

Web Presence

Some say that your web presence is about creating a web site to tell about who you are. (Hargadon, 2011). Having a website that can be directly attributed to you and to your work is a great start to developing your web presence. I think your web presence is much greater than one place that you can refer others to, your presence is multi-dimensional. I think of web presence as the artifacts that you leave behind that are open and available to others who seek similar ideas or similar interests but may or may not agree with your viewpoint. Your web presence is about pushing information out, whether it is an original thought or something that you exude to others. I use “exude” as a neutral word between endorse and criticize since you may share something you find for positive or negative reasons. Your web presence is your branding—it is (or should be) the message that you want others to understand about you. Web presence is also about where you go on the internet, where you search, what you buy. In this way your web presence includes your digital footprint. Using the class definition of “digital footprint” as those intentional or unintentional traces that you leave behind when you visit web pages, search for information, post on Facebook, tweet, shop online, or engage in similar activities, it should not surprise you to see occurrences in your web presence that you were not expecting.

Who hasn't googled themselves to see just what others may find when they use your name as a search parameter. For those of us who have more common names, we might not see many hits or a very high ranking unless we are producing a lot of material. Those who have a unique name might find that they can dominate the entire first page of website suggestions. Results may include such things as your website, or websites that you participate in, and artifacts from twitter, blogs, discussion boards, curation tools like scoop.it or pinterest, among other pieces from social software.

In most cases, it is very hard to manage your digital footprint and still participate on the internet. There are numerous businesses tracking your patterns and feeding that data right back at you in hopes of generating more sales. (Sponder, 2009). Some of this is out of your control. If this is cause for concern then there are often privacy tools that you can add to your browser to help control some of this tracking. (Henry, 2012).

Howard Rheingold says, “One strong link between mindfulness and participation is the two-part question: What impression is my digital participation deliberately giving to others? and what impression is my digital participation unintentionally giving off?” (Rheingold, 2012, p. 139). I think that these two questions are very important to think about as you participate in web activities. You do have some control on how public or private you want to be. You have some control over what the first things people see when they go searching for you. There are many ways to managing your presence. In the web posting “Creating Your Web Presence: A Primer for Academics,” the authors Miriam Posner, Stewart Varner and Brian Croxall (2011) give some very good recommendations for creating and managing your web presence. I especially like how they have broken the concept into three manageable elements:

- **Familiarity:** What are you getting into? Don't sign up for a social networking platform or Web application without understanding what it does with your data, whether you can maintain the privacy you want, and the conventions that govern the way the community operates.
- **Consistency:** It's important to carry the same voice, image, and persona across multiple social networking platforms.
- **Participation:** Social networking is a gift economy. The more you participate productively with others, the higher your own profile will be.

I manage both a public and a private web presence, however I'm more apt to use my public presence for most content or comments I publish and I try to use the same userid or username as much as possible. I think this is not only helpful in being found and building a reputable web presence, but it is also helpful in managing logging on to websites and blogs or other social media.

I do participate in some private conversations due to the subject matter and out of respect for the topic. I justify my participation for the greater good of the family and I trust that the other participants are equally conscientious about the topic and the site's privacy will not be shared. I actually anticipate that at some point, the conversation will no longer need to be private and that the discussion will dissipate or its private web presence may even disappear.

I recently participated on a nation-wide screening committee in which there were about 60 applicants. There were only a few candidates who actually addressed their web presence in their cover letters or resumes. Only one, who had a very common name, actually gave specific search parameters to help the committee find them on the internet. Luckily, I didn't have to google all 60 applicants, but I did search the internet when the committee had a smaller pool of potential candidates. Again, I was amazed that very few of the applicants had a strong web presence. Most of them were hidden behind their institutional web presence without any kind of name recognition. Did this activity influence my decisions when putting names forward? For this specific job, yes it did.

[ok, here is where things get sketchy for me...I don't have children, I have no k-12 experience with teaching. I'll try my best!]

Teaching about web presence to all students whether, K-12 or post-secondary students, is a responsibility of every teacher or instructor and should be a part of the competencies for each grade level and for each course. I have zero experience with K-12 students except for being one, and I can only image the enormous challenge it is for parents and teachers to get across the message about how things posted on the internet can be harmful and hurtful. The YouTube video, Privacy Student Intro Video - The Digital Footprint at (2010) really reminded me of how K-12 students might be affected. Students should understand that what they put out in the public, or even within a more private environment, may come back at them in a way that they might need to defend or explain. It is no different from passing a note in class, in that there

is always the chance that someone unintended will intercede and read the note. One should always be prepared that someone unintended will find your web reference and call you on your words.

The importance of building a web presence as an undergraduate student should be part of any degree curriculum plan. One goal for any university or college is seeing that the graduate is either getting a great job or being successful at getting in graduate school. Having that web presence established before graduation will prepare the student for the real world. A post found on the Student Advisor Blog, gives some very clear results about how admissions offices are doing web searches to learn more about potential students. The results show that in some circumstances, if an internet search finds something negative it can have an impact on successful admissions. (2011) Making smart choices about what one chooses to put in the public or private will continue to be a skill that students and life-long learners will have to develop.

Along with an understanding of what your web presence is and how to built it, students of all ages should be given age-appropriate information about intellectual property and copyright from both a creator or provider of information as well as a user or taker of information. I'm a strong supporter of using a Creative Commons license for anything that I feel someone else might want to use or refer to. However, I do understand that some research and findings might need more privacy due to a monetary contract or fiduciary relationship with an employer. There are good reasons to be private. If this is not the case, and if your content is that good then most people will respect your intellectual property and give you credit. By publishing it on the internet under your name, aren't you staking a claim on your ideas by the act of making it public? When it comes to taking or using, or referring to someone else's work then looking for the Creative Commons license can be very helpful in understanding how to give acknowledgement to the originator.

Another dimension of understanding your public web presence is thinking about how your employer views the message you are pushing. Is your message in competition with your employer? If it is, then I can't image that your workplace is even slightly enjoyable and you need to move on! Find out if your employer has a non-disclosure agreement and carefully consider if something you post could be seen as harassment. People have been fired for posting such statements on Facebook (Eidelson, 2012). Luckily, at least for now, I work in an environment where I feel that freedom of speech is tolerated and often times encouraged, although when the recent presidential decree went out for a proposed staff code of ethics, I was concerned about how that might affect all UA employee's web presence and was happy to see the code rescinded on many different levels.

When I think about my professional web presence I know I must begin to contribute more to improve what is found when performing a search. On a personal level, I have been the number one suggestion on google since 2007 for "oven poached egg" for posting a recipe (or rather a process) on my personal blog for poaching a dozen eggs at one time. Every time a holiday comes around and people are making breakfast for large

groups my blog gets constantly hit and I get comments about how helpful the directions are. This personal side helps identify who I am as an individual. Every academic should hope to have similar successes on the professional side.

Resources

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[I found the non-attribution ironic. It almost seems like the author was afraid to claim it for fear of being googled!]

Posner, Miriam, Varner, Stewart, & Croxall, Brian. (2011, February 14) [Web Page] Creating Your Web Presence: A Primer for Academics. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/creating-your-web-presence-a-primer-for-academics/30458>.

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