A Genre Analysis of Corporate Home Pages

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1. Introduction[1]

A genre is a conventionalised way of using language in a particular recurrent social situation. New genres appear to answer new rhetorical needs in a discourse community, their form and function being determined by these needs. The introduction of the Internet as a new communications medium has given rise to the appearance of a plethora of digital genres, or cybergenres, which have features deriving from the capabilities afforded by this new medium (Shepherd and Watters, 1998).

Shepherd and Watters (1998) distinguish between extant cybergenres, based on genres existing in other media, and novel cybergenres, with no real counterpart in other media. The home page is one of the genres that have emerged spontaneously (Crowston and Williams, 1997; Shepherd and Watters, 1998). Dillon and Gushorowski (2000) suggest that the personal home page has evolved into a standard form that might be considered the first truly digital genre. The personal home page and the corporate home page (henceforth CHP) are sometimes considered as categories belonging to the home page genre (Shepherd and Watters, 1999). However, personal home pages (PHPs) and corporate home pages have features different enough to be considered separate genres. Roberts (1998: 80) establishes the following distinction between the PHP and the CHP: "PHPs are narratives, whereas Commercial Home Pages (CHPs) are not. CHPs are mostly advertisements regarding a company's products or services." This description, however, only focuses on one aspect of corporate home pages, without reflecting the complexity of this genre. In their study of the functions of corporate home pages, Mannion and Sullivan (1999) state that CHPs act as image creating tools and as gatekeepers to control information about the company that the potential customer may receive. The CHP is a multi-purpose genre used to construct the

company's identity and image, by giving selected information related to the company, and to persuade potential consumers to use the company products or services. CHPs could be considered to belong to what Fairclough (1992) refers to as "hybrid information-and-publicity (or telling and selling discourse)", a new discourse type which is constituted through a mixture of existing types.

The CHP is not only a genre of increasing importance for corporations, but also a dominant genre on the Internet (Mannion and Sullivan, 1999). The knowledge of the generic features of CHPs guide the writers in the production of any instance of the genre and help the readers to better comprehend, process, and interact with the text. The purpose of this research was to analyse the elements that are characteristic of CHPs, and their function. For that purpose I examined 72 CHPs belonging to a specific area: computing company home pages. The pages examined were those listed on the page "Computer company home pages" (http://www.bris.ac.uk/is/services/computers/general/compcos.htm). Following Dillon and Gushorowski's (2000) analysis of personal home pages I identified the elements (i.e. components of the pages, such as graphics, internal or external links, etc) that occurred on the CHPs and counted the number of pages that contained each element. These elements were classified according to their function on the CHP. This analysis was then used to characterise the CHP in terms of purpose, functionality, content and form.

2. Defining genre

It is usually easy to identify the genre to which a particular text belongs, but it is quite difficult to define a specific genre. The difficulty lies in the fact that a genre cannot be defined in terms of a list of linguistic features that it should include or in terms of formal criteria that it must meet. Paltridge (1995: 395) states that in order to assign a specific text to a genre we do not draw on internal linguistic properties, but on pragmatic and perceptual aspects of the communicative event. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 17) consider that individual texts "contain heterogeneous mixtures of elements, some of which are recognisably more generic than others". A text is a more or less prototypical instance of a genre. Thus, language patterns are not features by which a genre might be defined, but elements which can be seen as characteristic of a particular genre (Paltridge, 1995).

There are several aspects that can help us to characterise a specific genre. Swales (1991) and Bhatia (1993) consider that the rationale for a genre is the set of communicative purposes which it serves. This set of purposes determines the particular features of the genre in terms of schematic structure, style and content. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 4), drawing on Bakhtin, see genres are "dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actor's responses to recurrent situations". They take the stance that in order to characterise a genre it is necessary to consider the recurrent social situation to which the genre responds and the discourse community that owns the genre. In their view, genre knowledge includes both form and content (the topics that are "appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation"). Yates and Orlikowski (1992) also regard genres as "typified social

actions" and define them as "typified communicative actions characterised by similar substance and form and taken in response to recurrent situations" (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992: 299). Fairclough (1992: 126) observes that rather than being only a specific type of text, a genre involves a specific mode of text production, distribution and consumption. Researchers on digital genres place special emphasis on the mode of transmission. Roberts (1997) defines genre as: "texts that have a similar set of purposes, mode of transmission and discourse properties". Shepherd and Watters (1999) claim that in order to characterise a cybergenre it is necessary to consider its function or functionality (i.e. the capabilities afforded by the Internet).

Since genres are dynamic communicative events which "change over time in response to their users' sociocognitive needs" (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 4), the linguistics and structural features shared by instances of the genre should not be seen as necessary, but as more or less typical elements of the genre.

3. Elements of CHPs

The different elements that may occur in CHPs can be classified into four groups according to their function: a) creating a positive image of the company; b) introducing and offering products; c) strengthening the relation with the customer; d) asking and giving information about the page itself.

A) *Creating a positive image of the company.*

The following elements have this purpose:

1.   Company slogans or product catchphrases placed at the centre of the page. Some examples of these slogans are the following:

(1)   Everywhere you look (*Adobe*)
        The center of your digital lifestyle (*Apple*)
        Cisco Connection online: the worldwide leaders in networking for the Internet (*Cisco Connections*)
        Discover all that's possible on the Internet (*Cisco Connections*)
        Helping people connect (*Dell*)
        Minolta QMS- the essentials of imaging (*Minolta QMS*)
        As essential as water, air, sun and wheat- MINOLTA-QMS for the future imaging
        The logic to change everything (*LSI*)
        The leader in storage and computing innovations worldwide (*American Megatrends*)

These slogans may use a "you" approach: they address the individual and imply that the company offers the best services and products to help the potential customer manage in the computing and digital world. A "we" approach can also be used by focusing on the company and depicting it as the leading company in the field. Home pages can also display catchphrases based on wordplays to associate

the company with positive ideas. For instance, "Dell" company shows the slogan "Easy as Dell" on its page, playing on the phrase "Easy as hell".

2.   Brief introduction to the company. Like the slogan, this brief introduction always includes words that evaluate the company positively, highlighting its leadership, importance, long experience, etc. This brief introduction usually comes after a welcome notice.

> (2)   a.   MathSoft is the <u>leading</u> provider of math, science and engineering software solutions for business, academia, research and government (*MathSoft*)
>   b.   Over the last 25 years, Viglen has grown to become the <u>largest and most successful</u> UK computer manufacturer- a position that has been achieved through an <u>unwavering commitment to excellence</u> (*Viglen*)
>   c.   LSI is <u>everywhere, driving</u> the access, interconnect and storage of voice, video and data over the Internet with <u>leading-edge</u> semiconductors *(LSI)*
>   d.   Rockwell Automation is uniquely focused on <u>becoming the most valued</u> global provider of power, control and information solutions for automation. <u>Backed by leading brands</u> like Allen-Bradley, Reliance Electric, Dodge and Rockwell Software, our mission is to <u>help</u> companies <u>in virtually every industry</u> <u>cut</u> costs, <u>streamline</u> productivity and <u>speed</u> time to market (*Rockwell Automation*)

3.   Positive announcements and news headings related to the company, with links to the full story. As these news headings are self-selected by the company they only deal with positive aspects, and do not reveal unpleasant information or information harmful to the company image. These pieces of news, which provide an incomplete and biased image of the company, are used by companies to act as gatekeepers, controlling information (Mannion and Sullivan, 1999). Companies can distribute information offering their view on an event and they can collect information on the company itself that can influence the readers' opinion.

> (3)   a. hp launches new line of digital cameras and printers.
>   hp wins global IT services agreement with Nokia.
>   hp and Compaq agree to merge (*Hewlett Packard*)
>   b. Fujitsu selects ATI's MOBILITY^{TM} RADEON^{TM} chip.
>   See what analysis are saying about ATI's MOBILITY^{TM} RADEON^{TM} 7500 (*ATI Technologies*)

Some CHPs do not include news headings, but have a link to the company pressroom or newsroom. The pressroom offers services that the company considers interesting for customers, e.g. corporate and product news, product data sheets.

4.   Internal links to more information about the company. The purpose of these links is not to provide information, but to present the company as economically sound, dynamic, continually developing and improving, etc. There are links to information about the company, training, events, seminars, and company awards. A high number of home pages (86% in the sample analysed) also include links to

corporate news and economic information related to the company (e.g. the stock quote of the company or the company earnings release during a specific period). Disclosure of information is, according to Mannion and Sullivan (1999), an important function of company home pages. Companies want this information on their pages because financial information has a great impact on investment choices. Another highly frequent link on CHPs is the "jobs/ careers" link. This way, the home page becomes a channel to advertise jobs.

5.   Any kind of important information, or graphics with a symbolic value, that help convey a positive image of the company (or links to that kind of information). For instance, the centre of the home page of "Dell" was occupied by a picture of the statue of liberty with the U.S.A. flag on the background. The text accompanying the image was: "With heavy hearts and in the face of great challenge, the men and women of Dell are proud to rise and serve with a world united", and in smaller letters "Dell is doing what we can to help by expediting emergency requests related to these events. These requests have top priority at Dell. Click for more information." The only external links in the pages analysed were related to the attacks on September 11th. A high number of pages included links to information on how to help or links to the Red Cross.

B) Introducing and offering products

Homepages are used as advertising texts, to inform potential customers about the company products and services, and as channels to make commercial transactions easier. The following elements have this purpose:

1.   Showcase, which gives the potential customer the possibility to have a look at all the products and services offered by the company. This showcase usually takes the form of a bar of buttons, with pull-down menus, each one with a label, such as "store", "products", "support", "solutions", "technical resources". With the help of these pull-down menus, the writer can offer detailed information of the product or service, without overloading the page with unsolicited advertising. The labels on the bar of buttons may also refer to the type of reader/ customer at whom the information behind each button may interest. For instance, the bar of buttons at the top of "ATI Technologies" home page has the following labels: gamer, videophile, home user, business user, channel partner, developer. This category listing allows the reader to have a general overview of all the possibilities and to enter the page that interests him/her.

2.   Adverts of new products, sometimes with a flashing or highlighted "now available", to let the users know what is new. Adverts on CHPs can take many forms. Sometimes the advert just consists in a graphic of the product with a brief evaluative description. The user has to click on the graphic to get more detailed information. The evaluative description is often longer, as illustrated by the following examples:

(4)   a.   **Diamond Mako**TM - The Connected Organizer
Upgrade productivity with the Diamond Mako connected organizer. Maximizing productivity on the go, Mako offers e-mail, Internet, calendar and contact management, word-processing and spreadsheet solutions. For more information on the Diamond Mako connected organizer, please visit www.diamondmako.com. *(Diamond)*

   b.   **Supra®** - Reliable Faster Modems
A complete line of award-winning high-speed fax/modems that include the highly successful SupraExpress and SupraMax series of products. (*Diamond*)

Nearly in all cases where a product is advertised on the home page the advert provides a link to another page of the Web site where the product is described in more detail.

The home page may also include product specifications. Unlike adverts, product specifications give an impression of objectivity. They consist in a detailing of the technical features of the product. The potential customer can click on an icon to access a more detailed specification sheet:

(5)   Intel Tehama 82850 & 82801BA Chipset
Socket 423
Support Pentium 4 Processor
Four 184-pin RIMMs, up to 2GB
Support PC600, PC800
Support UltraDMA 66/100
AC97 Audio Codec on board
5 PCI slots, 1 CNR slot
1 4X AGP slot (AGP Pro optional)
ATX Size (305 mm x 244 mm) (*ECS Elitegroup*)

3.   Offers and incentives. CHPs sometimes offer incentives that make the services or products more attractive.

   a. Attend a free launch event and receive rebates and special offers. U.S. only.
Attend PDC 2001 and be first to get the code and tools for XML Web services. Register now and save.
Win a Dream PC for Life. Enter to win the grand prize, plus more than 1,000 others. (*Microsoft*)

   b. Want to win $1000 in WebCash, click here.
For each new subscriber between now and October 15th, 2001, Mikrotec is donating $10.00 to a county school system in Kentucky or West Virginia (*Mikrotec*)

"Offering incentives" is also an element typically found in sales promotion letters

(Bhatia, 1993).

4.   Link to the virtual store. Many pages offer the customer the possibility to buy online, thereby reducing marketing costs and making it easier for the potential customer to buy the products. Another way of facilitating the acquisition of the products is to include a link to information about the company retail locations.

C) Strengthening the relation with the potential consumer

The function of many elements of a home page is to make readers feel at "home" and convince them that the company will do its best to meet their needs. The elements with this function are the following:

1.   Thank you notes/ welcome message

> (7)   Welcome to MathSoft Engineering & Education, Inc.

2.   Personalising and offering information/ services for different types of customers. Many pages offer the possibility for customers to register online and customise the content of the page, so as to receive only the information that interests them. When accessing a Website consumers are in control and do not need to spend time looking at information in which they are not interested. Readers can also register online to get special services and features (e.g. software updates, expert technical support, special offers, and early notifications of product upgrades). This way the company establishes a closer relationship with the reader/ customer, and, additionally, a database of consumers can be created.

> (8)   Which is your area of interest? Create your own custom profile (*ATI Technologies*)

3.   Possibility to see the page in other languages with the option "choose a country" or "worldwide". There were two sites ("Epson" and "BTC" homepages) where the cover page just asked the readers to choose an area from which they could access the company affiliates around the world (and thus to choose a language).

4.   Contact. Possibility to contact by e-mail or a phone number to call.

5.   Links to free of charge products and services, such as downloads and free demos. Another free benefit for potential customers is the access to newsletters. Users can even get the newsletter sent to them by e-mail. Mannion and Sullivan (1999) offer two reasons why companies may give services/ products without charge: first, companies use this strategy to attract attention and interest to the product; second, this is a way to communicate leadership or excellence. The links to technical support offered by a high number of home pages have the same objective.

6.   Feedback to customers. There are links to order status, to feedback to customers or to FAQs, whose purpose is to establish an ongoing relationship with the customer.

7.   Links to the company's community of users, by means of newsgroups access.

8.   Graphics, to make the page more visually attractive, and icons, to make a more user-friendly interface. 91.2% of the CHPs analysed had pictures, images and drawings, although only 19.4% (14) of the pages had more than 5 pictures or drawings. Most pages that included graphics had one big picture in the centre of the page. There were also icons indicating what is behind the link and logos of the company products. Some pages offered some kind of animation, although this was very limited, usually consisting of changing graphics or images.

D) Asking and giving information about the page itself

The following elements have this function:

1.   Date and update.

2.   Counter: number of users who have visited the page.

3.   Link to the webmaster e-mail. Possibility to contact the webmaster with questions and problems.

4.   Asking for the readers' feedback (e.g. rate this page) or asking the customer to fill in a survey.

5.   Proposing things to do with the page: add to favourites/ e-mail this page.

6.   Information about (or links to) site awards.

7.   Copyright information.

8.   Links to legal information. Legal notices, terms of use, online privacy statement.

Table 1 shows the frequency of each of the elements described above:

Function/ element	Total of 72	Total by %
A) Creating a positive image of the company		
* Company slogan	26	36.1
* Positive announcements and news related to the company	65	90.2
* Brief introduction to the company	17	23.6
* Internal links to information about the company		
- "About the company" link	50	69.4
- Corporate news and information	46	63.9
- Economic information	16	22
- Additional information: training, events, seminars, etc.	35	49
- Jobs and careers	29	40.2
- External links to information of general interest	35	49
- Links to other companies	1	1.3
B) Introducing and offering products		
* Showcase	57	79.2
* Adverts of new products	53	73.6
* Offers and incentives	16	22
* Links to the virtual store	39	54.2
C) Strengthening the relation with the potential customer		
* Thank you notes/ welcome message	12	16.7
* Personalising and registering online	23	31.9
* "Choose a country" feature	47	65.3
* Contact	39	54.2
* Links to free of charge products and services	30	41.7
* Technical support.	44	61.1
* Access to newsletters	4	5.5
* Feedback to customers	9	12.5
* Newsgroups access	4	5.5
* Graphics		
- Pictures, images and drawings	66	91.2
- Icons	15	20.8
- Logos	22	30.5
- Animation	6	8.3
D) Asking and giving information about the page itself		
* Date/ update	9	12.5
* Number of users	3	4.1
* Link to the Webmaster e-mail	4	5.5
* Asking for the readers' feedback.	7	9.7
* Proposing things to do with the page	1	1.3
* Information about (or links to) side awards	7	9.5
* Copyright information	68	94.5
* Legal notices/ terms of use/ online privacy statement	65	90.2

Table 1. *Frequency of elements in corporate home pages*

4. Characterising the genre of CHPs

1) Purpose

CHPs are used by companies to communicate with potential customers and investors and with other companies. The analysis of the most frequent elements in CHPs and of their function shows that the CHP is a multi-purpose genre, with both an informative and a persuasive goal. Many of the elements of CHPs offer information, but this information has been carefully chosen and presented with the objective of creating a positive image of the company. Thus, the primary purpose of these pages seems to be image building. Image building is achieved in several ways, e.g. through promotion and evaluation, by offering services and customer support. Although the CHP is not based on a specific previously existing genre, it shares many features with promotional genres, especially with sales promotion letters. It also incorporates elements from other genres, such as adverts or news.

Promotional strategies and elements are a pervasive component throughout CHPs. Evaluative vocabulary is used in CHPs to present the company under a positive light: both the company and the products and services offered are evaluated positively in order to persuade the potential customers to get the product or in order to convince them of the quality of the products and services. This is a strategy also exploited by writers of sales promotion letters for product detailing (Bhatia, 1993).

The following examples were taken from the home page of "Dell" company:

> (9) **Servers & Storage**
> Engineered for high performance, <u>maximum</u> uptime, s<u>erviceability</u>, and <u>ease</u> of management.
>
> **Notebooks & Desktops**
> <u>Harnessing</u> the power of emerging technology for <u>top</u> performance, <u>serious</u> multitasking & <u>high</u> productivity.

Another strategy typical of promotional writing frequently used in CHPs is to convince readers that they have a problem (Bhatia, 1993) and offer solutions that will solve their problem or meet their needs.

> (10) How fast can you transform host information into Web-based solutions?
>
> Today. Get an immediate Web presence by converting host applications to Web pages on-the-fly.
>
> This Week. Add graphics and customize Web pages using templates and editing tools.
>
> 30 Days. Create new Web applications that integrate multiple data sources and business processes for impressive results in record time.
>
> Right Now. Begin with **OnWeb QuickStart.** (*NetManage*)

(11) Enhance server data performance, security and efficiency to grow your business.
Get connected to today hottest peripheral and take control of your multimedia and digital content (*CI Adaptec*)

2) Functionality

The functionality of a digital genre must be discussed taking into account the purpose of the genre, since the functional features of the page are designed with the end-user and the purpose of the genre in mind (Shepherd and Watters, 1999).

CHPs are highly dynamic texts, which lack the fixity of printed texts and are changed and revised almost on a daily basis. Mannion and Sullivan (1999) suggest that one of the functions of the CHP is to supply updated information rapidly at a cheap price. CHPs can incorporate relevant information every day. A clear example is the occurrence in 54% of the pages analysed of some reference to the tragic events of September 11th in New York.

Another feature of CHPs is their high connectivity. Like most Web genres, CHPs are non-linear texts, which can be linked to other texts by means of hypertext. Most of the links are internal, to other pages within the company. The home page is a cover page which lists the contents of the Website. The internal links turn the CHP into a genre quite effective for advertising purposes: instead of getting detailed descriptions of products on the cover page, users can browse and find just what they are looking for.

CHPs are highly interactive. They include features such as e-mail to the company, online ordering, downloadable files. Some websites even offer the possibility to discuss and interact with others through newsgroups.

3) Form

Form has a great importance in the CHP, since it is a way to construct an image (Chandler, 1998) and also a way to attract the customers' attention to specific aspects. On the home page of "AMD" the following question is asked (25/09/2001):

(12) "What do you think of our new look? The AMD website redesign: it is more than just look! We are making it easier for you to find the information you need."

One of the goals that determines form is to facilitate navigation, so that users can visit the pages of the site that interest them. This is achieved in CHPs by means of bars of buttons and menus with five to seven links. Each menu leads to a mini-home page with specific information.

However, facilitating users' navigation does not seem to be the driving force in home page design. The information in the foreground is the one that the company

wants the user to see first. The central part of the page is typically occupied by adverts of new products and the headings of positive news related to the company.

Shepherd and Watters (1999:3) state that "the form of home pages tends to be a general introduction and short chunks of information with subtopics that can be reached by following links." Although this may apply to personal homepages it does not seem a correct description for CHPs. Most of the CHPs analysed do not have a general introduction. They place the information the company wants to focus on in the centre of the page and include links to any other information at the top and the sides of the page. The form of the CHP seems to follow the guideline proposed in the "Web style guide" (http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/contents.html): "An informational site, such as an academic, corporate, or general interest site, should have a cover that establishes an overall visual design theme or metaphor for the site. It should also identify and give a brief explanation of the purpose of the site, and provide a site overview by presenting links to its major sections." A clear example is the home page of "ID software", a company that has created and distributed computer games such as DOOM and QUAKE. The home page of the company resembles the cover of these games.

4) Content

Shepherd and Watters (1999: 3) describe the contents of the CHPs as consisting "mostly of information and advertisements about the company's home products and services". Although this is true, CHPs include many other elements, as we have seen. The most frequent elements, in decreasing order, are the following: copyright information, legal notices/ terms of use/ online privacy statement, positive announcements and news headings related to the company, links to corporate news and information and economic information about the company, showcase, adverts of new products, "choose a country" feature, e-mail contact, additional information about the company (training, events, seminars, jobs), offer of free of charge products and services.

CHPs can include any element that can be of interest for their readers at a specific moment. For instance, many of the CHPs analysed include a note showing sympathy to those impacted by the events of September 11th, 2001. The home page of "Samsung" includes a "sports" link and the home page of "Silicon Graphics" has a link with the label "serious fun", where the reader can find games and downloads.

5. Conclusions

The CHP is one of the genres that has appeared to take advantage of the capabilities afforded by the Internet. CHPs are used by companies to deliver the information they want rapidly, and to interact with potential customers, with investors, and with other companies.

This research has shown that the CHP is a very complex genre which incorporates a variety of different elements. Some of these elements have been taken from genres existing in other media (e.g. the graphics, evaluative text and slogans taken from adverts, the news headings, the introduction to the company, typically found in sales promotion letters). Other elements, such as the update information, the counter, or the link to a virtual store, are specific of genres in this new medium. And many other elements have been borrowed from genres in traditional media and have been adapted or modified to take full advantage of the features of the Internet. For instance, establishing a contact is a typical element in promotional genres such as sales promotional letters or adverts, but here the reader can establish a contact just by clicking on the link "contact" and sending an e-mail. Therefore, the CHP does not only inform of how to contact with the company, but provides the medium to do it.

The different elements that may occur in CHPs have been classified into four groups according to their function: a) creating a positive image of the company; b) introducing and offering products; c) strengthening the relation with the customer; d) asking and giving information about the page itself. Our research supports the conclusion by Mannion and Sullivan (1999) that the main purpose of corporate home pages is to create a positive image of the company. Even the elements that introduce and offer products and services or those which are intended to strengthen the relation with the customer contribute to the purpose of image creation. However, as this is a complex genre with a multiple audience (potential customers, investors, companies), it has many subsidiary purposes, such as disclosing economic information or facilitating e-business.

The CHP is a clear example of what Levi-Strauss (1974) and Chandler (1988) call "bricolage": the inclusion and adaptation in a text of elements from other texts. The results of the research show that, although the CHP is a genre in its infancy, it is quite a conventionalised form, with are a high number of elements that occur frequently and regularly in CHPs and can thus be considered typical of the genre. This can be explained by taking into account that the nature of the Web as a medium facilitates the borrowing of elements from other pages. A clear example of this borrowing is the icon used to point to the virtual store: all the pages which include this element have the same "shopping cart" icon.

A CHP is an easily revisable text which lacks the fixity of a printed text. Thus, it does not consist of a fixed text and accompanying graphics. It could rather be considered a textual space, a notice board used by the company to fix any type of information that it intends the audience to receive. The highly dynamic character of the CHP means that we cannot regard the less frequent elements as untypical of the genre. For instance, the element "date/ update" only occurred in 9 CHPs, but it is an element frequent in other Web genres, which could be easily adopted in CHPs if designers of CHPs began to consider it useful or necessary. The CHP is a genre co-constructed by the company and the audience. The features of the Internet and the

possibility to interact with the reader allow the company to collect information from the audience, which will necessarily shape the genre.

The CHP is the cover of the company Website, that is, it is the first page of and gate to a hyper-document. This means that the CHP has enormous potential for advertising purposes and that it should be carefully designed to help the readers reach easily the information that they want and to get the readers to enter specific pages in the Website. Thus, further research could investigate the pages to which the CHP links, the connections between the different pages in the Website, and the rhetorical strategies used on the CHP to arouse the readers' interest in specific pages.

NOTE

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ABSTRACT

A Genre Analysis of Corporate Home Pages

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The introduction of the Internet as a new communications medium has given rise to the appearance of a high number of digital genres. Some of them simply reproduce genres existing in other media, but others borrow features from existing genres while taking advantage of the capabilities afforded by the Internet. Corporate home pages are a dominant genre on the Internet, used by companies to construct a positive image and to advertise their products.

Genre awareness generates certain expectation as to what prototypical instances of the genre contain, thus guiding writers in the production of any instance of the genre and helping readers to better comprehend and interact with the text. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the elements that are characteristic of corporate home pages and their function. The analysis of these elements is useful to characterise the genre of corporate home pages in terms of purpose, functionality, content and form.

The different elements that may occur in corporate home pages were classified into four groups according to their function: a) creating a positive image of the company; b) introducing and offering products; c) strengthening the relation with the customer; d) asking and giving information about the page itself. The results show that the corporate home page is a multi-purpose genre which shares some features with promotional genres existing in other media, but incorporates many new elements which exploit the connectivity and interactive features of the Internet.

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