

8-16-1996

Today's Electronic Communication Facilitators: A Profile of Fortune 1000 Webmasters

Kirk P. Arnett

Mississippi State University, karnett@coblian.msstate.edu

Chang Liu

Mississippi State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis1996>

Recommended Citation

Arnett, Kirk P. and Liu, Chang, "Today's Electronic Communication Facilitators: A Profile of Fortune 1000 Webmasters" (1996).
AMCIS 1996 Proceedings. 307.

<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis1996/307>

This material is brought to you by the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in AMCIS 1996 Proceedings by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Today's Electronic Communication Facilitators: A Profile of Fortune 1000 Webmasters

Authors: [Kirk P. Arnett](#) and [Chang Liu](#)
karnett@cobilan.msstate.edu & cl1@cobilan.msstate.edu
Mississippi State University - Dept. of Mgt and IS
PO Box 9581, Mississippi State, MS 39762

ABSTRACT

This profile of Webmasters of Fortune 1000 companies is based on electronic mail survey responses. In general, the people who hold the webmaster title or position within these large organizations are very satisfied with their jobs, are fairly young, and are highly educated although the disciplines of their academic backgrounds are considerably diverse. The Webmasters are also very interested in the characteristics of their professional counterparts in other large organizations. Beyond the demographics, this paper highlights Webmaster perceptions relative to the creation and use of home pages.

INTRODUCTION

The hot job title of Webmaster shows up in a number of advertisements with a wide variety of skill requirements. Popular trade publications keep this job on the forefront and indeed, there is even a new magazine with the title of Webmaster, yet little is known about the characteristics of the people who occupy these titles in large business organizations. A profile of Fortune 1000 webmasters follows. The profile is based on a 26.34% response rate from an electronic mail survey of contact people from Fortune 1000 home page addresses.

METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

At the beginning of this year, Hoover's search engine and Netscape's Net Search were executed with a name search of all companies in the Fortune 1000. Surprisingly, only 338 of these large companies had a home page at the time of the study. Later discussions with representatives of companies in the group without a home page showed two reasons for the curious absence. First, some of the companies have concerns relative to the security of corporate networks and computing facilities. They believe that secure firewalls must be in place before the company spreads its computing to the whole world of users. The second reason that companies do not have a Web presence through a home page is that management is concerned about the time and resources that will be consumed with surfing and the like. The 198 firms with a contact email address on their home pages were mailed an electronic mail message requesting their help in responding to an electronic survey. Some responses came back in a matter of hours, while auto response messages came back in minutes. After a period of 10 days, 49 completed responses were received. Several of the outgoing Email messages could not be delivered, so there were only 186 true survey request with 49 returns representing an effective response rate of 26.34%. We consider all of these respondents to be Webmasters for the purpose of this study.

It seems that the quick response times and high response rate can be attributed to the high level of interest in the subject area among the respondents. Despite our guarantee to send survey results to all Webmasters in the target group, several of the people who received the email survey returned a special request for the results and several more inquired about the timing of the results.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Almost one-half (22 of 49) of the companies represent manufacturing, with the remainder coming from transportation and communications (9), service (10) retail (5), and financial insurance or real estate (3). No respondent reported a primary industry classification of wholesale, agriculture, mining, or construction. Although the sample may be representative of very large companies, the reader is cautioned that no efforts

were made to assess non-response bias so the responses may not be representative of the wide revenue ranges that exist in the parent population. For instance, only 20% of wholesalers in the Fortune 1000 have home pages so there is no balance of home pages among industry classifications.

Figure 1 shows the salary ranges of the 41 Webmasters who responded to the salary question. As illustrated, over one third (15/41) of the respondents who reported a salary are in the \$60-80k range.

With regard to the computer experience of the Webmasters, more than 93% (46/49) of the respondents have more than 6 years of computer experience and almost 72% have more than 10 years experience. Thus the Webmasters are not highly creative computer novices, rather they are at least moderately experienced with computer technology. In contrast less than one-half of the Webmasters are over 35 years of age - see Figure 2. So, despite the relative youth of the group, the majority of the Webmasters were using computers before the Web became a household word.

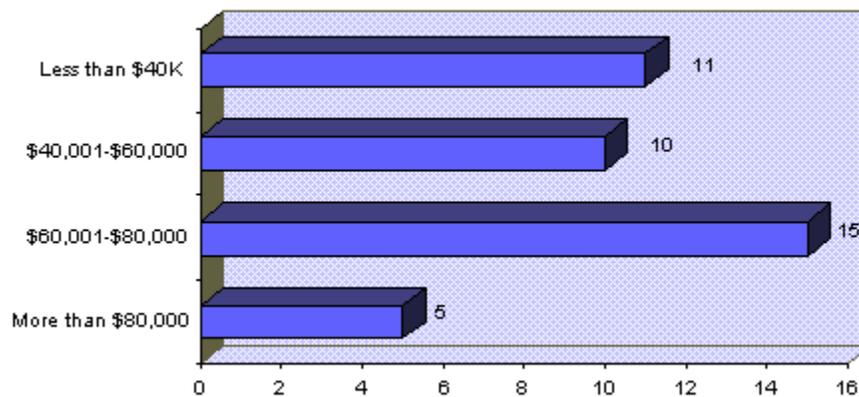


Fig. 1 - Salary Distribution of Webmasters

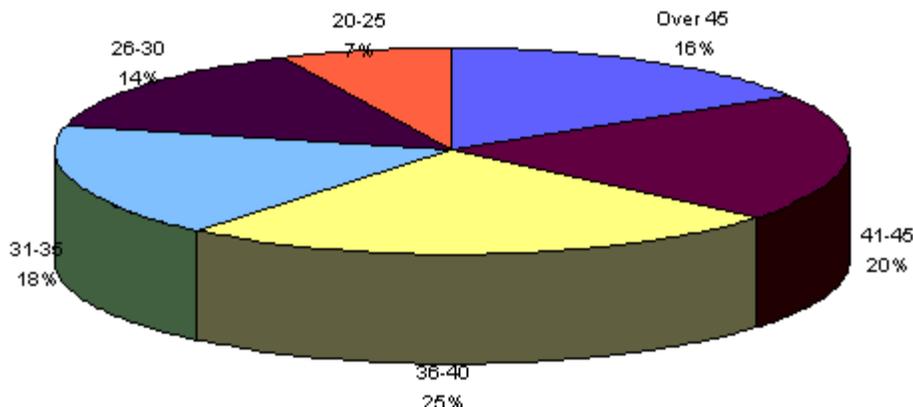


Fig. 2 - Age Distribution of Fortune 1000 Webmasters

THE WEBMASTER JOB

The respondents were asked to answer a series of questions relating to the job of Webmaster. In some cases, the person who received the survey forwarded it to the most appropriate person in the organization, therefore a possible limitation of this study is that the respondents may not be Webmasters by either title or job responsibility. However, by our broad definition of Webmaster as the person knowledgeable about the creation and use of home pages, this group likely represents the intended audience. The relative importance of selected items related to the Webmaster position were rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The mean values and standard deviations of these responses are presented in Table 1.

Similar to other studies of information professionals, this study shows that communication skills are very important for the position of Webmaster. In fact, these types of skills are more highly rated than are administrative, marketing, and technical skills to the Webmaster. Because of the position of the respondents, these findings seem reasonable as a function of the Webmasters' creation of home page is to facilitate communication with the outside world. Therefore, it seems that the need for communication skills would be seen as very high.

A second finding in Table 1 is the Webmasters' perception of factors relevant to perception of the Web site. Of these the highest rated was that the Web site enhanced the company image (4.15). This was followed by the Web site is easy to use and browse (4.00). In summary, it seems that the respondents believed the Web sites to be beautiful to the company's image and be easily available to potential customers of the company. The lowest rated Web site perception factor was that the Web site improves

Forty-two of the 49 respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs as Webmasters. This appears to be a very high satisfaction rating. Presumably the factors that would contribute to the high job satisfaction are those job hygiene factors that might create a pleasant working environment - for example the chance to be creative and/or to have your work recognized. These factors were not captured in the survey, but several scales related to the content of the Webmaster job and its management were collected.

Table 1. Summary responses by Webmasters

Responses	Mean Values	Std. Variation
Web site enhances company's image	4.15	0.74
Support from top management	4.00	0.92
Web site needs improvement	3.83	0.95
Web site improves market/sales competition	3.71	0.94
Web site improves productivity	3.31	1.05
Web site is well designed	3.88	0.82
Web site is easy to use and to browse	4.00	0.74
Web site attracts many visitors and inquires	3.71	0.99
Helpful with customers and/or partners	3.90	0.99
Technical skills are important to Webmaster	3.79	1.15
Communication skills are important	4.64	0.87
Administration skills are important	4.19	0.96
Combination of computer and marketing experience is important	4.02	1.06

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the data in Table 1, several research questions can be examined. Future research questions related to the dataset collected from the on-line survey of Webmasters falls into three areas:

- 1) information systems satisfaction
- 2) electronic commerce
- 3) employee satisfaction and motivation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Home page design and the characteristics of the people who manage the home pages in today's large corporate environments will no doubt change rapidly. As a result of these changes and of the influence that Fortune companies have on business, today's picture is an early-on, but highly relevant, glimpse at what Webmasters do at work, how satisfied they are with their work, and what personal characteristics they possess. In addition, factors that influence home page design quality can be identified and assessed. From this study, we found that there is a high correlation between Web page design quality and communication skills. High correlation also exists between the Web page design quality and administrative skills. The results suggest that technical skills are not emphasized for the job requirement of Webmasters. The information reported here should also provide a springboard from which follow-up academic studies relevant to this important MIS position can be initiated.