

Using blogs and Web pages to raise your professional profile

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Professional Goals

While it is possible that you want to raise your promotional profile to achieve academic fame, it is far more likely that you wish to increase your visibility in order to further specific career goals. In order to choose the best methods for raising your profile, I find it is helpful to first identify the specific goals you are trying to achieve. Goals common to faculty include, but are not limited to:

- Recruiting students to specific classes or departments
- Recruiting researchers and new faculty
- Raising public awareness and clarifying issues regarding public policy and societal issues ranging from alternative energy to the teaching of evolution in the schools
- Promoting book sales
- Attracting venture capital and/or corporate investment
- Soliciting philanthropic donations and grants
- Disseminating knowledge
- Networking to establish collaborations with colleagues from Case and other organizations
- Receiving promotion and/or tenure

More information on goal setting—in relation to online communication—is available at http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2005/07/01/so_you_want_to_build_a_website. Target Audience

Having established one or more goals, it is then helpful to understand who your communications must reach to support these goals. Sample target audiences for the above goals might include:

- High school students, current Case students, students from other colleges and universities
- Graduate students, professors, corporate researchers, and related professionals
- Faculty, staff and students, media, general public, alumni, etc.
- Scholars, students, and general public
- Venture capitalists, corporate product development departments, Case Tech Transfer office
- Individual donors, foundations, corporations and government agencies
- Students, colleagues, interested learners
- Professionals in related or complementary fields in academia, government, non-profit sector, and industry
- Colleagues, students and administration

Additional information regarding goals and target audiences can be found at http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2005/07/21/understanding_your_goals_and_your_target_audience and http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2005/07/28/more_about_your_target_audiences

Content

When considering what content you should include online, it is helpful to strike a balance between that which you think directly supports your goals and that which your target audience expects to find on your Web site. Faculty members can begin with the basics expected by users, such as CV's contact information, publications and/or abstracts, description of research interests, class listings, etc. and then add more specific information in direct support of their goals.

In particular, it is helpful to ask yourself what information you can provide that will allow a user to come to a decision and act in a manner that supports your goals. The following examples illustrate this process.

If you were hosting a symposium geared towards both professionals in your field and laypersons with an interest in the topic, you would naturally want to provide information regarding time, location, schedule of events and a list of speakers, but what else can you add that will persuade people to attend? Can you provide additional biographical information about the speakers, demonstrating their expertise and engaging speaking style? If you know that Professor Smith can talk about the practical applications of Pi for two hours while keeping English majors engaged in the topic, then you should definitely promote his appeal. On the other hand if Professor Jones will give a talk that will captivate fellow experts, but will be over the heads of laypersons, then you should make this clear as well. And if you will be providing coffee and pastry at the 2:00 break, make sure you promote that too. While food shouldn't be the only determining factor it can be a great incentive.

If you've developed a new polymer that could have practical applications in a variety of industries, you should certainly showcase the science, but also offer examples that will make sense to Acme Inc.'s Vice President of Marketing and your investment banker. Give them the features and benefits that will help them understand why they need this. You and their product development team may be impressed by the efficiency of production and stability under different temperatures, while other decision makers find value in the fact that the polymer is purple and luminescent. Additionally you should feature past successes on your Web site so they can see how you have followed through in the past. Whether you are seeking donations or investments, your readers will want to know that their money will be well spent.

If you want to teach students how to safely and efficiently use the machine that goes bing, will one demonstration suffice, or do you want them to be able to review the instructions in the future? If it is likely that they will need to refresh their knowledge, you can write up instructions on the process and include photographs of the various controls. If written instructions won't suffice, perhaps a video demonstration will. Borrow a video camera from the Freedman Center and have a lab assistant film while you demonstrate the equipment. By podcasting this on your blog, students can access it at any time, including midnight in the lab while using the device. Or, depending on the complexity and/or safety requirements, instead of offering the demonstration in class, you can assign the video as homework, and use the class time to expound on something else.

Bastions of Knowledge—specialized content designed to attract and educate visitors

In addition to providing content that promotes your own specific goals, you may also consider providing content that is designed to attract visitors to your site. Typically this type of material is designed to educate a wide-range of users on a topic related to your field. Caltech's Snow Crystals site is a great example of this type of content. Created by Kenneth G. Libbrecht, Caltech's chair of physics, the Snow Crystals site provides information and photographs that cover just about anything anyone would want to know about snowflakes. There is information appropriate for school age children as well as college students and Ph.D.s. Libbrecht also uses the site to promote his books and photographs.

According to Google, 381 sites currently link to <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~atomic/snowcrystals/> as compared to only 16 that link to Libbrecht's home page and 9 that link to Caltech's physics department. An additional 71 pages link to his redundant address, <http://www.snowcrystals.com/>. A google search on the word "snowflake" generates 10,100,000 results, but the third result listed is from the snowcrystals site. A search on "snow crystals" generates 238,000 results, and pages from the first 3 are from the snowcrystals site.

While the site is interesting and informative, it is also a tremendously powerful marketing tool. Applying this concept to your own field of expertise can make a tremendous impact on your professional profile.

Additional sites of this nature can be found at <http://www.case.edu/development/alum2/playground/intranet/know.html>.

Building your site

Most departments at Case have existing pages for faculty and/or laboratories or research projects. If that is the case for you, the person responsible for the existing pages should be able to help you modify or build on your existing content. If you need to build a new site that is separate from your department you can contact the Webmaster for your school, build a site on your own Web server, apply for an account on the main Case server, or use the space allocated on <http://filer.case.edu>. You may also find that you have existing sites scattered in a variety of places on the Case site. One way to unify these is to build a central page that links to your related sites. This can be a regular

Web site or a blog, but as Jeremy Smith has described, the blog offers ease of use, can serve to build a sense of community, allows for podcasting, and provides RSS feeds—among its many features.

No matter where you put your content, it is important that it is logically organized in a fashion that allows for easy navigation. Information about organizing and acquiring your content is available at http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2005/08/25/organizing_acquiring_and_creating_content_for_your_website_part_one
http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2005/08/25/organizing_acquiring_and_creating_content_for_your_website_part_two
http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/06/20/web_file_organization_and_naming_conventions.

Information that will assist you with creating html files and uploading them to a server can be found at http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/06/09/im_not_going_to_teach_you_xhtmlhtml_but_you_should_learn_it_anyway
http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/07/11/im_not_going_to_teach_you_xhtmlhtml_homework_review
http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/06/26/uploading_files_with_dreamweaver_ftp.

If you build it, will they come?

Your fabulous Web site, replete with all of the content an interested user could desire, and the information you have designed to support your goals, is worthless if you are the only person who sees it. To market your site to the world you need to make sure that the type of content you have included will be efficiently understood and ranked by the various search engines, and you must personally promote your site.

First and foremost you need to ensure that your content is accurate and meaningful. In addition to that, you can format your content in a manner that will impact the way search engines rank your site. The following format suggestions are specific to the HTML/XHTML used to format your Web site. If you aren't familiar with HTML you may want to read http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/06/09/im_not_going_to_teach_you_xhtmlhtml_but_you_should_learn_it_anyway. In the follow-up to that article, I've included a break down of a simple Web page into its typical component elements. You can view that at http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/07/11/im_not_going_to_teach_you_xhtmlhtml_homework_review.

Use descriptive headers to showcase your most important topics.

Search engines recognize that material placed in an h1 header is more important than something in a smaller header or in a normal paragraph. Try to make your headings specific to your topic. Instead of a header that says "Research Interests," be specific and say "Fuel Cell Research" or "Research on the impact of East German literature on society." These phrases will be indexed by the search engines and will help users conducting searches to find your site. If you are using the blog system, the titles of your entry will automatically be formatted as "headers" rather than bold type.

Title and Metatags

When constructing a Web page, a key element is the <title> tag that controls the name of the page as it is shown at the top of your browser window. This information is also important to search engines, so again, try to be specific. "Jane Smith's Literature Site" provides far less information than does "Jane Smith, Pastoral Poetry, English, Case Western Reserve University." On a regular Web site you can make your titles specific to each page, each section or the site as a whole as you so choose. On the blog server the title is in the template files and typically reflects your whole blog. On the Web Development blog, I use "Web Development Blog: Creative Services: Marketing and Communications: Case Western Reserve University"

In addition to the title you have the option of adding various metatags that give additional information to search engines and to readers. While this information is not visible on your page, it can be read when looking at the source code, and is collected by the robots that index Web sites.

The metatags I typically use are keywords, description and author. Here is how they appear on the Web Development blog: <meta name="keywords" content="Web Development Design CSS XHTML BLOG SSI templates branding server side includes mt case western reserve university marketing communications creative services" />

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<meta name="description" content="Case's Web Development Blog offers tips, tricks and a place to exchange ideas with web maintainers on campus." />
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<meta name="author" content="Heidi Adams Cool, Kevin Adams" />
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You will notice that I did not go overboard with the keywords. Some sites will list hundreds of keywords in a misguided attempt to affect the search engines. This doesn't work. In fact many search engines, such as Google, don't

even consider keywords anymore. It is more practical to include a few select words or phrases that are representative of your site. Imagine what terms you might use to search for the type of information on your site. If a user searches on those terms and gets to your page, will he find the information he needs? If not, don't include that term. The description and author tags are fairly self-explanatory. Be brief yet specific.

Passive marketing strategies

Once your Web or blog site is up and running, you want to make sure that anyone you encounter can readily find the site. To give the site maximum exposure, include the address in any of your communications materials. For example, put the address on the bottom of your e-mail signature, print it on your business cards and letterhead, include it on the final slide in your powerpoint presentations, have it listed in conference programs, news releases, etc. Make sure your name and contact information are clearly available on the site so that visitors associate the content with you.

Proactive marketing strategies

List your site in online directories such as Yahoo. This service is free to educational institutions. Information for Yahoo is available at <http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/dir/suggest/index.html>.

Request links to your site from other sites. Generally if you are providing content that will be of interest and value to the users of a particular site, that site's Webmaster will be happy to include your link. When asking it is helpful to be polite, suggest the specific page where the link should appear, and offer brief but valid reasoning for your suggestion.

Ensure that your site is linked from your department and from the appropriate Case Directories page.

If you want to reach the Case community, announce your site in Case Daily.

If you have created a specialty site of value to a broad or topically specific audience, contact Marketing and Communications to determine if a release to the media would be appropriate.

List your site in the Faculty Web Page Search site at <http://ora.ra.case.edu/facultysearch/dynamic/search.aspx> by contacting diane.weitzen@case.edu.

Keep abreast of blogs and discussion groups pertaining to your field. Make comments when appropriate and include your site link. This both promotes your site and spreads word of your expertise through the community.

Additional information is available at http://blog.case.edu/webdev/2006/02/24/raising_your_web_site_rankings.

Additional Resources

<http://www.case.edu/univrel/marcomm/>
<http://blog.case.edu/webdev/> <http://blog.case.edu/>
<http://blog.case.edu/FreedmanCenter/>
Contact Heidi at cool@case.edu.