History 581: Digital History, Fall 2012
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Digital Identity Assignment

Reading:

Patrick Lowenthal and Joanna Dunlap, "Intentional Web Presence: 10 SEO Strategies Every Academic Needs to Know": http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/intentional-web-presence-10-seo-strategies-every-academic-needs-know.

Step 1: Conduct an assessment

Work with an <u>objective</u> partner from this course (hint: don't pick a good friend) to find the contours of your digital identity and explain what she thinks it says about you as a professional and a human being. (Yes, this basically means just Googling someone to see what emerges in the first few pages of results.)

Step 2: Establish your professional needs and goals

Determine what kind of identity you would like to construct and your goals for constructing that particular identity. So, for example, do you need to expand your network in a particular field? Do you need to provide samples of your work and your CV? (If you already have constructed a significant digital identity, let's talk about how you can enhance or evolve it in ways that are useful to your professional goals.)

Step 3: Find inspiration and learn by example

Find three websites that you feel do an excellent job of showcasing the professional identity of people in your targeted profession. Deconstruct those websites. What information do the professionals share? How is the information organized? Who constitutes the intended audiences of the sites? How do these professionals use social networks like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn? What aspects of these websites might you incorporate into your digital identity as you work toward your own goals?

Step 4: Build your website

While participation on social networking sites can be important, you also need to have your own little corner of the web independent from these services. There are many, many paths you can take to establish your own website. I'm listing three of them here, from free to most expensive.

1. Completely free

If you're not ready to commit to purchasing a domain name of your own, you can get a completely free site at WordPress or Blogger that includes your name in the URL (e.g. LeslieMadsenBrooks.wordpress.com). Even though these are blogging platforms, you can use them to create static websites.

About custom domain names

In the best of all possible worlds, you would own a domain name that matches your first and last name (e.g. LeslieMadsenBrooks.com) or one that matches your professional identity in some other way (e.g., if you intend to be a historian who consults with movie studios, you might choose something like RealToReelHistory.com or HistoricalMovieConsulting.com). That option, however, is not free. You can expect to pay about $10/year for a domain name and $10/year for privacy protection so that people can't use a WHOIS request to find your billing/home address.

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2. Custom domain name + free hosting
The cheapest way to have a website with your custom domain name is probably to buy a domain name through Google and use the Blogger publishing platform. You can get hosting for free and pay only $10/year for the domain name. See
http://support.google.com/blogger/bin/static.py?hl=en&ts=1233381&page=ts.cs
WordPress.com offers a similar service for $18/year, and it lets you create an e-mail address at your domain name (e.g., Leslie@HistoricalMovieConsulting.com):
http://en.support.wordpress.com/domains/register-domain/

3. Custom domain name + paid hosting
This option, if you can afford it and are ready to commit, is going to give you the most flexibility in customizing your website. In addition to domain name registrartion, you can expect to pay $5-12 per month for website hosting, depending on what kind of deals webhosts are currently running, as well as on the length of the hosting package (longer commitment usually means a lower cost per month). Many web hosts offer multiple software platforms on which to build your website, including my favorite, WordPress. These platforms typically do not require you to know any programming or markup languages. Popular and inexpensive hosts include Bluehost, Dreamhost, and Hostgator, but there are others. (I use Bluehost. Avoid GoDaddy; it's less expensive, but in my experience the customer service leaves much to be desired.) I'm happy to provide a tutorial to anyone using this option.

Step 5: Get social

Create professional profiles on

- LinkedIn
- Academia.edu
- Google+
- Twitter

Link from these accounts to your website, and vice versa. Begin connecting with people working in your field through these services by "following" them.

Step 6: Get feedback

Have your new website and social media presence evaluated by three classmates, including the person who conducted the assessment in Step 1. Based on the feedback you receive, tweak the components of your digital identity so they will help you better meet your goals.

Step 7: Make a plan for sustainability

You need to plan for the future of your professional identity online. How will you keep it updated? In what directions do you intend it to grow? If you decided to start a blog, what topics will you cover, with what frequency will you post, and why?

What you will turn in

1. Links to your website and any professional profiles you created on social networking sites in Step 5.

2. A reflection paper in which you explain:

- what your partner discovered about your digital professional identity, and your reaction to his or her assessment;
- your current professional goals;
- your objectives as you build your online identity;
- the three sites you found in step 3, and your brief analysis of why you find them useful or admirable;
- why you chose this particular virtual location (i.e., domain name and host) and platform (e.g. WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr, Google Sites) on which to build your website;
- why you chose to include the content you have posted on your website, and who you expect the audience for this website to be, now and in the future;
- what you learned from the feedback in Step 6;
- your plan for updating, sustaining, and/or expanding your online digital identity.

Deadline: Monday, November 26