Chapter VI

Virtual Networks: Mapping Community-Based Collaboration and Professional Writing

Melody Bowdon
University of Central Florida, USA

Abstract

Today small businesses, public schools, local governments, universities, international conglomerates, and nonprofit agencies all feel the pressure to have informative and interactive presences on the Web. This new Web-based information economy has helped to significantly narrow the gap between the technical writing needs of profit and nonprofit workplaces. As local, regional, national, and international groups now compete for attention, business, and participation in the vast arena of the Internet, academic and workplace writers must develop theoretical and practical strategies for identifying and accommodating the varied needs of multiple organizations and audiences. Our technical writing students need to be cross-trained to face profit and nonprofit writing challenges, and our contact people in the community need to be aware of the benefits they can realize through working with students on major projects. In this chapter, I will offer some suggestions for making this collaboration work.
Introduction

The time in which we live in America is commonly referred to as “the era of the Internet” in political, educational, financial, and industrial communities. Virtually every product, service, organization, and concept imaginable has Web space devoted to it. The World Wide Web is a giant piece of real estate with seemingly endless space for expansion and discovery, which creates an exciting, convenient, and ethically complex reality. In this chapter, I will attempt to “map” spaces on the Internet through a model of ethical critique. I will argue that the emergence of the Internet has helped to blur the lines between the professional writing needs of profit and nonprofit groups, as every group feels the pressure to have a strong and meaningful presence on the Web. I will argue that this blurring requires that writing teachers cross-train professional communication students to work in multiple types of environments. Whereas a typical professional or technical writing course requires students to apply the skills and concepts derived from the course to hypothetical cases, rooted primarily in imagined or invoked corporate spaces, like a growing number of my colleagues, I advocate for diverse “real-world” experiences for students, including work in the nonprofit sector of the economy. I believe that an effective professional writing course should challenge students to recognize ways in which their work shapes the multiple communities in which they live. I advocate that we accomplish this objective by teaching our students to map the spaces in which they work and the ways in which language functions in those spaces. I will demonstrate the mapping principle through a description of my own Web-based graduate course in proposal writing.

Background: The Emergence and Commercialization of the Internet

Computer experts began developing the infrastructure we now call the Internet in the early 1960s. The network’s purpose, at that time, was to enable researchers to share their work and to harness the power of multiple, connected computer systems. Specifically, researchers wanted to ensure their ability to communicate in the event of nuclear war. In a time when humans were facing eradication through our technologies of mass destruction, a small group of computer experts turned to this other form of technology for protection. In 30 years their secret plan for secure communication became, according to the Internet Society (2002):
An Analysis of Factors Affecting User Acceptance of ERP Systems in the United States
Kakoli Bandyopadhyay and Cynthia Barnes (2012). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 1-14).
www.igi-global.com/article/analysis-factors-affecting-user-acceptance/63624?camid=4v1a

Team Software Process in GSD Teams: A Study of New Work Practices and Models
www.igi-global.com/chapter/team-software-process-gsd-teams/64093?camid=4v1a