

CMS.998/CMS.600: New Media Literacies
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Lecture Notes

Session 8, 3/5/07
Learning Week

- Forums
 - Great sources of information
 - We'll be talking a lot about game forums today
 - You can go to these forums and ask people questions about how things work
 - Often these forums are centered around a certain topic, but often on a site dedicated to a certain topic there will also be one or two boards dedicated to just random conversation
 - These forums can be great places for community
 - You can sort through a forum looking for just boards that you're interested in
 - These boards aren't real time like a chat – you'll have to wait and come back to check to see if your post has gotten any response

- How useful do forums sound to you?
 - How do they compare to more traditional sources of information, like magazines?
 - Potential drawback: how do you find information that's probably already been asked before?
 - Rankings: you can sometimes tell how experienced a person on a forum is by their ranking. This is a measure of how many times they've posted before.

- How to find forums and start using them
 - You can find forum listings at <http://www.big-boards.com/> or at http://directory.google.com/Top/Computers/Internet/On_the_Web/Messag_e_Boards/
 - Most forums require you to log in with a user name in order to post. However, you can usually read all the boards without logging in, as long as you don't want to post anything
 - A lot of forums have boards specifically for beginners.
 - There are websites that will let you start your own forum for free, although they might also offer you a “deluxe package” that you can buy for your forum, which would provide extra features.

- Activity: find a forum that you're interested in, log in, and post something yourself

- Rules

- A lot of these forums have specific rules for things that you are and aren't allowed to do.
 - On Nintendo forums, for example, no personal information, age, location, or personal details are allowed to be disclosed, because people worry about children revealing that sort of thing online.
 - If you break the rules, a moderator will be likely to see it and delete it for you
 - How fast this happens depends on how many moderators there are
 - Often illegal posts stay up longer in the middle of the night than they would during the daytime.
 - A note about etiquette: writing all in caps (LIKE THIS) is considered yelling. People might get angry with you on forums if you post things all in caps.
 - Some forums have rules specifically stating that being mean to new users is forbidden
 - If you find something that somebody posts offensive, there's often a way to report abuse to a moderator
 - Some communities prefer to use this self-moderated method, where abuse is just defined by what people find to be offensive, rather than being defined by whether it breaks certain rules. Others forums prefer to use more strictly stated rules, with moderators to enforce those rules.
 - If you do something extremely offensive, they might delete not only that single offensive post, but they can also delete every other post you've ever put up before, and ban you from the forum.
 - Rules are important, because they keep things from getting messy. Without rules, you end up having to wade through tons and tons of posts that just have pointless curse words or say "you're all stupid"
- How do you think anonymity influences forums in general?
 - Most people post via user names that are pseudonyms, rather than their own real names
 - It provides a sort of freedom when people don't know who you really are
 - You can create for yourself a different persona, where you're more funny, or less shy.
 - Often there are people who can become very popular on forums, and their posts are much more likely to get responses than are the posts put up by new or unknown users
 - Why do people use forums? Why are they still around?
 - They're less reliable than print sources in some ways, but they're a good place to find and to create information
 - They create a nice community, where people can bond over a single issue and feel not alone
 - These forums allow people to discuss topics in very great detail when they're really obsessed with a certain issue

- No one's come up with a better way to accomplish the same thing – they provide access to really new, firsthand information on topics
- These forums all have a very similar format in terms of the layout (post, response, thread, etc.)
 - This is the case partly because a lot of them all use the same forum board client
 - They're often not very aesthetically pleasing
 - There are different skins and wallpapers for them, but they're still mostly all the same
 - They're often not very visually interesting – just lots and lots of text to wade through
 - Some people do have signature images that they include with their posts though.