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The Chronicle of Higher Education

# Chronicle Careers

Friday, August 5, 2005

## Master (or Mistress) of Your Domain

By [MICHAEL J. BUGEJA](#)

### FIRST PERSON

Personal experiences on the job market

For better or worse, the Internet is playing a larger role in editorial decisions about books and in promotion and tenure evaluations. It is commonplace for external

reviewers to Google Web sites or troll databases before rendering their decisions on behalf of publishing houses and institutions.

Search committees also are using the Web to evaluate the writing or scholarship of job applicants before inviting them to on-campus interviews.

As director of the journalism school at Iowa State University, I'm responsible for the academic fates of some eight assistant professors hoping to earn tenure, with two faculty searches in progress and several associate professors who might seek promotion soon. I've also published academic and trade books.

My latest, *Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age* (Oxford, 2005), warns professors about the dangers of the Web, a dynamic but unmerciful medium. But as a journalist, I am also a realist. I want professors to remain at my school, earning tenure and promotion. So I have come to grips with the notion that they may have to showcase their publications and scholarship online.

The cold, hard facts of both book publication and tenure decisions demand that they do. That's why I advise authors to create a Web site with the title of their texts as the domain name and to assemble other sites with domain names identifying their scholarship.

### Book-Site Savvy

Authors are responsible for getting their books reviewed, purchased by libraries, and adopted by professors for use in research or in the classroom. In the past that required an author to fill out a questionnaire for the publisher, identifying editors, book reviewers,

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and colleagues who might have interest in the work.

The Internet has changed that.

Consider what happened to my book, *Interpersonal Divide*. Advance reading copies were sent to editors, reviewers, and colleagues, but many of those copies ended up as "used works" being sold on Amazon.com and other online vendors -- ironic, given the book's theme.

My editors and I still don't know who hijacked and sold those review copies, but for all intents and purposes, four years of research, writing, and revising had been jeopardized because major review journals only consider advance copies, not published books.

To save the work from oblivion, I e-mailed reviewers and technology columnists, directing them to [the Web site](#) I created for the book and asking if they would like a copy. Several said yes, generating reviews and citations that I added to my site under "latest news." Without the site, the book would have died along with the trees that gave life to it at the printing press. Instead, it went on to win a research award with reviews in top publications.

That's the benefit of a book site.

One of my editors, Sean Mahoney, also credits the book site for augmenting classroom sales. Without the site, professors who might adopt the work must rely on the publisher's online catalog. But those catalog Web sites "are almost completely static," he says, and offer minimal updates. Oxford's digital catalog directs viewers to my site for "reviews, material for classroom discussion, and more."

My domain name, [interpersonal-divide.org](http://interpersonal-divide.org), put my book "in a unique position," Mahoney says, since so few professors create Web sites for their books. That won't be the case for long, because the next generation of technically savvy professors is rapidly filling the ranks of academic departments.

Holly Carver, director of the University of Iowa Press, says that most academic authors continue to have Web sites associated with their home departments. "Thus," she says, "the information is often fairly telegraphic and loaded toward classroom material, the design depends on each department's sophistication, updates are infrequent, and there are no links to publishers or bookstores."

"These authors form the bulk of our list at the moment," she adds.

But Carver's authors do include some with

their own independent book sites, such as one called the "[Journals & Memoirs of Carl Klaus](#)," which features the works of Klaus, a professor emeritus at the University of Iowa and founding director of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program.

Although book sites are somewhat new to academic publishing, trade authors have been assembling them for several years now on the Internet. Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster, 2000) can be found at [bowlingalone.com](#) and [bowlingalone.org](#) and Howard Rheingold's *Smart Mobs* (Basic Books, 2003) can be found on [smartmobs.com](#).

Trade houses emphasize the importance of a snappy title, in part so that it can metamorphose easily into a domain. Still, some of the best titles are snapped up by others before authors even contemplate creation of a book site; so once your title is set, buy the domain.

Case in point: In researching this article I discovered that domains for *Weaving the Web*, the best-selling trade book by Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, were taken by others, except for [weavingtheweb.org](#), which I bought and will transfer to Berners-Lee for free upon his request.

If you're considering a book site, you should realize the convention of the Internet: People expect things for free. This is not the medium for professors concerned about copyright issues or intellectual property. If you're in that crowd, you won't easily share your pedagogies or methodologies so your site will be static -- or worse, will seem purely self-promotional.

Visitors to my book site have access to all manner of free information, including lectures for each chapter; sample syllabi for large, middle-range, senior, master's, and doctoral classes; end-of-chapter materials; forms for paper assignments, journal exercises, and presentations; sample midterms and final exams; a bibliography; and an index.

I also provide a 103-page instructor's manual in both Word and PDF formats. Online manuals save the publisher printing costs and allow potential users to manipulate syllabi, lectures, and other downloads. The most popular free feature on my site is a twice monthly teaching module meant to stimulate classroom discussion. To date I've added more than two dozen such modules to the site on content too topical to include in a new edition but nonetheless related to the concept of the work.

My book site also contains reviews, recent articles, and information about me, the author. Amid all of that free material is one exception: the book. That you have to order online from Oxford University Press.

That's the point of the site, and all links lead to that outcome.

### **Academic Branding**

Take a look at your department's or school's promotion and tenure guidelines. Chances are, as in my school, promotion to associate professor requires that the candidate be "a significant contributor to the field or profession, with the potential for national distinction." According to our rules, promotion to professor requires that candidates "be recognized by his/her professional peers within the university, as well as nationally and/or internationally, for the quality of the contribution to his/her discipline."

The question is, how do you document "the potential for national distinction" or the "quality" of your contributions to the discipline nationally and internationally? Web sites showcasing scholarship can help do that.

"Creating an online domain -- especially for a tenure-track professor -- is an integral part of developing what in advertising would be called branding," says Jay Newell, an assistant professor in the journalism school I head at Iowa State.

"I am master of the [mediatown.org](http://mediatown.org) domain," he says, which will go online this summer, featuring his research on, appropriately, media saturation, exploring "the nearly constant contact that people have with mass media."

Newell notes that at Iowa State, tenure-track faculty members are told they need to develop a national reputation in a specific area -- "in essence, the researcher's brand" -- that needs to be communicated quickly and effectively.

"The Internet offers researchers, even those starting out, the ability to lay some of the foundation for their own brand," he says.

Joel Geske, an associate professor and head of advertising at my school, says professors should brand their research because the academic marketplace has become so crowded that substantive scholarship can go unnoticed. The best brands help people identify products, he says, and "intellectual property is also a product."

Geske, an administrator here for eight years, understands how budget cuts have increased the need for academic branding: "There is a

shrinking number of tenured or tenurable professors, along with an increasing pressure to hire those who can become 'superstars,' not unlike what is happening in sports. Big names that have big ideas, and can generate outside funding to support those ideas, are in great demand, and we come to know about them by their 'brands.'"

His own research explores brain processes stimulated by media, and Geske is in the process of branding his work with the name PhysioMedia lab. "This is a place where brain physiology and media come together," he says. "It gives a descriptive umbrella concept for my work that is both specific, yet broad enough to cover several lifetimes of research."

To protect his brand, Geske spent \$42.10 to purchase domains using several extensions, including the one most desired by book publishers and institutions, .org.

"I was careful to register the domain names in my own name and using my own financial resources," he says. "Intellectual property belongs to the creator and the person with the ideas."

Should he ever decide to take a new job at a different university, he will leave behind the real lab in our building but bring his digital one to his new institution. "In effect," he concludes, "I have branded myself."

I'm not a fan of academic branding. Only a few years ago, before the Internet revolution, professors were largely free of marketing, except by the occasional textbook representative who left his or her card in the door crack. Now we work in digital and cellular towers, not ivory ones, and so we all must adapt.

That includes me.

This year I set up a research site with an assistant professor, Daniela Dimitrova, who shares my concern about the Internet's dynamic but unstable features. In such an environment, footnotes often disappear in online documents and databases, threatening scholarship as we know it.

Our research has been featured in *The Chronicle* and other publications and journals, and all of that is accessible via our site, whose domain name -- halfnotes.org -- suggests our contribution to the discipline: "the half-life of Internet footnotes," or the time it takes for one half of footnotes to decay in an online document.

Whereas the objective of a book site is to sell the text, the goal of a research site is to provide access to scholarly work, establishing

that narrow niche necessary to document "the potential for national distinction" and "contributions to the discipline."

Such a site should explain why your work makes that contribution. We do so with links explaining how our research began, where it has taken us, and where we intend to take it. The site also contains downloadable pictures and vitas along with book recommendations and reprints. Other links go to my book site and Dimitrova's Web site.

So when editors or colleagues query us about our research, we answer briefly via e-mail and then send them to [halfnotes.org](http://halfnotes.org), which we update whenever we publish new data.

True, maintaining such a research site is one more chore in our digital day, but that simple upkeep also serves to accumulate the history of our scholarship and our contribution to the discipline.

### **Assembling a Site**

Charles Self, dean of the Gaylord College of Communication at the University of Oklahoma, notes that, as with all such tools, the Internet can be used appropriately or inappropriately. It is important, he says, to construct a book or research site that not only promotes your work but that also serves your constituents with the emphasis on "new knowledge."

"To the extent that technologies have enhanced, rather than detracted, from the development and dissemination of new knowledge," Self writes in an email, "they have come to play an expanding role in the success of faculty members in achieving tenure and promotion."

One key in assembling a successful book or research site is to conceive of a memorable title that symbolizes new knowledge, such as Joel Geske's "PhysioMediaLab" or Jay Newell's "Mediatown."

That title will serve as your domain name. (The extensions .org, .com, .net are preferred over other more-available ones.)

Choose a title that describes your discipline (such as "magazine-nonfiction.com"), suggests but does not define your work ("[halfnotes.org](http://halfnotes.org)"), or advances your concept or theory descriptively or suggestively ("[livingethics.com](http://livingethics.com)" or "[interpersonal-divide.org](http://interpersonal-divide.org)").

In constructing your site, be sure to:

- Create a graphic of your book or

research concept. As Dimitrova and I learned in designing a research concept for "halfnotes.org," the challenge is to turn an abstraction into a concrete symbol.

- Provide a statement about your "book concept" or "research goals" that distinguishes your work from others and carves a niche that colleagues (especially external reviewers) might remember.
- Provide links to your published or presented works. You can ask publishers to allow you to post pdf files of your papers and presentations or otherwise direct visitors to a URL provided by the publisher or association.
- Provide a downloadable headshot of you with a short biography and complete vita. Reviewers or reporters often request such data, and you can direct them to your site where they will be exposed to more information about your work.
- Offer downloads that promote your book's use or encourage others to cite your research. The objective here is to serve constituents and advance new knowledge.
- Feature links to resource materials by other scholars whose work complements your own. That diminishes the perception of self-promotion and fosters online networking.
- Go to [blogger.com](http://blogger.com) (or another provider) and create a Web journal with the same name as your book or research. That allows others to comment, critique, or provide perspectives about your work.

In the end, a book or research site might eventually brand your research or even you as a scholar. But such a site is really an online promotion and tenure file that serves colleagues and attracts potential external reviewers.

And it does something else, according to George Sylvie, associate director of the journalism school at the University of Texas at Austin. It helps "promotion-shy pros learn that the name of the game is networking" and challenges professors to engage colleagues "beyond the point of content alone."

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*Communication at Iowa State University, is the winner of the Clifford G. Christians Award for Research in Media Ethics for his book, Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age (Oxford University Press).*

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