

## Introduction

*It is important that Professional Writing move toward communication studies, but in doing so, it must be careful to preserve its own distinct identity in writing and in its humanistic rhetorical approach, and not become a digital media arts program. Why? Because in blending too much with digital media, with graphic arts, with communication studies, the distinctive emphasis on written production and on rhetoric can get lost, and that emphasis is, or should be, the defining quality of the Professional Writing major.*

*(Porter and Sullivan 19)*

I was reminded of this statement I had read in The Journal of Business and Technical Communication during a meeting recently. As a technical writer for a company that conducts domestic preparedness exercises for State and local governments, I am not exactly involved in a cutting-edge industry. The technical experts in this field are typically former police officers and firemen or retired military colonels, mixed in with the occasional expert in chemical, biological, or explosive weaponry. Their rhetoric almost always consists of a “back to basics” approach: The statement, “Let’s not solve a human problem with an IT solution,” is frequently repeated in meetings, and their general distaste for implementing any technology into our existing products and services is palpable. So it struck me as odd when a significant portion of this meeting included an overview of a video-based exercise development tool we are proposing for an upcoming contract. The software is an automated system that delivers exercise information to participants via pre-recorded video clips played on laptops and computers instead of

having the flesh-and-blood facilitator tell participants the same information. My coworkers begrudgingly agreed to include the technology as part of the proposal. After the meeting, I asked my boss what had motivated the change from the in-person delivery, which is usually my job to write and then print onto 3x5 index cards, to the video-based system. He said simply, “People want to see more interaction.”

His assessment is not exactly right. From attending these exercises, I know that the existing process is sufficiently “interactive,” in the true sense of the word: With 200-800 people sitting at round tables in conference rooms and stadiums given a variety of tasks to complete that require discussion and collaboration with the people around them, anything more interactive than that setup is hard to imagine. What my company is really trying to do is incorporate technologies people are accustomed using on the Internet in order to add to the everyday reality of what is in fact a simulated event in a drill. Even an industry that prides itself on its person-to-person communication cannot ignore the fact that participants are more accustomed to getting emergency information from a video news report on CNN.com than from a person standing in front of them or even over the phone. Ironically, by using video, the simulation becomes more real.

Adopting this measure as part of a proposal to expand existing business represents a shift within the preparedness industry that, in many ways, is a microcosm of what is occurring within many businesses in response to the changing user interaction with the Internet. Corporations that did not previously have a presence on the Internet or incorporate media as part of their interactions with consumers now opt to use these technologies to mimic the ways users operate on the web. As the Internet changes from

functioning as a conduit for basic information delivered from websites to users, to a source of social networking and community-building, corporate use of web-based technologies have transformed in response. For some companies, evidence of this change exists in the weekly blogs written by the CEO, corporate-sponsored podcasts on an issue or question of relevance to the company's products, or online videos that allow users to access relevant content and information about a product or service; for others, like mine, the shift is reflected in the New Media capabilities and features the corporation uses to augment their existing practices of engaging customers even in offline events. Common to these changes both on and offline, however, is the changing rhetoric the communication requires because, in each instance, the genre changes drastically as the technology is employed.

As pleasantly surprised as I was to see such an innovative use of New Media in my workplace, this exchange reminded me of Porter and Sullivan's statement because as soon as I saw that technology being deployed in my office, I knew my job would change significantly months down the line. My writing task would shift from developing text in a spreadsheet that would eventually make its way onto an index card to writing scripts for actors to portray, record, and simulate the look and feel of an online news broadcast, documentary, or even a commercial. Though I would be operating with the same information, and it would still be my job to ensure the participants had been given all of the information they would need to complete a task in the exercise, the writing task for the screen would be entirely different than the one I employed for the index card. I alone knew this; none of the technical experts in the room even considered or questioned how

that text would be produced or whether it would be a challenge to produce it. This experience made me realize how ubiquitous New Media is becoming in the workplace and what an impact it is having on professional writers every day in every variety of business. Regardless of the company type or the text used, corporations are adopting these practices as new ways to appeal to consumers.

In June 2006, the business intelligence tracking and research company JuniperResearch estimated that by the end of 2006, 70% of corporations would have blogs on their corporate websites. Harvard Business School officially recommended the blog as a means to “boost your company’s credibility and help it connect with customers” at the end of 2005 (HBS). Companies ranging from Google and Sun Microsystems to Deloitte & Touche and ABC have launched podcasts recommending computer systems and MP3 players, offering career advice, and updating the audience on the previous week’s episode of Lost. Online videos once only adopted to review and advertise new products for CNET’s tech-savvy customers are now used to educate consumers about charitable clothing lines at small startup companies like Mondonation, and Coca-Cola sells sodas, snacks, and candy via user-created online videos through “The Coke Show,” a series of video contests that encourage users to use Coke products in inventive ways, record their acts, and send the videos in to win prizes. These products have emerged on the Internet as corporations have changed their advertising and content delivery methods to respond to changing user interaction with the New Media environment on the web. As consumers increasingly go online to not simply absorb information, but to interact with it

via blogs, podcasts, and video, corporations have responded to maintain user interest in their websites by advertising via these media.

Causing this change in the ways businesses use the Internet to market to consumers is the new user-centered model of the Internet: Web 2.0. Though it is seemingly simple marketing kitsch, at its core, Web 2.0 connotes a shift in how users engage with the Internet. People do not just go online in encyclopedic search for facts about a medical condition or history project via a series of linked pages, but instead want to obtain that same information by interacting with other users in a community where people recommend and contribute their knowledge on the subject. Whether that user decides to obtain information on a blog, from a podcast, or through a video, that person will seek out informed communities about the subject to gain recommendations from everyone, from experts to everyday people.

Web 2.0 is an important means of conceptualizing why businesses are beginning to implement New Media into their products and development initiatives. As consumers become more accustomed to using social software technologies such as blogs, podcasts, and online videos because they use them on a variety of different entertainment, news, and political websites, corporations are developing new ways of offering these technologies to consumers on corporate websites. And more importantly, it is not simply *possible* for users to do this, but they actually *want* to. This shift—from programmers touting the capabilities of technology to the realization and use of that technology in actual consumer interaction with them—is what is really significant about Web 2.0. In response to the fundamental change in this paradigm, businesses are creating blogs,

podcasts, and video to entice and interest consumers. Consumers, in turn, are participating. Although the main corporate purpose for the use of these media may be to advertise new products or services, the message is communicated through a distinct situation that requires a specific rhetoric in order to be relevant to a reader. As an advocate for the audience, the professional writer has the keenest concept of what the corporation's audience needs and the information that audience will find most relevant and useful. As corporations are just beginning to adopt these changes, a definitive assessment regarding whether corporate use of these media will be lasting or effective in the long-term is pending. Writers in corporations seeking to use these technologies are nevertheless in a position to respond to these new ideas with the same solid, effective, rhetorically sound text they would produce traditionally every day for print-based texts.

For every meeting room where a group of executives are deciding to use one of these media to connect to their consumers, there are one or two or maybe even a group of professional writers who, just like me, suddenly feel a twinge of panic as they realize that this new "interactive" idea will eventually fall on their desks, where their writing task has just changed considerably without anyone around them really understanding the difference. As a writer, the possible downsides of this evolution are significant: If a writer cannot adapt to the new rhetoric warranted by a change in medium, the end result to the corporation is that the writer cannot perform the task requested. The circumstances will differ from corporation to corporation whether the writer will be given time to adapt and understand the new rhetoric needed to make effective use of the change. In the worst-case scenario, the task of writing for the project may be reassigned to a marketing

or even information technology team, potentially leaving the writer with little to do, and even less reason for remaining employed in that environment. This adversely affects the audience, however, as purely advertising or marketing material replaces the writer's audience-driven content.

For this reason, a focus within Professional Writing that does not fully embrace technology, as indicated by Porter and Sullivan's comments, is problematic. By asserting that Professional Writing should focus on writing only, as if that act is distinct from New Media technologies that involve writing in some way, can only serve to leave students of Professional Writing programs less-than prepared to operate in technology environments once they leave these programs. the perception that these technologies do not really affect professional writers and that scholarship should focus on writing in lieu of how technology influences what writers produce is not merely unnecessarily limited, but is falsely narrow considering the tasks writers actually take on in the workplace and how research may assist them by expanding their notions of what they are prepared to do.

Traditional approaches to Professional Writing teach students that their domain is building technical reports, writing proposals, managing contributions to the monthly newsletter, synthesizing the company's product overview in brochures, and only occasionally adapting marketing content for an update on the corporate website. Although technical and professional academic journals reflect the shift in the workplace toward use of new technologies, this discussion mostly encompasses a view of technology that does not include New Media. Although the absence of this discussion could be attributed to a temporary delay in publishing this research, points of view, such

as those expressed by Michael Knievel, indicate that academics within Professional Writing are hesitant in approaching topics that focus on use of technology. Knievel states that Professional Writing's current positioning within the humanities causes this gap in the treatment of technology:

Notions of technical communication's humanistic character, although unquestionably groundbreaking and crucial to the field's sense of self and mission, remain too deeply indebted to traditional academic humanities' and English studies' constructions of humanistic purview, which largely refuse to accommodate technology. (65)

As academic focus lies in the humanities in lieu of technology, as Knievel maintains, then new genres, new ways of looking at technology and its intersection with writing, and new ways professional writers use these technologies in the workplace, remain ignored.

Research published in journals further exemplifies this phenomenon. Issues of the Journal of Business and Technical Communication and Technical Communication Quarterly published since 2000 contain few articles about technology at all and, save for Knievel's article, ignore the emergence of New Media as it relates to Professional Writing. The articles and research published in journals discuss the professional writer's interaction with technology, yes, but not the role of New Media texts on the Internet. The absence of New Media illustrates that academic discussion is not responding to the increasing practical use of Internet-based texts, such as blogs, podcasts, and video, in the workplace. Actual discussion of the professional writer's use of writing—effective means for appealing to an audience, collaborative writing processes, and stylistic changes



in how writers manipulate text—is reserved for discussions of print-based documentation production only. Emphasizing print-based products while ignoring online and New Media products narrows the scope of preparation writers have as they move from educational programs to the workplace. Students of Professional Writing programs, as a result, are limited in their scope and knowledge of technology, and how genres that fuse writing and technology can be used for business purposes.

At the core of this gap between the academic notion of what professional writers create and what is presently being produced in corporate workplaces is an issue of genre. By conceptualizing blogs, podcasts, and video as genres rather than simply texts or products or even entertainment, it becomes clear that, as genres, these methods of communication have specific rhetorical situations and, therefore, have distinct purposes, audiences with which to interact, and methods for being persuasive. Since these are genres that integrate text with technology, rather than seeing writing and technology as exclusive parts of a text, they do not fit into the traditional perception of how technology and text interact, so they are largely ignored.

This paper, therefore, will assess how Professional Writing might influence the corporate rhetoric employed in emerging New Media genres. An examination of published research reveals this distinction between technology and writing within academics: technology is most often viewed as a tool to create text, whereas only writing is studied rhetorically. The technology-as-tool/writing-as-rhetoric dichotomy reveals the academic purview at the present moment that professional writers produce print-based texts only; this position further asserts that any texts produced that fuse technology with

writing do not demand a distinct rhetoric, and therefore fall outside of what is considered “Professional Writing,” since these texts receive no treatment within journals. Further discussion of rhetorical theory will show that analysis of blogs, podcasts, and video demonstrates that these texts all respond to specific rhetorical situations when used by businesses and, therefore, constitute their own unique genres. Genre analyses will demonstrate how businesses use the media, how users interact with them, and what needs the genre must fulfill rhetorically in order for the genre to be successful.

By changing the point of view within journals and ultimately in teaching to a perspective on New Media that conceptualizes these texts as genres, and therefore deserving of a unique rhetorical response, professional writers will be more adequately prepared to produce texts within a range of genres in today’s corporate workplaces; as a result, business uses of these genres will be crafted with rhetorical effectiveness, to the ultimate advantage of the user.

## Scholarly Research and Professional Writing

As the field of Professional Writing has expanded, the notion of what these writers do in the workplace has likewise altered. Academic research within the field has been critical to training future professional writers in the theories and practices involved in developing text in a corporate environment, thus establishing and advancing the concept of what “professional” writing is. A task that was once only seen as means for relaying objective, scientific discovery has evolved over time into a dynamic field that implements the ancient art of rhetoric to craft text that most distinctly appeals to, persuades, and captures the attention of an audience. However, issues of Technical Communication, The Journal of Business and Technical Communication, and Technical Communication Quarterly published since 2000 reveal that research within the field remains limited in its treatment of technology and Professional Writing. The research published in these journals still restricts examination of rhetorical practices to print-based genres only, and technology is more likely to be seen as a tool for writers to use in the course of producing text, rather than as an integrated component of a text a writer produces. Widening the focus from print-based texts to electronic, online products would make writers more adequately prepared for changing workplaces and would help to evolve the role of the professional writer further. This preparation could make writers advocates for change to expanding uses of New Media within their organizations.

By examining the historical evolution of Professional Writing, current treatment of technology in professional journals, and rhetoric and writing in scholarship today, this critical gap between the New Media texts corporations produce and the print-based rhetoric endorsed within academia—as well as the need for it to close—becomes increasingly clear.

### *Historical Perceptions of Technical and Professional Writers*

Technical writing has been employed, through varying methods, to explain, describe, and announce scientific achievements since the mid-nineteenth century. Technical writing was the chief method through which advancements in sciences, chiefly engineering at first, could be communicated to the public at large. This communication was important to engineers during the nineteenth century because writing provided the main vehicle through which any engineer or inventor could make his findings known and, therefore, take and receive credit for them from the public (Longo 1). Specialist technical writers, whose duties were to produce documents separate from the engineering or technical processes that they recorded or instructed, were not formalized in the workplace until after World War II. At this time, the documents technical writers produced served two functions: to record the observations involved in conducting a technical process for further study by other experts or to instruct a potential lay user on how to replicate the process. Essentially, technical writing took on the task of report-writing or manual-writing in an effort to communicate the scientific process to a reader in hopes of the lay user being able to imitate it (Longo 2).

Carolyn Miller, in “A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing,” echoes this point about the role of the writer in the traditions of science and engineering as well. Writing this article in 1979, Miller portrays a technical writing field that was distinct from the scientific processes it existed to describe, though it grappled with the tension between science and rhetoric. The cause of this conflict, according to Miller, is the “positivist view of science,” where “human knowledge, of which we may take science to be a model, is a matter of getting closer to the material things of reality and farther away from the confusing and untrustworthy imperfections of words and minds” (610-611). In this instance, it was the job of technical writers to portray this reality accurately, presumably through writing objectively; with a systematic purpose, organization, and tone; and by limiting audience analysis to different “levels” of audience understanding (613). According to Miller, this perspective on science gives way to “the windowpane theory of knowledge,” which she describes as

The notion that language provides a view out onto the real world, a view which may be clear or obfuscated. If language is clear, then we see accurately; if language is highly decorative or opaque, then we see what is not really there or we see it with difficulty. (611-612).

Rhetoric, in this scenario, since it concerns language, can only exist to disguise the real and undermine the technical writer’s purpose as the purveyor of reality. As Miller’s observations indicate, this notion that the technical writer produces documentation that connects a scientific process to a reader through writing continued well into the 1970s and 1980s, but was beginning to grapple with a variety of issues—its place in English

departments, its relationship to language, and its use of rhetoric in constructing documentation. Ultimately, Miller argues for rhetoric to be included as part of technical communication, stating that the writer's place is to act as an advocate for the reader. Therefore, by this point in the history of the field, technical writing was a practice that did not simply relate reality, but communicated the values of a specific community to readers at large by careful use of rhetoric through writing (617).

In 1993, Patricia Sullivan and James Porter published "Remapping Curricular Geography: Professional Writing in/and English," in which they argue that business communication and technical communication had collapsed into one overarching term "Professional Writing" (15). Audience awareness and reader advocacy distinguish professional writers from professionals who write as part of their jobs, according to Sullivan and Porter. The concern with the audience reaffirms Miller's earlier contention that rhetoric lies at the heart of technical or professional communication. Since writing links what a business, scientist, or engineer attempts to communicate directly to the reader, the professional writer has the unique position in the relay of that message. The writer must craft an utterance in a manner so that it is most understandable to the reader and in a way that persuades the reader to not only comprehend the instructions or the course of events being relayed, but to also convince the reader that the information is useful, pertinent, truthful, and should be followed. Sullivan and Porter further state that "rather than addressing the corporate objectives of a company, professional communication instead addresses the larger social and cultural needs of the public that the company serves" (Faber 312). This focus on audience reception extends not just to

the words in the message that a company relays, but also is persuasive in the method through which it is relayed to the audience. This choice in genre as a means for maximizing the rhetorical effectiveness of a message is an important element of the professional writer's tasks in the workplace today, given that businesses' options for communicating with their audiences extend beyond print media.

Critical concepts of the role that technical or Professional Writing plays for corporations have changed significantly since technical writing began in the nineteenth century. The role of the writer is no longer simply perceived to be one of relaying or recording the message developed by an engineer or scientist, but is instead situated in rhetoric. Because a professional writer produces text that anticipates what the intended audience finds most persuasive in the message and crafts text according to that expectation, the writer is not simply a conduit for the objective writing that the windowpane theory of knowledge suggests, but a skilled rhetorician who must use writing to meet the needs and expectations of the audience. The rhetorical appeal occurs through the written text that a writer produces, certainly, but it also extends to the genre the corporation asks the writer to use in delivering that message to the user. Genre plays an important role in this business-to-audience connection because it prescribes the vehicle through which the information is delivered to the user no matter what product information is being communicated. To study what professional writers produce and examine the role of rhetoric in the field, it is important to also consider the genres in which professional writers operate as part of the rhetoric they employ as well.

### *Technology-as-Tool*

The chief documentation produced by technical writers as the field was being formed were documents that recorded what an engineer had done or instructed the reader on how to replicate a process an engineer had developed. These two early genres that technical writers produced survive today as two significant types of print-based documents that technical writers are often responsible for creating in the workplace: The technical report and the user manual. Although significant changes in technology now allow people to read and interact with text online, a review of research published in issues of Technical Communication, The Journal of Business and Technical Communication, and Technical Communication Quarterly since 2000 shows that little scholarly attention is paid to how these new means of communication influence professional writers. Technology-related topics are given notable treatment in Professional Writing journals, but these discussions fall into the mode of technology-as-tool, where a program or an electronic means of communication exists to help a writer perform a task, but is not an integrated part of the final product a writer produces.

One technology-related subject that receives ample treatment in Professional Writing journals is usability testing. Usability testing is the process of assessing a website or other product for how potential users interact with it. In some ways, this process has a natural place in Professional Writing, since both subjects are concerned with the audience and advocate for its needs, and the pertinence of this subject to Professional Writing is evident in the articles devoted to it. The recent article “Usability Instruction in Technical Communication Programs,” by Lee-Ann Breuch, Mark Zachry,



and Clay Spinuzzi, for example, discusses adoption of usability testing within the field includes the article. In this article, they state:

Technical communication programs are particularly well positioned to adopt usability testing and research in their curricula because of inherent connections between usability and technical communication, such as their mutual emphases on audience analysis, technology, and information design. (223)

The argument that usability testing is relevant to Professional Writing is demonstrably valid given the rhetorical foundations of the field. Usability studies can give writers insight into the actual reactions that readers have to text they have composed or systems that they assist in designing. However, in this case, the technology-as-tool concept is reinforced because the usability study, the use of the technology, is a means for providing the writer data that will inform the writing. The writing is still seen as separate, distinct, a rhetoric that will be informed by the information the technology provided, but not as part of the writing task or the relay method to the audience. The usability test, therefore, even though ultimately used to employ a rhetorical goal, becomes parceled into technology-as-tool.

Additionally, email as a mode of communication in the workplace is the subject of substantial discussion within academic journals as well. Focus on this use of technology and its impact on professional writers typically includes examination of how email is changing the workplace and how it changes collaboration with other writers. For example, the article “From Writers to Information Coordinators: Technology and the

Changing Face of Collaboration” by Scott Jones asserts that “collaborative activities using a newly developed continuum shows that the writers’ jobs were significantly transformed by the company’s transition to a digital concept of writing” (449). Jones continues by stating that email enables writers to connect to coworkers working on other parts of development in projects, and as a result “writers focused less on producing text and more on developing, coordinating and structuring” the IT piece that was being designed (449). Whereas this research indicates positive consequences for writers who use email as they take on new roles in the workplace, it also indicates that the role of writers in this instance becomes less focused on text, which diminishes their interaction with their chief realm of expertise: writing.

Finally, discussion of how to incorporate technology into Professional Writing pedagogy is another focus of research on technology published in current research. Acknowledging that the Internet and online technologies are important aspects of Professional Writing, these articles typically focus on how Professional Writing professors can connect to students by posting content, courses, and projects that they can complete online. The article “Online Education in an Age of Globalization: Foundational Perspectives and Practices for Technical Communication Instructors and Trainers,” is one such example of this type of research. In this article, Kirk St. Amant notes the number of students who are interested in learning about technical communication not only in the United States, but around the world as well. He asserts that “online access and interest in technical communication are increasing on a global scale. The time is therefore right for instructors to consider offering online courses to students located around the globe” (13).

By using the accessibility of the Internet, St. Amant recommends that Professional Writing educators offer courses online to make instruction available to students internationally. In so doing, St. Amant states that programs must design web pages to load quickly and easily, design web pages to print easily and coherently, design online interfaces to allow students to post to them quickly and easily, and limit the number of updates and required online activities (20-21). This focus on how technology should be incorporated into a program, rather than how use of technology can be taught to students in the program, is a common focus among articles of this type published in journals. Technology is consequently reduced to a tool for transparent dissemination or communication, rather than part of a process of writing.

Although the information about technology available in these journals is comprehensive, it covers the technology as separate from the writing, which reinforces the technology-as-tool scheme, and technology continues to be conceptualized as separate from the texts that professional writers produce. As such, technology is not discussed in a manner that explores rhetoric. Little about any of these examinations actually involves looking at writing or studies how writers integrate writing with technology. They are disconnected, splintered concepts, where the technology is a means to an end—a tool to be used to improve the writer's involvement, but not as a part of the end result. Therefore, this distinction between technology-as-tool and writing-as-rhetoric becomes separate, the result of which is an absence of discussion of New Media texts.

*Writing-as-Rhetoric*

While these examples establish the areas of technology that are given ample treatment in the journals, it is important to consider what kind of treatment writing receives as well. Any discussion of how a writer employs rhetoric in the workplace is reserved for how that writer composes print-based text only. As such, close rhetorical analyses of print-based texts, not electronic texts, dominate the discussion and research.

Two articles recently published in Technical Communication Quarterly and The Journal of Business and Technical Communication illustrate the very different ways in which writing is treated in scholarly journals. In the article “Toward an Expanded Concept of Rhetorical Delivery: The Uses of Reports in Public Policy Debates,” for example, Carolyn Rude analyzes the use of the rhetorical canon of delivery through a close reading of public policy speeches and debates to determine how professional writers can contribute to civic arenas as well as corporate ones. Similarly, in “Liminality and Othering: The Issue of Rhetorical Authority in Technical Discourse,” Joseph Jeyaraj discusses issues of authorship in the workplace, and the tension between professional writers and subject matter experts emerges as professional writers are largely seen in the workplace as grammarians rather than rhetoricians who can contribute to the effectiveness of reporting and other documentation. Both of these articles include close readings of sample texts in the course of their research, yet both are print-based forms of writing—in the case of the former, written speeches, and in the case of the latter, the technical report.

Ironically, a special issue in the Journal of Business and Technical Communication on the intersection of information technology and text suggests that renaming text produced at this juncture as “IText” underscores the schism between technology and writing most perfectly. The article “IText: Future Directions for Research on the Relationship between Information Technology and Writing” defines “ITexts” as “information technologies with texts at their core,” such as email, online messaging, and website content (270). The article calls for increased attention to ITexts, and argues for the rhetorical foundations of these types of texts, stating,

In particular, rhetorical theory provides the fundamental analytical tools for elucidating how IText is related to traditional forms of communication and for stimulating theoretical advances needed to go beyond those forms. (271)

By arguing for the rhetorical nature of these texts in particular, the authors separate these ITexts from print-based writing, essentially admitting that they need to be established as a separate type of text to be thought of as rhetorical at all. Reconceptualizing texts produced in collusion with information technologies as separate types of writing illustrates the point that scholarship views writing as so distinct from technology that writing that fuses with technology warrants a change in terminology.

While journals investigate a myriad of issues professional writers face in the workplace, the fact that research seemingly talks about writing or technology, but not how they intersect rhetorically, is a significant problem within scholarship, especially

since the rhetorical value of new genres enabled by the Internet are consequently largely ignored.

Just as scholarly journals establish the technology-as-tool concept through the types of technology they discuss and the roles those systems play in Professional Writing, the research published establishes the writing-as-rhetoric role as well. The rhetorical analyses of workplace writing that are published lean heavily in favor of print-based genres, a focus that reinforces traditional notions of what writers produce. If the purpose of Professional Writing is to implement rhetoric in order to appeal to, persuade, and inform an audience, then the relegation of discussion of the rhetoric professional writers implement to print-based products only results in a narrow view of when, where, and through what means professional writers operate rhetorically. This dichotomy between technology-as-tool and writing-as-rhetoric within scholarly journals implies that writing and technology cannot be employed together as an available means for appealing to an audience; thus, genres that fuse the use of technology and writing cannot be used rhetorically and, therefore, become unavailable to the professional writer.

#### *Gap in Focus: Genre*

In this purview, technology and the writing that is produced in it are largely separate. In one scenario, the writer is the user, the person who, as non-expert in the technology being used, must be instructed on new ways the technology can change her role; in the other, the writer becomes the expert, the one producing writing and enacting change through this expertise. This split in how technology and text are treated in the

journals affects Professional Writing through the impression these journals create within the field that technology and text are separate. The most significant problem arises because this distinction between technology and writing forces a growing number of texts and genres outside the scope of research. By maintaining that the professional writer engages rhetoric only when producing texts within print-based genres, the role, range, and capabilities of the writer thus becomes limited, and unnecessarily so. Professional writers, as experts in rhetoric and in advocating the needs of the audience within businesses, are distinctly capable of and responsible for analyzing and understanding emerging genres to make business use of them most effective, despite the approach the journals take on these subjects. Texts such as blogs, podcasts, and video are being produced by businesses as a major means of communicating their products and services to consumers and offer new rhetorical opportunities for writers to communicate business messages and connect with audiences.

This gap in the treatment of technology and text within published scholarly research is important to note in a discussion of New Media because it posits a possible reason why this New Media texts receive so little attention. New Media texts are not simply alternative forms of communication being explored by individuals or for sheer entertainment value. As corporations have continued to develop these texts, new, distinct genres are emerging that integrate technology and text and serve a distinct rhetorical purpose. Therefore, an approach that separates technology from text cannot adequately assess these genres because they demand an integrated approach through the use of rhetoric.

Consequently, it is important to examine these uses of media as they operate as distinct genres, what the characteristics of these genres are, and how those genres are defined by the audiences they attract. In continuing this discussion of genre and New Media, it is important to examine rhetorical theory and to analyze the chief texts that integrate technology and writing: blogs, podcasts, and online video. Expanding the focus of the genres professional writers produce will make technical writers better prepared for responding to the rhetorical needs of these genres on the web, making the field more flexible and adaptable to the changing social construct, driven by Web 2.0.



## **Evolutions in *Kairos*: Impact on Genre and Rhetoric**

The dynamic nature of the Internet has caused many traditional notions of discourse, text, and genre to be called into question. Mixed and multimedia creations have problematized definitions of genre based on form, online versions of traditional genres such as fiction and poetry have called in to question what texts actually are, and multivocal chats and participatory message boards have blurred the boundaries between authorship and readership. With all of this change and reassessment, it is questionable whether studying new forms of online text is even rhetorically helpful. However, arguments made by Carolyn Miller and Phillip Agre show these rapid changes in text caused by evolving user interactions with the web create a distinct need for classification according to genre, despite how limited categorization can seem. In accepting the validity of arguing for defined genre, an examination of what “genre” is more specifically will include discussion of prevailing theories of genre and genre analysis by Miller and Clay Spinuzzi.

### *Genre and Rhetorical Criticism*

Although it is arguable that applying taxonomic classifications to texts of any kind is unnecessarily limiting—even more so on the Internet since technology enables

texts that are dynamic, fluid, and evolving and, therefore, resist print-based notions of categorization—establishing genre can be helpful to those who study, create, and learn from the texts that constitute the genre. In her essay “Genre as Social Action,” Miller discusses the importance of defining genre as a means of classification. In defense of the use of genre, she states, “The urge to classify is fundamental, and . . . classification is necessary to language and learning” (151). In this instance, genre is not only important for purposes of study, categorization, and research, but also to audience interaction and understanding. Similarly, Philip Agre maintains that, in fact, genre is necessary to the study of texts on the Internet as discourses relate to communities online. Agre states that “Genres are addressed to particular communities and fit into particular activities in the lives of that community’s members” (83). On the web, Agre maintains, use of genre is important to users because it defines their expectations for what information they can expect to get, how the text will operate, and what their level of interaction with it will be. Therefore, definition of genre is important to texts online in particular not only in determining how they are created but also in providing a means through which a user can expect to interact with them.

If defining genres for online texts is helpful to study and appropriate for meeting users’ needs, then an approach to determining how genre will be defined that considers the motives of the rhetor as well as the needs of the perceived audience is critical to ensuring an accurate and inclusive approach. Rhetorical criticism offers such an adaptive approach, one that considers the situational demands to which the text responds and the societal considerations that the context, author, and audience contribute to the text. The

most crucial indication that a set of discourses can constitute a genre is their response to like rhetorical situations. Lloyd Bitzer offers this example of the traditional model of rhetorical situation: “If someone says, That is a dangerous situation, his words suggest the presence of events, persons, or objects which threaten him, someone else, or something of value” (300). These events, persons, or objects come together, for Bitzer, to determine a rhetorical situation, which he defines as, “the context in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse” (300). Bitzer delineates each discourse act into separate parts that determine the rhetoric required by the situation: “the first is the exigence; the second and third are . . . the audience to be constrained in decision and action, and the constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience” (304). The interaction of the exigence, audience, and constraints culminate to form a rhetorical situation. Bitzer likens exigence to “something waiting to be done,” a certain expectation that emerges from the situation to invite action by the audience and constrain how the rhetor will respond (304). In the example of the “dangerous situation” above, the exigence would be the perceived peril: two cars on a collision course, a woman walking home alone late at night, a toddler wobbling toward a sharp-edged table. Audience and constraints are also critical to the situation, where audience is those who “function as mediators of change,” and constraints “have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (305). So, in the case of the toddler, the audience would be any people surrounding the child who can prevent the injury, and the constraints would be the “persons, events, objects, and relations” that are part of the

physical surroundings that would help or hinder any person trying to enact change on the dangerous situation (305).

For Miller, the rhetorical situation to which a discourse responds is similarly critical to determining genre, though, it is the exigence of the rhetorical situation that constitutes genre as social action. She defines exigence as, “a social construct . . . a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need” (157). Whereas Bitzer’s concept of exigence is limited to the factual realities of a setting, Miller’s definition of exigence repositions it in the social context in which a discourse occurs. So, to use the toddler example again, the “dangerous situation” is not created by the fact that the child may fall onto a sharp edge of a table and injure himself, but instead by the social knowledge that dictates that children should be watched carefully around—and ushered safely away from—anything that can cause injury. Exigence, as it relates to an author, “must be seen neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intention, but as a social motive. To comprehend an exigence is to have a motive” (158). The motive is the rhetor’s purpose in acting—the end result the rhetor seeks in responding to an exigence. Through this shift in the definition of exigence, rhetorical situation becomes essentially social. Exigence is defined as the social construct within which a rhetor operates with a defined motive—therefore, the three essential elements of the rhetorical situation are the exigence, or social construct to which a rhetor responds, motives of the rhetor in achieving a certain goal in acting within the situation, and the response of the audience to the rhetor’s action. The discourses that result are classified pragmatically as genres

according to like rhetorical actions that take into consideration the “situation and motive” an author has in choosing a genre for relaying discourse and “the character of a rhetorical ‘response’ to situational ‘demands’ perceived by the rhetor” (152). Therefore, a genre is defined by three main elements in Miller’s approach: the social construct to which it responds, the motives of the author or rhetor within the construct, and the typified audience responses to and interactions with the texts that make up the genre.

By classifying genre according to discourses with similar rhetorical situations, therefore, the intentions of the author and the responses of the reader are contextualized within the expectations of the medium in which the text is relayed. This enables a view of text, and consequently of genre, that considers similarities based on notions that encompass all three elements of a discourse. In sum, it does not ignore any element of the process involved in producing a text. Including social constraints, author, and reader in an evaluation of a text is particularly important when considering genres on the web because of their changing natures, in that they are updated frequently by their authors; are participatory in nature because any reader can comment on, link to, and otherwise directly respond to the text; and are comprised of dynamic technology that establishes and constrains their form. Genres on the web do not have to be retrofitted into classifications according to content, form, technique, or similarities, but rather can be defined as a fusion of all three, making comparison on the basis of rhetorical situation an ideal means for defining web-based genres.

Applying Miller’s method and definition of genre—the social construct, motive, and audience of the text—to New Media reveals how the rhetorical approach to genre is

not only helpful in particular to genres on the web, but can enlighten corporate use of these genres as well. In order for a business's use of a New Media genre to be successful, the business must first understand the disparate elements of genre in which they are working by examining the common rhetorical situation to which the text responds: the demands of the social construct, the perceived motivations of the author, and the audience needs. Businesses must understand that New Media texts have distinct situations that must be responded to in a way that is in line with the user expectation of the "typified rhetorical action" of the discourse that will take place there (Miller 151). If blogs, podcasts, and videos are distinct genres, then their users must perceive the business' adherence to the qualities of the genre—not just the form in which the text is presented—in order for the use of that media to be relevant. This rhetorical approach to genre also offers insight into the invaluable perspective that a professional writer can bring to developing corporate uses of New Media. Because writers are trained to adapt to considerations of situational circumstances, such as the proposed use of a text or a particular audience for which it is produced, they can craft consistent, clear, and engaging uses of these media through their own motives needed to respond within a particular genre on the web.

### *Perspectives on Emerging Genres and Corporate Texts*

Since classification is helpful to the study of discourse and useful to learning, and response to like rhetorical situations constitutes a means for classification, then blogs, podcasts, and online video should have generic qualities that can be traced in order to

define and analyze each genre. Furthermore, it is important to examine how these genres, which were developed as a means for people to communicate and interact informally and popularly online, are reappropriated for into a business use. Therefore, additional perspectives on genre based on rhetorical categorization are useful in analyzing genres made up of web-based texts.

Clay Spinuzzi offers such a continuation of Miller's concept of genre that is useful to examination of corporate texts. Spinuzzi's definition and method of analyzing genre are particularly significant in their emphasis on the role an audience plays within genre. Spinuzzi bases his method of tracing genres on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory that genre is "*dialogic*—it draws on the metaphor of dialogue to examine how people interact with complex institutions, disciplines, and communities" (23). In this sense, genres do not constitute mere categories in which to put texts, but instead frame the reader's expectation of any texts that claim to be part of a particular genre. The evidence of the rhetorical appeal, in this circumstance, exists in the dialogue that transpires between text and audience through the genre. As part of Bakhtin's dialogic, the genre becomes a point of engagement with the reader, where the genre constitutes the common space in which the reader and text interact. In this perspective, Spinuzzi argues, "Genres are not discrete artifacts, but traditions of producing, using, and interpreting artifacts. . . . That is, they emerge from cultural-historical activity and represent, reflect, stabilize, and help constitute that activity" (41). Spinuzzi continues Miller's point that genre represents "typified rhetorical response to a recurring social situation," by adding that the situation, motivations, and audience of a discourse can be analyzed according to the dialogue that

transpires between the rhetor and the audience via the genre (41). By conceptualizing genre as a dialogue that occurs within a tradition, the dialogue becomes an effective means through which the genre can be traced and analyzed. A deeper understanding of the rhetoric that is most effective within the tradition emerges, since successful rhetoric will elicit the most prolific audience engagement. This method of genre tracing as a means for following how an audience interacts with a genre is important to analysis and study of the genres themselves because of their focus on dialogue as a means for tracing the genre.

Spinuzzi argues for a method of genre tracing that enables a means for gaining valuable insight into the user interaction with genre across three levels: the macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic. At the macroscopic level, “genre is seen as shaping and being shaped by its sociocultural milieu. . . . Thus genre analysis has often been used to investigate the recurring organizational activities in which genres are used” (44-45). At the macroscopic level, genre is analyzed according to how it interrelates with and responds to the context of a social moment. In the case of New Media genres, each genre serves to connect corporations and individuals through evolving concepts of community and society that result from changing user interactions with the Internet from Web 2.0. At the mesoscopic level, “genre is seen as a tool-in-use. . . . Genre at this level of scope is typically taken to be instantiated in an artifact—usually a text—that is used to meet an actor’s goals” (45-46). Genre operates as a tool through which a rhetor and its audience interacts—in the case of New Media genres, the technical operation of the web-based medium through which the text is relayed. Formal constraints that guide and define each



of the genres determine how users interact with the genre's basic operations; those formal elements thus contribute to how the genre is defined. At the microscopic level, "genre is conceived as a coherent collection of habits, as operationalized rules, and as the typification of talk used to maintain regularity and structure of work" (46). Examination of the genres at the microscopic level will involve analysis of the language used in the discourse that occurs within these genres to determine how users take in information and, when applicable, how they respond or reply. These three levels of analysis combine to present a holistic image of how the user interacts with a genre—from a wider scope as created within the organizational structures in which the user interacts with the genre; to the choices and decisions the user makes as he/she interacts with the genre's form and function; to a more minute examination of how the user operates, learns, and adapts to the features of the genre.

Although Spinuzzi's theory on genre tracing is largely articulated for analyzing the genres that workers encounter in businesses, this scope and practice illuminates how consumer audiences interact with genres on the web as well through the metaphor of dialogue. In order for a dialogue to be successful—in this case, in order for the rhetorical situation of the genre to be adequately responded to—participation by both speaker and listener are necessary. If, in the case of corporate use of New Media genres, the speaker is the professional writer and the listener is the user, then the key to understanding the genre is the degree to which user interaction with the genre is elicited and achieved. Paramount to this concept of genre is the function of rhetorical situation as it responds within the social construct. As corporations continue to use these genres, therefore, it is

important to understand the context of the genre's tradition these texts were developed in response to the *kairos*, a shift in user interaction with the Internet ushered in by social software systems made popular by Web 2.0.

### *Web 2.0 as Impetus for New Media Genres*

Critical to any consideration of changing corporate interaction with users on the Internet is a discussion of the significance of this change during this specific *kairos*. Miller states in "Blogging as Social Action" that it is the *kairos*, or the time, place, and circumstance of a subject, that most directly determines the exigence (par. 3). Because exigence is so keenly tied to rhetorical situation, it is important to consider the overarching *kairos* of the social moment in which a genre is defined, as it determines the larger social context within which a genre exists.

The most significant shift in user interaction with the Internet during this distinct time is Web 2.0, which signifies a change in how users interact with and create community online. In considering how *kairos* interacts with the New Media genres, this cultural shift in how users interact with the Internet is extraordinarily significant, because the Internet no longer simply consists of a catalog of networked web pages that users can access at a slow pace for specific information. Technological advances have enabled people to be on the Internet at almost any time and any place, through the development of high-speed Internet connections, wireless networks, and mobile devices. Social software sites, such as that sponsored on websites such as MySpace and Facebook, connect people who know each other off and on line, so for many people, one's online identity is

determined by the profile published at one of these sites. Businesses of all types now have areas for user-driven content on their webpages, from blogs to customized page settings to RSS feeds that send email notifications to the user if updates or changes have been made to areas of the site in which the user has expressed interest. This proclivity of user-centered Internet applications, a shift termed Web 2.0, has significantly impacted not only how society interacts with the web, but has created an entirely new social construct within it; a social construct that forms our present *kairos*, as well as the genres that emerge from it.

At its core, Web 2.0 is an Internet that consists of, builds up, and relies upon the Internet-as-community. Steven Levy and Brad Stone in “The New Wisdom of the Web” characterize the change this way:

This rebooting owes everything to the enhanced power and pervasiveness of the Web, which has finally matured to the point where it can fulfill some of the promises that we heard in the ‘90s. The generic term for this movement, especially among the hundreds of new companies jamming the waiting rooms of venture capital offices, is Web 2.0. (48)

This version of the Internet is not made up of individual web pages and corporations that link between each other, as it was in the late 90s and early 2000s. By contrast, Web 2.0 is all about user-based communities fostered through interactive social software online. Blogs, MySpace, Flickr, and YouTube are among these sites that truly consist of the contributions made to them, where their significance lies not in content and information generated from the company that owns them to the user, but rather in the creators’

abilities to foster and encourage social interaction online. These sites are the embodiment of this social nature of Web 2.0, or, as Levy and Stone state: “What makes the Web alive is, quite simply, us. Our presence, most often conducted at the speed of broadband, is constant and mandatory” (48).

The shift to the user-centered Internet is so ubiquitous that Time magazine named “You,” or the user, the Person of the Year for 2006. In his article “Person of the Year: You,” Lev Grossman characterizes the change in the user relationship to the Internet as more than just a minor cultural shift, but a revolution:

The tool that makes this possible is the World Wide Web. Not the Web that Tim Berners-Lee hacked together (15 years ago, according to Wikipedia) as a way for scientists to share research. It's not even the overhyped dotcom Web of the late 1990s. The new Web is a very different thing. It's a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0, as if it were a new version of some old software. But it's really a revolution. (48)

The important point that Grossman makes is that the concept behind Web 2.0 is more than simply a change in the types of businesses that are developing on the Internet or the changes in technological add-ons that websites now offer, but a real, demonstrable transformation in how users interact with the Internet.

What Levy and Stone mean by “presence,” and what Time means by “You,” is more than spectatorship, voyeurism, or exhibition. This presence is determined by

community building online through connection to other people. Grossman notes this change in the participatory nature of the changing Internet as well:

And we didn't just watch, we also worked. Like crazy. We made Facebook profiles and Second Life avatars and reviewed books at Amazon and recorded podcasts. We blogged about our candidates losing and wrote songs about getting dumped. We camcordered bombing runs and built open-source software. (par. 6)

The variety of highly popular websites that have been created to build these communities and enable people to contribute to this revolution include a host of sites that allow users to setup free blogs on their sites, as well as sites such as MySpace, Flickr, and YouTube. These sites, however, are only as successful as those who contribute to them and the communities that form within, which also provides the reasoning why “You” are the Person of the Year, not the creators or inventors of any of these places in cyberspace.

MySpace is one of the most popular sites to embrace community-building, as their About page states: “an online community that lets you meet your friends’ friends” (About) Based on an idea that expands on simple interpersonal networking, users use their MySpace pages to build their own web of friends, family, bands, and even celebrities through their “Friend List” that links to other MySpace pages. Flickr, another Web 2.0 manifestation, is a site where users post photographs that are available online for other users to see. Other users blog about the photographs (there is even a “blog this” button that allows a user to link the photograph to his/her blog automatically), share photographs with friends and family, and post their own professional photographs for

advertisement. YouTube is similar to Flickr, only this site allows people to post short videos for public view. These clips range from blooper-type reels of people falling or tripping, to clipped together segments of popular television shows set to music, to original short films that are produced and released in a series. Though the types of contributions people make to these Web 2.0 sites vary, their engagement from site to site is the same—participation through connecting to others; building community online; and contributing by creating original texts to be posted, viewed, and evaluated by peers.

These texts have not just emerged popularly from individuals; businesses have begun responding to this new need among consumers to seek community online by using blogs, podcasts, and video. Corporations support blogs that generate conversation among consumers online about new products, special sales or deals, or opine on new technologies or innovations in the marketplace. Given the openness of podcasting, some businesses have recorded informational programs where experts are interviewed and answer consumer questions. These programs are available via the corporate website or for free download and subscription via Apple's iTunes program. Other companies have used user-made video that has made the YouTube so popular by sponsoring video contests where consumers make and submit their own videos about unique ways they use the businesses' products. The availability of this technology makes these communication techniques available to large corporations as well as small businesses, so the range and scope of businesses opting to employ these media widens constantly.

Given the emergence of these texts among corporations and the important role they now play in how the Internet operates, it is important for professional and technical

writers to consider what their roles may be in creating these texts and consequently to seek a more active role in their production in the workplace. Writers not only possess the knowledge to assess and respond to an audience and work within a prescribed set of expectations inherent in any text, but also offer expertise in communication during the development of texts; therefore, they should be prepared to respond to these business needs and New Media genres popularized because of the *kairos* that necessitates their use while also being aware of the many ways in which a business can communicate its ideas, needs, changes, or products either internally or externally.

#### *Genre Analysis: Method*

In examining corporate uses of blogs, podcasts, and online video, I will conduct analyses of texts within each genre to fully examine their qualities and user interactions within them. In so doing, I will use an approach that begins with Miller's concept of discourse classification according to like rhetorical situation, follow with Spinuzzi's perspective on genre tracing in order to fully examine the means through which the audience interacts with the genre, and then examine the dialogue that results from each of these genres in order to assess the characteristics of the most successful corporate rhetoric employed.

This method will first involve an examination the rhetorical situation of each genre by analyzing a sampling of corporate uses of each genre; second, in analyzing the rhetoric of each of these genres as they are used by corporations, each genre's interaction with audience will be traced at the macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic levels;

and third, corporate rhetoric will be analyzed to determine what appeals are most effective with users, as determined by the degree to which the audience participates in the dialogue of the genre.

Identifying the rhetorical situation according to the surrounding social constructs, audience needs, and the rhetoric implemented highlights the role of the professional writer in New Media, because effective implementation of these genres requires careful attention to the rhetoric that must be employed. As the analyses will show, users will respond, initiate, and engage in dialogue with texts that best adhere to the traditions of the genre as determined by the situation and employ rhetoric that complements the traditional standards. Therefore, it is rhetoric that connects the technology to the text in the process of creating a product with which users will interact and as a result establishes a New Media genre unique within the corporate realm.



## **Genre Analysis and Corporate Rhetoric**

The present *kairos*, defined by the user shift on the Internet termed Web 2.0, has helped usher in a use of New Media that connects businesses to consumers through community building online. The following samples of blogs, podcasts, and videos exemplify the use of these genres by corporations and trace users' interactions with them. I will discuss the blogs "Travels with Tish: Girlfriends' Getaway Guide," a travel blog sponsored by Midwest airlines; "What's the Diff," a blog about loans, taxes, and other issues related to personal finance sponsored by Quicken Loans; and "Hot Bike" a blog about motorcycles sponsored by Harley-Davidson. I will also discuss podcasts that are created by corporations, such as Whirlpool, Simon & Schuster, and Purina pet food, as well as uses of video productions for discussing company products and services, such as those created by Mondonation, video contests sponsored by Coca-Cola Co., and the video-based "choose your own adventure" series sponsored by Jeep. In the course of examining these texts, I will show that they typify distinct genres within New Media with clear situations, rhetors, and audiences and will also establish the distinct rhetoric these corporations should employ to communicate their messages while still making successful uses of the genres.

*Sampling Methodology: Assumptions*

The aim and scope of this analysis is to determine the potential affect New Media can have on professional writers. Therefore, a number of assumptions and methods for selecting samples of these genres underlies the analyses that follow. The first of these assumptions must start with Professional Writing itself, and the working definition of not only the field, but of the writer's role within a corporation. For this, the boundaries previously quoted by James Porter and Patricia Sullivan create the foundation for a working concept of professional communication: "rather than addressing the corporate objectives of a company, professional communication instead addresses the larger social and cultural needs of the public that the company serves" (Faber 312). The distinction between relaying the corporate message and addressing the larger needs of the public is what differentiates Professional Writing from advertising and marketing, and by extension, what makes the professional writer aptly qualified for crafting genres within corporate environments that are particularly meaningful to consumers. Hence, the methodological assumptions begin with a working definition of a professional writer as a person in a corporation who is responsible for the task of responding to the needs of the public a corporation serves.

This working definition of Professional Writing leads to the second assumption of the sampling methodology. In order to determine how the genres influence the profession, therefore, only corporate uses of these media are relevant to the examination. While some background information on both popular and corporate use of these genres is relevant to an understanding of how, and for what social functions, these genres

developed, since they largely developed as modes of informal entertainment or communication on the web, it is more useful to assess how businesses are currently operating within these genres. One of the most poignant outcomes of this sampling assumption is that, by focusing only on corporate genres, the relative ineffectiveness of these genres on the whole becomes clear. As it stands, few of the blogs, podcasts, or online videos sampled garner large audiences or followings. It is important at this juncture, therefore, to assess what the characteristics are of these genres, and what about their structure currently adequately engages users online and what does not. This gives the Professional Writing community a sense of how—and how not—to use these genres for corporate purposes and how Professional Writers might more effectively apply their rhetorical approach to these texts. By selecting examples of these genres from a wide range of businesses, therefore, the best possible span of audience base could be assessed as well.

The third significant methodological assumption in the sampling that follows is the method for determining successful versus unsuccessful uses of the genre. In all formal and qualitative assessments, such as presence of a particular tool or option within the website, success of the use of the genre is determined by the presence or absence of the formal element. For rhetorical assessment, success is defined according to the degree of audience response to the text via the tools available at the website. This response is measured either by the number and content of posted responses to the corporate contributor's message or the degree to which the corporation provides interactivity and user involvement in the media, the latter particularly in the case of online video. This

means for measuring rhetorical success makes the assessment relevant to professional writers because of its working definition: if professional writers are responsible for responding to the needs of the public that a corporation serves, then the most successful use of a text must be one that results in dialogue between the text and the user, evident in the user's response

### *The Blog*

One genre that has continued to develop significantly as a result of Web 2.0 and increased user interaction with the web is the weblog, or blog. A blog consists of a catalog of online content written and published in reverse chronological order by a writer or group of writers. Blogs are one of the oldest of the New Media genres, first emerging around 1994. One of the earliest bloggers was Jason Hall who, in 1994 while a student at Swathmore College, began what we now call blogging—cataloging his daily life, thoughts on current events, and ideas about technology on a public forum for others to read. He maintained a blog at his personal website, [www.links.net](http://www.links.net), for nearly 10 years, a time during which he was named “The Founding Father of Personal Blogging” by The New York Times (Harmanci). The actual term “weblog” or “blog” came a few years later, as Carolyn Miller states: “although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the blog, most seem to agree that the term *weblog* was coined by weblog writer Jørn Barger in 1997” (par. 18). Since then, blogs have expanded beyond their original use as a medium that individuals used to divulge secrets or share personal information. Journalists for major news organizations such as CNN and MSNBC keep blogs on the

organizations' main webpages for people to read behind-the-scenes perspectives on the stories journalists are covering. Politicians keep blogs as ways to interact with their constituents, as do musicians, actors, and other celebrities.

Corporations use blogs to involve users and promote the company's products in ways that are different from those used in brochures or even information on linked pages of a website. Blogs are essential to the social software aspect of Web 2.0 because blogs connect users to one another through expression of shared experience—both intensely personal experiences as well as providing recommendations based on experiences with certain products or services. These blogs, therefore, serve to not only promote a corporate message, but also to create community online and fulfill this social need.

The rhetorical situation to which corporate blogs respond, therefore, is closely tied to the creation of online community and connection that the genre demands as each genre responds to the social construct, expresses the authorial motivations, and interacts with the perceived audience online. All three blogs, "Travels with Tish," "Hot Bikes," and "What's the Diff," claim to exist for purposes of responding to such a situation by establishing a community through their site. While the fact that the ultimate goal of the corporation is to sell their products to consumers cannot be ignored, through the writer's use of rhetoric, the user can interact with the text in a way that is meaningful beyond mere advertising. By making the content, information, and other data that the user seeks available and accessible, the user does gain something from the experience of interacting with the text that goes beyond receiving a slightly re-worded marketing pitch. Community is therefore built via the user's interaction with the corporation's online persona, which

comes in a variety of forms, from a fictitious person who relates information, to a panel of perceived experts in a field, to a batch of “real” people who contribute to the blog to share and interact more than sell.

As Tish’s blog profile reads in the Technorati Blog Directory, “You have to do some real planning if you visit a city that’s new to you—how to get there, where to stay, how to get around town, what to see and do. I’ll visit U.S. cities, do the travel homework and share it with you” (Tish). Important to note here is that Tish reports that she will “share” the information with readers via the blog, not simply post or report on it in an online article. The blog establishes a community of travelers through which users can relate to and engage with Tish’s experiences as she tells this perceived audience about her experiences traveling in her posts. While the site does not say whether or not Tish is a real person, a fictitious avatar of a real person, or whether she is a compilation of a variety of travelers and writers, Tish becomes the corporation’s online persona, the point of connection between the user and the corporation through which users engage with the corporate message.

While “Hot Bikes” does not have a Technorati listing, the postings written by the blog’s chief editor indicate how Harley-Davidson intends to use the blog as a distinct mode of communication from their main website. By offering editorials and opinions on elements of biker’s communities, as a recent editorial reflection on the blog begins, “It happens over and over again, in garages, shops, dealerships, and bars—guys going back and forth with each other, bragging about how much horsepower their bike just put out on the dyno” (Hot Bikes). The blog, in this instance, is used to discuss the goings on in the

real-life communities of the bikers, essentially extending that community online through the corresponding comments and opinions the bikers who read the blog can leave in response to this examination. Distinct from Midwest Airline's use of "Tish," this blog is composed of a variety of contributors, whose photos look anything but corporate—most of their profiles contain photos of the writer atop his own Harley. In this instance, the corporate persona is established through the real bikers who compose the messages on the blog, and their own expertise in all matters related to motorcycles is sought, while the corporate message is communicated at the same time.

The "What's the Diff" About page reads similarly, where the community that the corporation has fostered online exists as an extension of the corporate community they seek to develop in their offices:

THE DIFF blog is all about the things that make the difference in business and in life. Most of the time, it's the little things. But every so often it's something really big. At Quicken Loans, our team members cite 'the ability to make a difference' as the biggest key to their job satisfaction. We consider this one of the most important facets of our company and corporate culture. So, we decided to search the planet for things that make a difference. Everyday, we want to celebrate those that make a difference and call out those that don't. It's that simple. (About)

This blog also attempts to create community online by emulating issues experienced in the real-life worlds of those who make up the community, while engaging others through the blog's examinations of these issues and the corresponding reader feedback available

online. In the case of What's the Diff, Quicken makes every effort to construct the blog as though it is entirely distinct from the purpose of the corporation. By claiming that their blog focuses not on loans, but on "people who make a difference," the purpose for reading it changes with the perceived change in authorial motive. The corporate objective in establishing this type of persona could be to ingratiate the company to the user by this seemingly altruistic mission in the blog. The company becomes less a financial software company and more a source to be trusted for advice, information, or even just a diversion by reading the posts and thoughts of the employees.

The three blogs' responses to the situational demands of the blog genre—as necessitated by the popularity of social software on the Internet at present, the community-based motivations as expressed by the writers on the blog, and the communities formed through audience interaction with the blog—are, therefore, categorically the same across corporations, where the blog is created, developed, and maintained with the purpose of establishing community online through shared interests and values of the writer and audience. The persona in these cases functions rhetorically to speak to the audience, to anticipate its needs and respond with content relevant to those perceived needs.

Tracing the blog genre along the macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic levels reveals more specifically how the texts respond to the elements of the rhetorical situation. At the macroscopic level, the connections between users and online communities can be traced through the specific interactions that users have with the writers on the blog, through the "comments" mechanism available on the blog. Though



content published on a blog can cover a variety of topics, in this instance from travel to motorcycles to loans, the blog has been significant to the development of Web 2.0 in that its interactive format of discussion and dialogue via these comments users can leave on a blog serves to foster community online. This commenting function enables the online community to be fully enacted, as the dialogue between the writer and the user occurs through the comments users are able to leave. As these users, in turn, comment in response to one another and to the writer, they are engaging in community through this discussion as they express knowledge of, opinions about, and shared experiences in the topic at hand.

At the mesoscopic level, the formal characteristics that establish the blog's setup are traced in order to determine the success of the corporation's use of form to create a space for the corporation and user to interact. There are a few main characteristics to which most blogs adhere that have remained the same during the 10-15 years blogs have been maintained. As Miller states: "most commentators define blogs on the basis of their reverse chronology, frequent updating, and combination of links with personal commentary" (par. 20). Blogs contain a number of formal characteristics: Since they are arranged in reverse chronological order, posts are always accompanied by timestamp that indicates the date and time of the post; the main text of the blog is typically posted in the main column of the webpage, with comments from other users posted below the main post; increasingly, blog homepages contain photographs or avatars of the author of the blog; and the writing oftentimes begins with an image or link, which contains information to which the person is responding, though this is not always the case. Tracing these

sample corporate blogs at the mesoscopic level reveals that all three blogs, “Travels with Tish,” “Hot Bikes,” and “What’s the Diff,” all follow these constraints, including reverse chronological order, images, and avatars for the speakers whether through the use of an actual photograph or an illustration. Although seemingly simple, these formal requirements of the genre are important for maintaining dialogue between the writer and the user since adhering to formal characteristics is what separates the blog genre from simply a website with online corporate content. While simply adhering to the formal characteristics is not enough to indicate successful implementation of a genre, it is a characteristic that must be met in order to justify the relative plausibility of the other elements that are traced. These elements establish the basic overarching concepts that define the genre at the mesoscopic level.

Finally, tracing at the microscopic level reveals the patterns and rhetoric that the writer must use in order to contribute to the social element of community-building since this is what motivates the user engagement and dialogue that are necessary for the blog to be truly successful. The rhetoric each of these blogs employs in its interaction with consumers is clear as well. “Travels with Tish” has its moments of relative rhetorical success only when it appeals to the readers in a way that promotes or elicits audience response. For instance, when Tish comments that she does not know what she is going to do on a trip, she gets input and feedback from readers recommending that she go to certain restaurants or profile certain places. But, when her travel plans are more set—and presumably comprised of strategically placed products or destinations that Midwest Airlines is trying to promote—users do not respond. They do not want to be “sold” on

certain travel options or just hear what she has to say about specific places; they want to interact, ask questions, and contribute their own knowledge when they perceive its relevance.

Since “Hot Bikes” contains few actual blog posts that differ from their existing online magazine, the blog is rhetorically ineffective in its use of content because the rhetoric employed does not subscribe to the blog genre. The user does not gain new information from the blog or have any reason to read the blog instead of just the articles in the main part of the online magazine. By extension, the reader is not persuaded to engage in dialogue with the writers of the blog; the user simply may read the information, view the recommended article, or take a look at the photograph posted and move on, if that user is interested in looking at the blog at all in the first place without any motivation to add an opinion or interact with other users on the topic. As the site overemphasizes its corporate connection to Harley-Davidson, the main purpose of the site is revealed through the numerous advertisements and links to items for sale. Though these products are likely of interest to the average user, the emphasis of the blog shifts from community-building and information-sharing to sales, and that shift does not encourage a user to engage in the blog’s dialogue.

In the case of “What’s the Diff,” the bloggers at Quicken are successful rhetorically at the microscopic level because of the macroscopic and mesoscopic successes. Users interact with and engage in dialogue with the writers on the site because, first, the site does not seek to simply sell users on Quicken products. Yes, users can find information that will help them with Quicken tools, but that is information the

user would have to specifically seek; it is there if the user needs it, but is not the main focus of the blog per-se. The blog posts are engaging and personable. They contain content that is relative to a main topic and also illustrate the blog posts with photographs and other graphics. The interface is clear and free of advertisements or anything that could be perceived as trying to sell the user on additional products or services. Ironically, it is by not trying to turn the blog into a mere marketing or sales tool that the corporation achieves the most effective use of the genre.

An analysis of the corporate blogging samples reveals that in terms of dialogue with the audience, the writer and the user must interact based on the premise that they exchange their own opinions or insights on an issue or event in an effort to share experience and information in search of community. Looking at three samples of corporate blogs from a variety of companies and with a variety of readers, the corporate use of blogs, though not always most successful, can be traced according to the degree of dialogue that occurs through the commenting function of the blog to reveal similar information about the user in the course of each analysis.

The corporate blog “Travels with Tish” attempts to use this dialogue to inform consumers about upcoming travel deals on the airline, but falls short in execution because it does not respond to the need for audience interaction with the genre. Speaking through the voice of Tish and her friends, Ginny and Sandy, the blog relates their adventures to Baltimore, Boston, and Toronto (among other places). While Tish certainly doesn’t tell the details of the trip the way a typical advertisement would read—carefully relating the prices, number of restaurants in the vicinity, and the quality of the hotels in a bulleted

format and impersonal style—instead, she tells about her adventures and experiences while traveling from a first-person point of view. The tone is rather conversational, but overall, there are few rhetorical elements that comply with the blog genre’s social aspect of information sharing based on experience. There are few stories or insights into what the “girls” do on their trips, other than relaying basic information about shopping at specific stores or eating at restaurants. Tish does not talk about what they said at dinner or how the women know each other or even much at all about them personally beyond the places they go and the deals they find. Reading the blog, it is uncertain whether Tish is even a real person since she shares nothing about her life or interests other than the confined recommendations she makes for places to go. Even her endorsements fall short making the fact that the blog is just a thinly veiled attempt at selling airline tickets only more apparent. Of a recent hotel in Massachusetts, she lists the prices for a room at the hotel and then follows it up by stating, “Would Ginny and I recommend this hotel? Absolutely. For a girlfriend getaway—or for a more romantic vacation with your guy” (Midwest Airlines). In a blog, persuasion occurs within the social context through the engaging stories that the writers tell about their own experiences and the corresponding readers who want to observe as the person experiences something first-hand, not through salesy catch phrases or impersonal statements such as this.

User dialogue with the blog can still be tracked, even with a less-than successful use of the genre. In the “Travels with Tish” blog, posts like the one quoted above receive no comments indicating that, although users may have read the posts, there is nothing persuading the reader to interact with the writer. Later posts, such as one that details a

day spent in New York and contains few advertisements and endorsements, but instead reveals what Trish and her friends plan to do without specifically mentioning products or services for sale (“I heard about this pizza place in a church. Should we try to find it?”; “Then we’ll head to Canal Street for knock-off purses and check out the small shops and boutiques in SoHo or the West Village,” and “The rest of the day is a bit sketchy right now, but I’m certain we can fill up the remaining hours without any trouble”) are much more successful. This post yielded the most comments of any of the other recent posts—four responses from users, all asking questions and making recommendations for what the girls should do. These responses indicate that the corporation will encourage open dialogue and participation from readers by appealing to the blog’s ability to build community through shared expertise and discussion, rather than mere endorsement or advertising.

The corporate blog “Hot Bikes,” by contrast, fulfills the same community-building needs that “Travels with Tish” does, though in a different way. In some senses, the blog sponsored at this site has many advantages that “Travels with Tish” does not. Motorcycle enthusiasts and Harley-Davidson owners (or potential owners) already make up a defined community that interacts in real-life. Therefore, the writers of this blog have a more defined, existing audience to which they can respond. Additionally, the blog is an offshoot of an existing online magazine, so people interested in motorcycles would already know about the magazine and, therefore, the blog does not have to attract readers independent from the actual service the company provides. The Tish blog, however, does not have these advantages; while the blog does speak to a specific audience, people who

are looking to book travel online, that audience is not specialized since a wide variety of Internet users are online looking at travel. Additionally, the parent company, Midwest Airlines, is an air travel company, not a general travel or vacation planning company. Therefore, people looking to book air travel are not necessarily also online looking for information about places to go and could be there to book a specific trip. These advantages are significant and should add to the blog's overall appeal.

However, this blog is only minimally successful in engaging user dialogue online. Few of the blog posts have user comments written to them, and the information available on the blog is little more than a condensed or editorialized version of the information available on the main part of the magazine with the exception of more photographs of motorcycles and links to external websites in the blog than in the main site. Also, there are many advertisements on the blog—along all of the columns, in the navigation, and at the top and bottom of the page. While all of the advertising is specific to the potential needs of the consumers on the site, such a visual emphasis on consumerism undermines the purpose of the content on a blog at the macroscopic level, which is to build community through user interaction. Therefore, since this content is not set up for users to have a clear or distinct dialogue with it, user interaction fails in the form of low responses or comments to the blog, even though the blog should be successful since the community is present and defined.

The final corporate blog, "What's the Diff," is significantly more successful at engaging user dialogue than either "Travels with Tish" or "Hot Bikes." Even though the audience for this blog is not as defined as Harley-Davidson's, and the content of the blog

posts varies considerably—talking sometimes about issues with loans and money, but more often than not covering other questions and topics, like recent office changes, events for upcoming holidays, and even reviewing other blogs—the level of participation is much more successful with this blog than with either of the other two. Although some blog posts do not have any comments, two on the main page alone have one comment, and another post has three. This is a greater rate of user dialogue with the blog posts than either of the other two examples, mainly because of the successes this blog exhibits at the macroscopic level. For instance, by covering a variety of topics, the blog serves as a collection of thoughts and ideas on a variety of issues and ideas common to all users who might visit the site. Although not everyone who comes to the site is a mortgage broker or banker, many people do work in offices and would be interested to read about things like Ice Cream Fridays or Grilled Cheese Wednesdays that the team at “What’s the Diff” is sponsoring. In addition, the navigation of the site enables user interaction, with links in the left-hand navigation that can take a user straight to customer service, for those who really do come to the blog with questions about mortgages or loans. Also, the top navigation has a button for “Submit your Story,” where any user can submit a story about a person who is, literally, “making a difference,” not just in banking, but in any facet of life. This level of engagement illustrates another success of this blog: It is not simply informative about the products and services that the parent company sells, but it is used to build a community around the idea of making a difference, something that many people feel they can and do contribute to and want to read about. So it is through the variety of information people can find in and add to the blog that makes it most successful in



community building, which fulfills a major need of the genre. This analysis of the dialogue that these blogs initiate with consumers reveals that although “Travels with Tish,” “Hot Bikes,” and “What’s the Diff” are all highly successful at the formal, content, and social levels, the methods through which their messages are relayed are still key to how they interact with their audiences and thus how prolific their dialogues with users become.

The blog, therefore, presents a unique opportunity for professional writers to interact with users about corporate products not only through the development of rhetorically sound text, but also through the development of the blog’s interface on the macroscopic and mesoscopic levels of genre development. As shown through the most successful blog, “What’s the Diff,” it is the availability of additional links and features within the overall site that contributes to the rhetorical effectiveness of Quicken’s use of the genre since the user feels engaged in community through the additional links to add personal stories or seek community online. Therefore, Professional Writing, through its emphasis on rhetorical expertise, is a field that offers important perspective on corporate use of the blog genre, making this an important example of how the field should embrace New Media and the resulting emerging workplace genres.

### *The Podcast*

The podcast has become an important component of community and social software use of Web 2.0 for a variety of reasons, most notably, its populist appeal. A podcast consists of an audio recording that is posted online and disseminated for public

review. Researcher Angelo Fernando states, “Podcasting simply refers to the act of making audio programs available for download to an MP3 player” (10). These programs can be produced by anyone with basic recording software and are nearly always available for free, adding to their populist appeal. Fernando states that because podcasts are accessed on a “pull” model, where users must seek out a specific podcast and download it or choose to subscribe to it through syndication (11). The “pull” model within the podcast, therefore, is one of its chief distinguishing characteristics from radio, since the individual user is in charge of the nature and order of audio broadcasts he or she will listen to at one time, as opposed to the “push” model of radio, where the announcer determines what will be broadcast and when. As the podcast has become increasingly popular and more widely used with the widespread use of MP3 players beginning in 2001, it has evolved into a genre separate from radio, yet separate from other online media as well (Fernando 10).

In contrast to blogs or video, corporate use of podcasts more often than not include some segment of interviewing, where a host asks an expert in a field questions about recent breakthroughs or discoveries. As with radio, these interviews may include user questions, either read from the Internet by the host or read by the user directly via recorded voicemails that the producers have received. In the event that the direct interview is not part of the podcast, then the moderator asks user questions that have been emailed or posted to a blog or message board to facilitate the information relayed in the podcast. This question-and-answer setup, whether established through multiple or single speakers, is the chief formal component of the podcast that must be met and distinguishes

the most important component of the dialog that takes place between writers and users via the podcast.

Corporations use podcasts to inform users about technical, scientific, or related material that is typically connected to the company's products and services, but that does not promote the company's products directly. The advantage of a corporation's use of a podcast as a means for connecting to consumers is that the corporation can appeal to the user by making an expert available via the recording. Since users will seek out a podcast of interest based on the perceived knowledge of the speaker on any topic—whether it is for pure entertainment or informative purposes—the corporation therefore is in a unique position to present content that is of value to potential users, which, in turn, offers corporation the opportunity to promote their name, products, and services.

The rhetorical situation to which corporate podcasts respond, therefore, is closely tied to the integrity of the information presented and the access the listener has to the experts interviewed in the program. A situation is thereby established where the genre responds to the needs of the audience in the online community through providing experts in fields of interest relevant to users and also offers these users the opportunity to ask these experts questions in order to gain insight and additional information.

Book publisher Simon and Schuster sponsor the podcast "Simon Says," which features information about upcoming books that will be published and readings by their authors. This podcast provides highly relevant information to users seeking information about authors or works in which they are interested in learning. While much of this format is akin to a reading at a local bookstore, where the author reads from a selected

passage of the book, the segments largely lack any response to the audience. The motivation of the podcast is largely centered on the promotion of the author and book—not discussion or interaction between the audience and speaker on any level.

“The American Family,” a podcast sponsored by Whirlpool, meets a variety of situational demands. This podcast is an extended discussion of issues broadly related to anything that could impact the American family—from changes in daylight savings time to discussion of “Green,” or environmentally friendly, appliances. All episodes consist of the same moderator interviewing experts in fields related to the topic of the week, adding to the ethos of the program by not only providing the user with a constant connection to the same moderator, but also by offering a variety of experts from fields outside of Whirlpool; therefore, their advice and information do not have to be suspect because of their affiliation with the company. These questions can also be submitted to the corporate website via a message board, email, or even via voicemail. During the course of the podcast, the moderator reads submitted questions, attributing to the degree of user dialogue with the podcast.

“Animal Advice,” a podcast sponsored by Purina dog food, has many successes in conforming to the rhetorical situation of the podcast. By having a narrow audience to begin with, these podcasts feature more defined issues related to animal health and maintenance. Short segments cover how to trim a dog’s nails, when to bathe a cat, and other very specific issues. All of the advice is given by veterinarians and technical experts who can provide trusted information to the listener. Also, the information remains highly relevant to the listener through the use of the question-and-answer format

with many of the questions submitted by specific listeners, giving the format a personable feel.

Tracing the podcast genre along the macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic levels reveals more specifically how the texts respond to the elements of the rhetorical situation. At the macroscopic level, the connections between users and online communities can be traced through the specific interactions that users have with the experts interviewed on the podcast, according to how available corporations make direct access to these experts. The content of the podcast must contain a question-and-answer session, accomplished via interview or from user questions. Finally, the podcast is fostered by the social software elements of Web 2.0 because of the populist appeal of the genre, but also in the fact that the interview process makes experts available to users online, as users are able to ask these people questions to which they will respond in the podcast. All of the samples chosen meet these requirements except “Simon Says.” This podcast does not meet one of the most important formal requirements, in that “Simon Says” is only available from the Simon and Schuster website, whereas “The American Family” and “Animal Advice” are both available through Apple’s iTunes. Since this service is a chief arena through which podcasts receive attention and are available, posting a corporate podcast on iTunes could be considered a formal requirement for podcasts. By only making the podcast available through the corporate website, Simon and Schuster are ignoring a significant opportunity for users to find the podcast through the widely available podcast directory on iTunes and, therefore, force the user to find the podcast at the website, an outdated mode of connection to the user.

At the mesoscopic level, the formal characteristics that establish the podcast are traced in order to determine the success of the corporation's use of form to create a space for the corporation and user to interact. In terms of form, the podcast must be an audio broadcast, available in a format that is compatible for an MP3 player, and offered for free for a user to download or subscribe to. A file that takes too long to download, is not uploaded to the site properly, or is of poor sound quality will disrupt the dialogue between the writer/speaker and user. For example, "The American Family" podcasts are very broad in scope and are very long—oftentimes running 60 to 90 minutes. This is mainly problematic because of the related formal concern: if a user plans to download and listen to the podcast on a portable listening device, then that single podcast could take up a significant portion of the device's battery time, which is something that may dissuade a user from downloading it in the first place. While there is not an absolute determination of generic success according to length, the formal MP3 compatibility requirement demands that podcasts at least not command a longer battery life—or too big a percentage of it—than an MP3 player has. Also, technology must be available for the user to submit questions to the corporation in the first place, so a feedback platform that is functional and user-friendly is highly important to the success of a podcast.

Finally, tracing at the microscopic level reveals the patterns and rhetoric that the podcast must use in order to contribute to the social element of community-building through the expertise of the subject of the podcast and availability of question-asking since this is what motivates the user engagement and dialogue that are necessary for the podcast to be truly successful. In terms of the rhetoric employed by the corporation, in

each instance it is the ethos of the speaker that is most important in the user interaction with the podcast because users are more likely to seek advice based on the presumed authority and knowledge of the speaker, which must be gained over time in a recurring, single-speaker podcast or through the perceived expertise of the guest speaker in an interview format. The social interaction these companies provide are most critical to how they engage with users in dialogue. Only Purina offers a special area on their website that allows users to submit questions for the experts on the podcast. While “Simon Says” and “The American Family” have potential for success, by ignoring the necessity of social interaction and user dialogue with the genre, they risk shutting their listeners out of the genre, effectively wasting the efforts they put in to creating these texts in the first place.

Podcasts generate dialogue with the audience through this question-asking as well. Podcasts connect users to presumed experts and hosts through this question-and-answer process; the user seeks information directly from someone knowledgeable on the subject and is persuaded to engage in dialogue with the podcast by the ethos of the speaker, which must be established through the relevance and informational quality of the podcast. This level of expertise and information-sharing must be met because in order for the podcast to constitute a successful use of the genre, a program cannot merely consist of one person talking about a company’s products in a commercial-like fashion. Looking at three samples of corporate podcasts that use the media in a variety of ways shows how corporations engage in different types of dialogue with users.

In terms of dialogue between the corporation and audience, the “Simon Says” podcast is revealed again to be least successful. Although this podcast is very informative in terms of the company’s upcoming offerings, its use of the podcast genre is mostly successful at the content level only. For example, most of the podcasts consist of a short introduction about the book delivered by a moderator, and then the writer reads a piece from his or her book before the podcast concludes. This format benefits the user because if that person seeks information about a particular book, the podcast offers an ample opportunity to hear directly from the author, by giving the reader access to personal, and certainly expert, points of view on the content of the book. However, the biggest content issue with “Simon Says” is the absence of the question-and-answer format. The chief characteristic of the podcast is the interview—the opportunity to find out information directly from a trusted source. Although the author’s reading gives readers insight into a key passage or part of a book in advance of its wider availability, no new information or personal perspectives on the work is gained. Therefore, the problem with Simon and Schuster’s use of the podcast is not only that it does not meet the content expectations of the podcast, but also the dialogue is not available for the user to interact with and submit questions to the author on the corporate website. By not making that level of question-and-answer available to users, the fundamental mesoscopic purpose of the interview/question-and-answer situation is not met, in that the user does not glean new information from the expert speaking.

Again, through this genre analysis, the potential role of the professional writer in the implementation of these genres becomes clear not only in the writing and production



of the actual podcast program, but in the development of the tool and interface as a whole. By understanding the genre rhetorically, the need for a question-asking mechanism available through the corporation's website becomes more apparent, and clearly, at least in the case of Simon and Schuster, an advocate within the organization needs to be present in order to ensure this generic element is available to users for the dialogue requirement to be met. Ensuring the people who are interviewed or who are presenting information on the podcast are able to appeal to potential listeners has a rhetorical function as well, in that the ethos of the speaker must be significant in order to attract a listener via the podcast's pull technology format. Furthermore, professional writers could also ensure the format of the program remains relevant and useful. By providing their expertise to the program's composition or editing, the writer can ensure the podcast is rhetorically effective and attentive to the expectations of the audience, namely, by ensuring that the podcast is of an appropriate length, while still providing the best information to users, thus producing a product that keeps both the informational and technological needs of the listener in mind.

### *Online Video*

With the advent of the video-sharing website, YouTube, created in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, popular use of video on the web has increased exponentially (Cloud). This is an important moment in the online video genre because user-made video that would be uploaded and shared with the online community was popularized by this site in particular. Online video is characterized as any moving picture

captured via any video recording device and posted online for public display. Some online videos consist of what look like home videos that users create to editorialize on current events or issues, other videos consist of segments of television shows and movies pieced together to develop a new story, while others consist of a combination of these two features. As the use of this medium has become increasingly ubiquitous, corporations have begun to use the popularity of the medium by incorporating video in similar ways to promote and sell their products and services. As analysis of the videos produced and shared on the Mondonation, Coca-Cola, and Jeep corporate sites will show, these videos have transcended their use for mere popular entertainment value and now constitute their own distinct genre.

Corporations use video to engage and involve users in product promotion or development in typically very direct ways though oftentimes doing so in a way that is incidental to the process or is so blatant that the product placement is tongue-in-cheek. As opposed to corporate-sponsored blogs or podcasts, videos must be very open about their use of the product, perhaps because it is a more visual medium that cannot obscure the product as easily as the more anonymous speaker of a blog or podcast can. In corporate use of online video, businesses encourage users either to use their products in new or inventive ways or to share their personal stories with the products and contribute these stories via online, diary-like videos. While these video journals are really little more than free advertising for the company's products, in order for the dialogue to occur between the corporation and the user in this instance, the user must feel like he or she is contributing a voice that is new and unique to the corporation. This user interaction

cannot simply consist of creating a different kind of commercial, but instead the video makes a statement about that user's particular interaction with the product.

The rhetorical situation to which corporate online videos respond, therefore, is closely tied to the authenticity of the product promotion, where the product that is being promoted must be clearly defined, but the creator of the video must express a purpose that reveals an individual connection with the product. Analysis of the corporate use of online video reveals that the samples chosen, "The Coke Show," "Mondonation," and Jeep's "Way Beyond Trail," function in different ways, but still operate in response to the same basic rhetorical situation demanded by the genre.

"The Coke Show" is a contest-based video site, where users are encouraged to compete for awards for the most original and inventive uses of Coke products by submitting videos displaying this use online. In turn, users have submitted videos showing massive structures created with empty bottles of Coca-Cola, which other users evaluate and vote on to determine the "winner." There are a variety of contests that are run simultaneously, with a range of just a few entries to over two dozen entries in the open contests at any given time.

Mondonation is a clothing and bedding company that "is committed to inspiring positive, global change through the development of sustainable, charitable strategies" (About). The premise of the company's product is that a consumer creates a statement that begins with "I believe" that is then printed onto a t-shirt or pillowcase that the consumer purchases. As part of this purchase, the consumer selects a charitable organization to which part of the proceeds of the sale are donated, and that organization is

printed on the sleeve or seam of the t-shirt or pillowcase the person purchases. The website is designed as a series of videos that explain the premise and ideas behind the Mondonation concept. The website also contains a section called “Stories” in which consumers can submit their own stories about their beliefs, why they are important to them, and (most importantly) why they decided to purchase their t-shirt. In one “story,” a mother explains that she wears her t-shirt as a reminder to her children that it is important to have, and stick by, one’s beliefs. In another, a couple make a trans-continental bike trip—while wearing different Mondonation t-shirts along the way—to try to raise more money for the charitable organization they chose. In this instance, these user testimonials are not overt advertising, though they do feature the products in a prominent, though essentially personal, way.

In Jeep’s “Way Beyond Trail” video campaign, the user does not contribute a video to the site, but instead decides the course that the corporation’s video will take. In a method similar to a Choose Your Own Adventure book, the website consists of 40 separate videos that document a camping trip with four friends (including the user), all of which constitute a “trail” the campers follow. By determining which decisions the characters will take—“follow the path to meet the old man” or “row your canoe back to safety”—the user dictates the nature, length, and path that the video takes. In this instance, the user interaction with the product occurs throughout the video as the campers take the Jeep Patriot to all of their destinations. By entering some personal information, the user becomes part of the scene as the characters speak directly “to” the user and even refer to the user by name. This interaction responds to the audience need for community

in that Jeep uses the vehicle of the community of the campers to promote and sell the Jeep Patriot product.

Tracing the online video genre along the macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic levels reveals more specifically how the texts respond to the elements of the rhetorical situation. At the macroscopic level, the connections between users and online communities can be traced through the specific appeals the users make to other viewers through the video. Users create community online through the use of video and the resulting interaction they have with other users' videos. In the case of "The Coke Show," user interaction occurs as users vote to determine the winning video, according to the most original use of the product. This fosters a community online where users can assume a sense of authority as they evaluate and choose a winner among the entries. For Mondonation, by submitting videos, the users share in the brand; considering that part of the corporate purpose of this company is to connect individuals through a shared sense of community responsibility, sharing too in the corporate message through submission of a video is important not only to creating user community online, but to furthering the message of the corporation as a business. In the case of Jeep, it is the action of participating in the trail in cooperation with the other campers that constitutes a kind of community in which the user operates.

At the mesoscopic level, the formal characteristics of online video are traced in order to determine the success of the corporation's use of form to create a space for the corporation and user to interact. In terms of form, videos often include some kind of title slide that introduces the short film and typically incorporate a variety of different scenes

in order to tell the story. As with podcasts, format constraints in file format and accessibility dictate how well a video interacts with the user since a file that takes too long to download, is not uploaded to the site properly, or is of poor quality will disrupt the dialogue between the writer/speaker and user. Only one company, Coke, allows its contributors to make the videos simultaneously available through YouTube, which, just as podcasts available on iTunes, is one distinct formal requirement of the genre since it is so ubiquitous in its dissemination of original video.

Finally, tracing at the microscopic level reveals the patterns and rhetoric that a video must use in order to contribute to the social element of community-building through the authenticity of the video response. The site's video example first dictates the nature of the videos to come, since the video typically provides instructions on how the user will participate, as well as an example for how the video should be constructed and organized. In each instance, the corporation first produces a sample video that sets the tone and rhetorical situation for the formal element of audience response—long or short, conversational or documentary, mediated engagement (through voting or determining a course of action) or original video production and contribution. In the same content vein as the blog and podcast, however, even though the video can—and more often than not must—be open about the use and promotion of the company product, the user creativity and perspective on the product is invaluable to making the video more than simply an online version of a television commercial. In terms of social engagement, the online video must connect users to each other as well as to the business in order to be effective; users must be persuaded to interact by not only contributing their own work, but by being

able to evaluate others' videos as well. The use of the product in the video must be specific to the user, rather than displayed for mass use.

Rhetorically, in these videos, it is pathos in a variety of forms that engages the user—emotion in journal or diary video, passion or interest in a project or in winning in contest video, and emotional connection to the characters in interactive, narrative video. Thus corporations must persuade the user to act within the video—to contribute, to vote, to continue the story through the video-based trail. This requires a rhetorical connection between the creator and user. In all cases, however, the tone of video contribution is first set by the corporation itself; this initial rhetorical expectation set by the corporation and then followed by user response sets the standard of the types of contributions it is seeking from users and gives the user a distinctive glimpse into what type of message the corporation is interested in viewing. Looking at three samples of corporate videos that use the media as video diary, competition, and as user-driven advertising, the corporate use of video can be traced to reveal similar information about the writer/user dialogue in the course of each analysis.

Dialogue is initiated and maintained between the user and the corporation on the basis of the exchange of video via the website. Mondonation, Coca-Cola, and Jeep all have very different, though successful, responses to how they operate on this level within the online video genre. Both Coca-Cola and Mondonation engage in dialogue with users through the video examples they set up for users to engage with the product via video on the website. In the case of Coca-Cola, the dialogue is directly elicited through the competitions and contests they sponsor, whereas at Mondonation, though the option to

submit a story is less overt, through the many videos that share the personal stories of the spokespeople and even the company's owner, the features of the t-shirts and the corporate philosophies on community serve as examples for how the consumer may become personally connected to the product and want to share that connection with other people. By providing a variety of models for creating the video, users respond in a similar fashion through their own testimonials, and as a result, the company is able to engage users and promote its own message for free through their consumers. In "The Way Beyond Trail," dialogue is initiated through participation in the trail: The various actions the characters have during the adventure in the Jeep Patriot connect the user to both the product and this content through the interaction with the story's plotline as well as the characters more specifically. The dialogue between the corporation and the user is key to all of these uses of the genre by these companies, though in different ways. For Mondonation, social interaction is achieved by users contributing videos and offering testimonials to their personal experiences with the product. Coke, by contrast, encourages engagement through contest as well as contribution. Finally, Jeep, through its mediated video environment, allows users to interact with the characters they have created, rather than other users in a simulated community online.

The online video genre demonstrates the importance of an expanded scope within Professional Writing to reach beyond print-based genres. The rhetorical function of the genre as part of the corporate message and means through which it interacts with potential consumers must be fully understood and responded to in order for the use of the genre to be rhetorically effective. By adhering to the macroscopic requirements of



formal, content, and social levels of user interaction while also maintaining dialogue with users and setting effective rhetorical standards for videos to which users contribute and with which they interact on the corporate websites, a rhetorically sound approach to the genre is needed. A professional writer can provide this perspective because of the field's emphasis on rhetorical training.

*Corporate Rhetoric and New Media: Implications for Professional Writing*

The rhetoric each of these genres employs in appealing to their audiences is particularly important in considering how professional writers could produce these texts in the workplace. First, because these genres apply to distinct rhetorical situations, there is specific rhetoric that must be used in order for their use by corporations to be successful, not only in order to fulfill generic requirements and expectations, but also in order to effectively reappropriate genres that are widely thought of as useful for popular, entertainment, or corporate purposes.

In all instances, corporations must follow the rules of the existing expectations users have of the genre. This means that a blog, podcast, or video cannot simply contain the retooled rhetoric of a thinly veiled marketing campaign. The corporation must understand how a blog, podcast, or video works and what drives users to create and respond to those texts popularly in order to make their corporate use of them successful. For this reason, the blog "What's the Diff," the podcast "Animal Advice," and the online videos at "The Coke Show" are successful. Each of these samples respond to the rhetorical situation of the medium: They follow the content, formal, social context

requirements that popular forms of these genres take on. However, they are most rhetorically effective through the dialogue they encourage with the user. By embracing their corporate connections in order to establish ethos with the user; making means of communication available, easy, and relevant to their needs; and by allowing the texts to contribute to and create a community online, these corporations use New Media most effectively.

Given that only one of these genres, the blog, is actually *written*, it would seem unclear why professional writers would be involved in the creation of these texts at all. However, the proclivity of Web 2.0 and the changing user interaction with the Internet in our current *kairos* means that implementation of these genres will become increasingly important to writers because they present a new avenue of corporate connection to the consumer. Therefore, because of the distinct rhetoric these genres require in order to be successful, writers are particularly able to develop, create, and, when appropriate, write the content that goes into the making not only of blogs, but of podcasts and video as well. Additionally, writers can evaluate these productions as texts to assess them from a rhetorical and critical point of view, to ensure they are meeting all of the generic requirements, and to employ the most effective form of corporate rhetoric. Finally, as members of the workplace charged with assessing the most effective available means of persuasion in terms of how a corporate message will reach an audience, professional writers should be prepared to recommend and pursue these avenues in response to such a task.

## Conclusions

The tension between the point of view on Professional Writing presented by James Porter and Patricia Sullivan versus that depicted by Michael Knievel lies at the heart of the problem behind the treatment of New Media within Professional Writing. While Porter and Sullivan maintain that writing should remain separate from New Media because writing is the distinguishing element of the field, Knievel maintains that the field's overemphasis on the humanities risks making it less dynamic and adaptive. This fracture in the most basic identity of Professional Writing characterizes the treatment of both writing and technologies in its research journals, where these elements are addressed as two separate entities that cannot be combined to produce a unified text.

I propose, however, that the answer to these conflicting points of view lies somewhere in readjusting the notion of what professional writers actually do in the workplace, and this must come from an assessment of what workplaces are producing. As technology continues to advance and the Internet continues to take on new, changing roles within society, businesses will adapt to embrace these new means of reaching their consumers. Therefore, professional writers, too, must continue to advance by being knowledgeable about these texts and willing to craft them with the same rhetorical effectiveness that they do user's guides and technical reports so as to best serve the needs

of the audience to which the corporations respond. It becomes not only limiting, but also unrealistic, to think that a professional writer, as part of an organization, is only tasked to produce written documents that are printed, bound, and distributed in a traditional manner.

If Professional Writing is to continue to be the dynamic profession it is capable of being, the focus of its research must not be on technology or writing or on one means of communicating, but must instead be defined by the tasks most relevant to writers as part of their daily lives. Of course Professional Writing academics should not to shift to an entirely descriptive mode of teaching, where they simply reinforce the methods advocated by businesses despite whatever rhetorical, ethical, or impractical methods may be embedded in them. However, there is a difference between institutionalizing business practices despite their effectiveness and responding, as a field, to the new challenges businesses present to writers.

Previous studies of Professional Writing programs demonstrate that “a program that invests too heavily in humanistic study will fail ‘to prepare [students] for the writing they will have to do in business and industry’” (Spigelman and Grobman 52). While abandoning the humanistic approach and rhetorical groundwork would be detrimental to the understanding of language, rhetoric, and communication these programs provide in lieu of “instruction in basic skills, the fundamentals...such as ‘outlining, good grammar, and revision skills,’” reflecting New Media genres within programs and instruction does not require that humanistic approaches be left by the wayside (Spigelman and Grobman 52). By contrast, these genres constitute a synthesis of academic and business needs,

through the intense study of rhetoric and adherence to rhetorical standards that lies at the crux of any truly effective use of the genres for businesses or audiences.

For this change to happen, critics must change their perception of what writing is in the workplace and how businesses will communicate with consumers. Corporations, in an effort to connect to users in new ways of communicating, have begun to expand online through genres that use text and technology together to operate within the new environment on the web. The types of texts businesses produce to connect with consumers are changing, in response to the new user interaction with the internet. As these blogs, podcasts, and online videos are reconceived as genres, their use by corporations reveals that these texts operate within distinct rhetorical environments where those who produce the text and those who use and interact with it engage in a distinct dialogue. By keeping the focus on genre study, and how rhetoric operates within the genre to connect the business to the user, Professional Writing as a field can open itself up to studying how writers can impact the use of these technologies without completely fusing with communications or digital media fields. As advocates for audience, professional writers occupy a distinct perspective within these environments, as being aptly capable of crafting text that most directly responds to audience needs. In this case, writing still remains the distinct study of Professional Writing scholarship, but its applicability expands beyond the confines of the printed page to an entirely new concept of the tasks and functions of the professional writer in the corporate workplace.

If scholarship, research, and Professional Writing programs do not embrace these expanding notions of what writers produce, they risk closing off a its writers and

graduates to this growing notion of what text is and how it can operate. Professional writers who work in businesses where New Media solutions are proposed are at the whim of the request that ends up on their desks, and they must, at that point, either rise to the challenge and create a text that ultimately responds to the needs of the corporation's audience, or they may feel bewildered and lost in this new, unfamiliar rhetorical situation. While it is important that Professional Writing programs not entirely bend to business needs, it is the educator's responsibility, ultimately, to offer students the most opportunities to succeed. That cannot happen until more attention to these genres is paid within the scholarship and research that leads the field.

The result is a revolution in how professional writers view technology and how they define themselves. As they use technology in the workplace in ways that are inventive and embrace New Media, new rhetorical avenues for communication and audience interaction open for exploration through these emerging genres.