Another wrote that his 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. Yet another explains that the Web version is in the most convenient medium to keep upto date because it s in a [c]onvenient location. Thus, even in the case of the print résumé with its short-term time horizon, the Web résumé is serving a useful purpose in the construction process because it is the version being well-maintained over the long-term.

Conclusion

In sum, we have seen that, unlike the print résumé with its short-term time horizon, the Web résumé has adopted purposes that require a long-term time horizon. Achieving such purposes requires ongoing maintenance of the Web résumé, including

- " updating the résumé s content,
- " redesigning the résumé,
- " publicizing the site,
- " and even creating new print résumés.

In contrast with our usual emphasis on the pre-publication writing and construction practices, this preliminary exploration of the most useful post-publication practices can be useful for both instructors aiming to instill long-term development practices for their students careers and for researchers aiming to understand new professional communication practices in new media.

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