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The Effect of Official College Athletic Web Sites on the Job of Division I Sports Information Directors

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Karen J. Bielak entitled "The Effect of Official College Athletic Web Sites on the Job of Division I Sports Information Directors." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication.

Benjamin Bates, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Barbara Moore, Mark Harmon

Accepted for the Council:

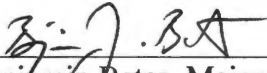
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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Mark Harmon

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor and
Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2004
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THE EFFECT OF OFFICIAL COLLEGE ATHLETIC
WEB SITES ON THE JOB OF DIVISION I SPORTS INFORMATION DIRECTORS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Karen J. Bielak
December 2004

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, who have always provided me with encouragement, love, and support and given me the strength to believe in myself and conquer any obstacle.

Thank you for not letting me give up.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Benjamin Bates, Dr. Barbara Moore, and Dr. Mark Harmon for their guidance and support during this study and throughout the course of my Master's program. Your time and wisdom are greatly appreciated.

Thank you also to the College Sports Information Directors of America for lending support to this research. Finally, I am grateful to the sports information directors who took the time to participate in the survey. Without you, this would not have been possible.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I sports information directors. Specifically, it focused on how often the site is updated, who is responsible for performing that duty, and whether a position has been created solely for the purpose of maintaining the Web site. The target population included all 327 Division I sports information directors. Directors from Division I schools were chosen because of the high probability that their school maintains an official Web site and that it has had an impact on the sports information director position.

The instrument used to collect the data was an online survey and participants were invited via e-mail. The survey contained 21 questions and in order to ensure anonymity, no identifying characteristics were asked. Participants were given the option to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. The directors were given two weeks to respond to the survey, with a reminder e-mail being sent half way through. In total, the survey received a response rate of 44.6 percent.

The major findings were that a very small amount of sports information offices (6.4 percent) employ a full-time staff member to maintain the Web site despite the fact that almost 96 percent consider the site to be of above average importance to their athletic program. One of the main constraints is budget, but 55.6 percent believe that hiring Web personnel will become a trend of the future out of the necessity to keep up with expanding technology and the growing importance of the sites to the programs.

The study also shows a varying degree of overall effect on the job of sports information directors. Some have welcomed the Web site, saying that it makes the job easier. Others, however, view it as added work and a greater demand to have new information constantly available. Some directors have developed a love-hate relationship, recognizing the value of the site but also the drawbacks.

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Chapter 1

Background and Statement of the Problem

New media are constantly updating and changing everything from the business world to everyday life. One such area that has felt an effect in recent years is college athletics, and more specifically, the job of a program's sports information director. Ten years ago, most college athletic departments did not run their own Web sites because the Internet, although having been around for many years, was still being developed and there were very few sites overall. Today, it is difficult to find a department that does not have a site. But with this infiltration of technology, not only has the job of a sports information director changed, but also in some instances an entire new position has been created.

The official school sites that offer "instant public access to player bios, scores, statistics, game recaps, and other promotional information" demonstrate the growing role of Web sites in college athletics (Hill, Burch-Ragan, and Yates, 2001). Additionally, "Internet technology will continue to produce evolving opportunities and corresponding challenges for broadcasting, recruiting, merchandising, fundraising, and distribution of administrative information" (Hill, Burch-Ragan, and Yates, 2001). While traditional media tend to focus on negative or sensational aspects of an athletics program, administrations are beginning to address those misconceptions through the development of their own sites, thus changing the duties of some sports information directors (Hill, Burch-Ragan, and Yates, 2001).

The Internet has also had a measurable effect on college recruiting. “The national attention focused on prized recruits has increased exponentially. There are more interview requests and photo shoots, more rumors and more questions, and there is scrutiny of nearly every word they utter” (Steinberg, 2004). The father of a current high school senior and top football recruit says the most significant reason for this change has been the Internet, because it allows for the quick dissemination of information (Steinberg, 2004). Prior to the development of Web sites, information was only available sporadically, as opposed to instantaneously (Steinberg, 2004). Some colleges offer “virtual tours of campus and athletic departments” on their sites in addition to eligibility requirements and administrative forms (Hill, Burch-Ragan, and Yates, 2001).

There have been three studies conducted examining the effect of computer technology on college sports information directors’ jobs. The first two, conducted in 1993 and 1998, were done when Web sites were still developing and only began to touch upon the changes taking place as a result of the technology. While these studies provided insight as to the initial effect on the profession, they are now somewhat outdated and need to be expanded upon in an era that is much more advanced in regard to Web sites and the Internet overall. The third study was conducted in 2000 and focused on the request by independent Web sites for media credentials from colleges. Although it yielded some interesting and helpful results, it did not touch on the subject of sports information directors’ dealings with official school sites. Also, because of the rapid development of computer technology, the study from 2000 could be updated even though it was conducted only four years ago.

Because of the growing importance of Web sites to college athletics as well as the limited research and data in this area, there is a need for additional research that will not only accurately reflect the impact of official school Web sites on sports information directors in 2004, but examines who is responsible for the added workload associated with such sites. This research would be important because it can help to define the growing role of official college athletic Web sites as legitimate sources of information. It may also help predict the future of Web sites as gateways to collegiate sports information and whether they will ultimately become the primary resource for sports news, thus replacing more traditional media.

Research questions

The goal of the current study is to understand the effect of Web sites on the job of Division I college sports information directors. The primary focus is on official athletic department Web sites and who is responsible for updating the content and how often that duty is performed.

1. Who is responsible for maintaining a school's official Web site?
2. Has a position within the sports information department been created to handle the work of maintaining a Web site?
3. How often is the official site updated?
4. How many extra hours of work per week are created for the sports information director as a direct effect of having an official Web site?

It is important for these questions to be researched because it will help to understand not only the impact of Web sites in the area of college athletics, but it will help to

redefine the position of a sports information director. Sports information directors may become more productive and efficient if they understand their changing role in relation to computer technology. This will also provide an overall examination of how the extra workload is being handled, whether by the sports information director, another member of the department, or an outside source.

Limitations and delimitations

The study has several limitations, the first being the sports information directors' willingness to participate and answer the survey truthfully and accurately. Also, there is the possibility that survey questions may be understood or interpreted differently, thereby providing misleading information. As a result, a pretest was administered. The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), the professional organization for sports information directors, has been contacted regarding the current study and has agreed to provide support. This will lend greater credibility to the study and may increase the response rate.

The delimitations include the use of Division I sports information directors as they are most likely to deal with official Web sites on a regular basis. Also, only directors with published and working e-mail addresses will be able to be contacted about this study.

Definition of terms

Sports information director: The person responsible for publicizing and promoting the intercollegiate athletic program at an institute of higher learning (Davis, 1978).

Official Web site: A site run and maintained by a college or university supporting its athletics program.

Division I: “Division I member institutions have to sponsor at least seven sports for men and seven for women (or six for men and eight for women) with two team sports for each gender. Each playing season has to be represented by each gender as well. There are contest and participant minimums for each sport, as well as scheduling criteria” (www.ncaa.org).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The amount of literature directly related to the relationship between sports information directors and Web sites is limited. However, it is also important to understand the sports information director position itself, the organization under whose rules they abide, and the effect that Web sites, and the Internet in general, have had on the field of public relations.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was originally formed as a governance group in 1906 as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States in response to the rugged nature of football, which at that time caused not only serious injury, but also death (ncaa.org). The name of the organization was changed to its current name in 1910, and in 1973, its membership was divided into three competitive divisions – I, II, and III (ncaa.org). Five years later, subdivisions were given for football, creating Division I-A, I-AA, and I-AAA (ncaa.org). The NCAA creates and enforces rules regarding issues such as recruiting, financial aid, principles of conduct, and eligibility and also allows member schools to address these issues (NCAA, 1976, 94). The NCAA created a public relations committee in 1956 to “provide professional public relations advice and service” to the organization and its members’ sports information directors (NCAA, 1976, Appendix I).

The Sports Information Director

In the simplest of terms, a sports information director (SID) is the person responsible for publicizing and promoting the intercollegiate athletic program at an institute of higher learning (Davis, 1978, 1). It is a profession that requires the ability to work with the media, write news releases, edit programs, media guides, and brochures, and staff athletic events (Manasseh, 1976, 7). A sports information director should always be prepared to serve, particularly when dealing with the media (Davis, 1978, 2). Although some of the work done by an SID, such as developing the media guides and press packets, can be considered “sales promotion activities designed to influence attitude and perception,” the intended target is often the media (Pitts and Stotlar, 1996, 213).

Knowledge of sports, writing ability, and creativity are also great assets (Davis, 1978, 2). The job requires a loyalty to the school’s administration, director of athletics, and coaching staff (Canham, 1976, 6). With this versatility, it is no surprise then that the position is often referred to by alternative names. Some of the more widely used include Director of Media Relations, Director of Athletic Communications, and Director of Sports Promotion. Although there is no exact date for the earliest development of the sports information director position, the job has had a steady presence since at least the 1950s. The College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) was founded in 1957 with 102 members; today, membership exceeds 1,800 (cosida.com).

The duties of a modern day sports information director vary from school to school depending on factors such as size of school and the needs of the athletics department. In September 2004, Division III Wellesley College posted a job opening for a sports information director. The ad described duties as including “weekly score reporting,

department Web site, publication of game programs, coordination of photography, updating athletic hotline, writing press releases, athletic archives, supervision of student workers, and department publications” (workinsports.com). Qualifications included “competency in Pagemaker, Quark Express, Photoshop, Dreamweaver, HyTek, and Stat Crew, preferably experienced in writing for press releases and publications” (workinsports.com).

In comparison, Division I Tulane University posted an opening that same month for an assistant media relations director that described the duties as:

“aggressively publicizing and promoting Tulane Athletics through all available means and handling all media relations duties (requests, interview schedules) for the sports of women’s basketball, women’s soccer, and other sports as assigned; supervising the writing, editing, design, and production of media guides and game programs for women’s basketball and women’s soccer, and other assigned sports; assisting with football publications and game operations; coordinating home event operations for women’s basketball, women’s soccer, and other assigned sports; updating official athletic department web site; maintaining archives; arranging for photography of student-athletes and events; distributing photos, stats, and releases to the media and others as necessary; promoting student-athletes, coaches, and programs for individual, team, and institutional awards, honors, and post-season play; and performing other duties as assigned by the Assistant Athletic Director for Media Relations” (ncaa.org).

Also, the qualifications were higher, including a requirement of a “bachelor’s degree, although a master’s degree is preferred. At least two years of successful media

relations experience is required, preferably at the NCAA Division I-A level, and women's basketball media relations experience is beneficial. Ability to interact effectively with the media and public is required. Strong writing and organizational skills are required. Experience using computer desktop publishing programs, such as but not limited to Pagemaker, InDesign and Photoshop, is required. Thorough knowledge of NCAA and conference rules and regulations is required" (ncaa.org).

"It's a 60 to 70-hour-a-week job for nine months of the year and high pressure all the way" (Langan, 1976, 93). It is often an unpredictable position as well. "A critical mistake could be attributed to the SID who comes to the office on a morning with his day planned ahead. Perhaps there are a few who can decide what they are going to accomplish on a particular day and follow through, but these are rare birds indeed" (Manasseh, 1976, 7).

One factor that can determine the workload and specific duties for a sports information director is the size of the sports information staff. Many SIDs have the benefit of full-time assistant directors as well as secretaries and student workers (Davis, 1978, 3). However, some departments have only one person, the SID, to handle the entire workload. One of the reasons for discrepancies in not only the size of the staff but therefore the job responsibility is financial limitations. "I simply do not know of any business that generates as much money as some of our sports programs, yet spends so little money on public relations, promotion, advertising, and media relations" (Canham, 1976, 6).

The need for a sports information director can be for reasons as simple as to inform the public of the purpose and reason for the school's athletics program (Healey and Healey, 1976, 358). This person may also be employed to:

“facilitate and ensure the inflow of representative opinions from an institution's several publics in order that its policies and operations may be kept compatible with the diverse needs and views of these publics, to counsel the director of athletics on ways and means of shaping its policies and operations to gain maximum public acceptance for what it deems essential in the best interests of all concerned, and to interpret widely and favorably an institution's policies and operations of the athletics department” (Steitz, 1971, 219).

Another opinion is that the purpose of a sports information director is to “bring about a recognition of the necessity of maintaining a balance in the life of the student-athlete that will permit him to be a student first and an athlete secondarily” (Shea and Wieman, 1967, 224-225). Therefore, it can be seen that there is no standard reason for why a college or university employs a sports information director, but rather it is dependent on a program's individual needs, goals, and expectations.

One such expectation is that the SID will serve the media, which is done in several ways including sending news releases, scheduling interviews with players or coaches, and distributing press credentials for games. The department also traditionally holds a “press day,” during which the media are invited to interview and photograph players and coaches while enjoying food and drink (Pitts and Stotlar, 1996, 212). The SID will also make available to the media packets of material on the coaches and athletes, including but not limited to “their records in high school, past seasons' records,

highlights, hometown information, human interest information, and expectations for the upcoming season” (Pitts and Stotlar, 1996, 212).

Therefore, it is important for an SID to establish professional credibility with the media early on in his/her career. This can be achieved by providing news that is timely and relevant and avoiding poorly written material, inaccuracies, stories of limited interest, or information that is fake or contains little substance (Steitz, 1971, 236).

However, maintenance of that credibility and professionalism is equally important. In 2001, a member of the sports information staff at Lipscomb University was removed from the department after altering a box score that was sent to *The Tennessean*, a Nashville newspaper (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2001). The incident occurred after the Lipscomb women’s basketball team lost to Lambuth University, 76-69, and the box score listed the game officials as Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, and Blind Lemon Jefferson, three blind musicians (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2001). Although the newspaper did not run the names, Lipscomb’s athletics director responded by saying he was not amused and would not tolerate the unprofessional act, and the school sent several letters of apology, including to each of the officials (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2001).

While serving the media with professionalism and credibility is a critical part of the sports information director’s job, it is also important to recognize a significant segment of a program’s support group that is often overlooked. That group is comprised of those who make up the university, namely students, faculty, and staff. Often times athletics programs become too focused on turning a profit and forget another reason for college athletics:

“Although many loyal fans feel an intercollegiate team belongs to them, none has a stronger claim than the students of that institution. After all, our athletic participants are to be representative of and are a part of that student body. The prime purpose of intercollegiate athletics should be to provide the benefits and lessons of competition to student-athletes while providing wholesome entertainment and a unifying force for the student body. It follows, then, that an athletic program should cater to its students – not so much to gain athletic support (although that is important) but because it is the students’ due” (Miller, 1976, 18).

In a similar manner, it has also been noted that it is helpful for an SID to treat the campus media in the same way he/she would the regular mainstream media. If not, it could cause editorial attacks on the athletics program. Instead, the best attitude to take is one of equality, and to remember that these reporters are novices and not as skilled or experienced as those who cover the program for a professional job (Miller, 1976, 19).

Other sports information directors are concerned about maintaining solid relations with the school’s alumni, both as individuals and as an organized group. One reason is that “their efforts are often channeled into increasing independent financial support of the institution and/or reinforcing requests to legislatures for more generous financing” (Shea and Wieman, 1967, 220-221). The importance of the alumni is sometimes dismissed because of this group’s tendency to criticize how the program is being run, but they cannot be disregarded (Shea and Wieman, 1967, 221).

While the duties of a sports information director have remained fundamentally consistent over time, those in the position now are faced with new issues regarding the media. Debby Jennings, the associate athletics director for media relations for women’s

athletics at the University of Tennessee, includes in her duties helping with arrangements for getting team members to press and television interviews as well as autograph sessions (Durman, 2003). During Lady Vols basketball games, another of her jobs is “letting the media know where parents or family members are sitting in a stadium so cameras can catch them, too” (Durman, 2003).

In addition to dealing with television crews, sports information directors also have Web sites to address, and in particular, the question of whether they are legitimate media outlets and should receive credentials to attend games, practices, and press conferences. However, a situation can escalate far enough that it needs to involve the law, as discovered by David Plati, assistant athletic director for media relations at the University of Colorado. In 1999, Theodore Smith, the owner of the Web site netbuffs.com, sued Plati and the university, claiming that Plati “has attempted to censor netbuffs.com and to interfere with Smith’s attempts to operate it” (McPhee, 1999). Additionally, “the suit claims that Plati had Smith arrested on Dec. 9, 1998, for trespassing in the school’s office of media relations, that Plati issued an order banning Smith from the Boulder campus for a calendar year and has prevented him from talking to the coaches, staff and fans” (McPhee, 1999). The district court later dismissed Smith’s claims, but not without Plati being involved in a legal drama as the result of his position in the Colorado athletics department (United States Court of Appeals, 2001).

The effect of computer technology

Despite its recent popularity, the Internet has been around for several decades, beginning as a Department of Defense project called ARPANet in the 1960s (Rauscher,

1996, 2). The Stanford Research Institute then used it in experiments in the early 1980s to develop the Transfer Control Protocol/Internet Protocol that allows computers to communicate by sending “packets” of information (Rauscher, 1996, 3). By the mid-1980s, the Internet was used for research and development purposes by colleges, universities, and the government (Rauscher, 1996, 3).

One component of the Internet is the World Wide Web, which “refers to the global accumulation of all Internet-accessible Web pages and content” (Covell, 2000, 171). The first software for the World Wide Web was developed by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, and it “allowed scientists to navigate between files and computers on the Internet without worrying about what software program was being used at the other end – and it made the movement easier, using hypertext links rather than a series of easily forgotten numbers and letters to access distant documents” (Rauscher, 1996, 5). The software was placed in the public domain in 1993 and a year later its rapid development produced a growth in the number of online consumers as more non-academics began using its resources (Rauscher, 1996, 5-6).

The appeal of the Web in the United States is evident by its global dominance in this area. As of 2000, the U.S. was responsible for 83 percent of all page views by Web users worldwide and maintained 65 percent of the top thousand Web sites (Castells, 2001, 219). One reason the Web is so attractive is that the information available is “virtually boundless” (Rauscher, 1996, 37). It has also created a vision of “a new world of innovation based on the technologies of digital convergence” that is shared by “consumers, technology providers, media companies, communications providers, and entrepreneurs” (Covell, 2000, 170).

The Internet and the Web have also gained importance as a communication tool. It is the first medium that allows “the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale” (Castells, 2001, 2). In 2001, there were more than 400 million users of computer communication networks, and it is projected that there will be approximately 1 billion users by 2005 and double that amount by 2010 (Castells, 2001, 3). With this amount of infiltration, “a Web presence may now be more ‘keeping up with the Jones’” than exploiting its revenue-generating potential” (Rauscher, 1996, 101). In the span of 24 hours, “some 3.2 million pages are added to the World Wide Web and 55,000 individuals worldwide adopt the Internet each day” (Rogers, 2004, 24).

While some people view the Internet as a place to find information, social communicators see it more as “coffee houses, bowling teams, and dinner parties, emphasizing tools such as chats, instant messaging, newsgroups, organizational portals, and listservs,” activities that provide social interaction (Katz and Rice, 2002, 203). Furthermore, “research and theory indicate that online communities generally can overcome physical and temporal constraints, be vibrant and supportive, allow diverse voices to create shared information, spur both local and global activism, generally complement offline communities, and foster otherwise suppressed dialogue” (Katz and Rice, 2002, 324). Castells also argues that communication on the Internet is “not isolated in some kind of imaginary world, the domain of role playing and fake identities” but rather rooted in social practice (Castells, 2001, 200).

Therefore, the advent and growth of the Internet and its consequent effects as a communication tool can be seen across most disciplines, including sports. News - whether it is political, medical, educational, or even local - is no exception. For example,

the Internet has changed political reporting by providing “a means of conveying information and as a vehicle for the public to observe and comment on political reporting” (Simon, 2003). Additionally, “dozens of individuals or organizations that post all or part of political news stories or circulate through e-mail their own lists of the top stories of the day, often reflecting the political perspective of the distributor’s special interests” (Simon, 2003). A comparison that is drawn between political reporting now and that of 13 years ago focuses on one main area: today’s existence of the Internet. In pre-Internet times, there were no 24-hour political news Web sites, or blogs in which reporters provide real-time information, and rumors, without editing or further research on the issue (Simon, 2003).

The Canadian Medical Association Journal discovered that having a presence on the Internet creates a more diverse readership as well as a broader spectrum of writers (Canadian Medical Association, 2004). The results of an online survey showed that “over 40% of the estimated annual total of 1.2 million visitors to [electronic Canadian Medical Association Journal] do not have access to the print journal, and that fewer than a third are Canadian” (Canadian Medical Association, 2004). Furthermore, the Internet provides opportunities for patients to access the same information as clinicians. “The Internet offers an opportunity to educate people and it will also enable consumers to participate in the decision-making process regarding their health care” (“Letters to the editor”, 2003).

Similarly, the effect of computer technology can be seen in the field of sports information. College Sports Television debuted in April 2003, but before the end of the year had made its way into the area of online sports coverage. The network purchased the Official College Sports Network, “which designs and maintains Web sites for the

athletics departments of almost 150 institutions and collegiate conferences” (Read, 2003). “College Sports Online's ‘College Sports Pass’ subscription service provides audio and video of games, coaches' shows, press conferences and other exclusive broadband programming; its exclusive ‘GameTracker’ application provides live statistics, scores and play-by-play for football, basketball, baseball and softball” (collegesports.com). For College Sports Television, television simply wasn’t enough. “The cable TV company needs to court the online market,” said Brian Bedol, president and chief operating officer of College Sports Television, “because a growing number of alumni and other college sports enthusiasts are turning to the Web for sports news” (Read, 2003).

Also, sports information directors previously depended heavily on typewriters and standard postal mail but now “the Internet has made possible the near instantaneous exchange of information and resources through listservs, newsgroups, and electronic mail,” thereby altering the time and manner in which sports news is disseminated (Shiffett et al, 2001). Before the proliferation of e-mail and Web sites, sports information directors had to make decisions about when to send releases based on whether the newspapers they were sending it to were morning or evening papers. It was important for SIDs to use sound judgment when deciding “when to release stories, where to send them (mailing lists), planning your schedule so that your copy arrives in time for deadlines, and spreading your special stories around so that the same few people aren’t getting all the breaks” (Unger, 1976, 34). Now, those steps are eliminated.

The effect of computer technology on Sports Information Directors

There have been three major studies conducted to examine the effect of computer technology on the sports information profession. The first was a thesis written in 1993 by a student at Slippery Rock University and examined the general use of electronic technology by sports information directors. Because the Internet was still being developed at this time, this study did not look at its effect, instead focusing on the overall use of computers in assisting in keeping records and statistics by sports information directors (Michaels, 1993). The researcher created a survey consisting of 21 questions and mailed it to the sports information directors of the 14 universities that comprised the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

It was discovered that every responding sports information department was using a computer and 76.9 percent reported that they could not live without it (Michaels, 1993). Reasons cited were that it saved time in recording statistics and allowed information to be distributed more rapidly to the media (Michaels, 1993). However, 25 percent also responded that the use of a computer had added more work for the department, with one SID stating, “We are now slaves to technology” (Michaels, 1993).

While Michaels’ study provides a foundation into the research of technology in sports information departments, the sample size could be enlarged to more accurately reflect sports information departments as a whole. Michaels did suggest replicating the study using both Division I and II schools to see if there is a difference across the various levels of college athletics (Michaels, 1993).

The second major study was a thesis written in 1998 by a student at Ball State University and researched the general impact of computer technology on sports

information directors. The survey contained 20 questions and was mailed to participants. The purpose of the study was to investigate use of computer technology by the SIDs of the 12 schools that comprise the Mid-American Conference, and it was discovered that 100 percent of them used electronic mail (Taylor, 1998). However, during a time when e-mail was not as commonplace – or necessary – as it is today, the amount of usage was not very high. In fact, 25 percent sent internal e-mails just once a week while one respondent never did (Taylor, 1998).

The dissemination of sports information such as rosters, statistics, and news releases via e-mail was also examined. It was found that 16.7 percent sent such information via e-mail once a week, with another 16.7 percent sending it just once a month, and one respondent never sending it via e-mail (Taylor, 1998). However, the respondents did stress the growing influence of e-mail on the sports information profession, with one SID commenting on how it has changed the immediacy of sports information (Taylor, 1998).

Data was also collected regarding the SIDs and their use of the Internet. All 12 respondents said they not only use the Internet, but each program also has its own athletics Web site (Taylor, 1998). When asked about the importance of the Web site to their athletics program, 91.7 percent said that it is important, with half of those saying that it is very important and the others noting its increasing importance (Taylor, 1998). When addressing the issue of these sites, there was a general consensus of added responsibility to the SID to maintain and update the site. One director stated:

“The Internet has increased the demand for information from fans, alums, and media. Internet updating could be a full-time job. People will continue to want

more, more, more and now, now, now. Unfortunately it's added one more huge responsibility to (sports information) workload. More staff is needed, but most likely won't be" (Taylor, 1998).

The survey touched on the issue of who is responsible for maintaining the site, but did not go into any detail.

The author does make several good recommendations for further research that would expand on the data collected in this study, such as examining "the use of electronic mail and Internet releases of sports information used by the media to determine effectiveness" (Taylor, 1998).

However, the sample size for Taylor's study is too restricted. Twelve is too small of a representation in almost any survey, and while the data from this study does provide insight, it is not necessarily indicative of the profession as a whole. The study needs to be replicated with a larger sample, as recommended by the author.

The third study was also a thesis, written in 2000 by a student at the University of North Carolina, and focuses on the experiences of college sports information directors with independent Web sites and requests for credentials. The methodology was a survey that was faxed to the SIDs of the 114 Division I football schools. They were given 11 days to respond by faxing back the completed survey. Forty-five surveys were completed and returned, for a response rate of 39.47 percent. The subject matter is one of substantial importance as independent sites are becoming increasingly popular, thanks in part to the two major networks, Rivals.com and TheInsiders.com, whose sites are used for recruiting information, message boards, and exclusive inside information.

The first research question focused on whether the SIDs are receiving requests for credentials from independent Web sites. It was found that 62.2 percent of schools have an independent site that covers their program, but 82.2 percent have received requests for credentials (Stepp, 2000). The author speculates that the reason for this increase is due to requests by sites to cover the visiting teams (Stepp, 2000). The respondents were also asked if sites have contacted them about conducting player interviews, with 68.9 percent saying that they had received such requests (Stepp, 2000).

This data shows the presence of independent Web sites and creates the issue of how their requests are handled by the sports information department. While 37 respondents had been approached by a site with regard to credentials, only 19 had granted a credential to a site, and eight of those had also denied requests (Stepp, 2000). In regard to credentialing policy, 75.6 percent of respondents said they did have a formal policy (Stepp, 2000). Twenty-four SIDs remarked that they had a general case-by-case, fax on letterhead policy while 18 required an accredited media outlet (Stepp, 2000). Three listed a conference or school policy against giving credentials to independent sites, while only one SID had no policy regarding these sites (Stepp, 2000).

Of the combined 107 credential denials by the respondents, the most popular reason was because of a lack of journalistic standards, accounting for 33.6 percent of those denials (Stepp, 2000). The covering of unsigned athletes came second with 24.3 percent, and message boards took 19.6 percent (Stepp, 2000). Independent sites are often associated with inaccurate information, false rumors, and negative posts on message boards, all of which can hurt an SID, whose job it is to provide a positive image for

his/her program. When asked whether independent sites are held to the same level of accountability as other media outlets, 80 percent responded no (Stepp, 2000).

But many publishers of the independent sites are quick to disagree. Dean Legge and Scott Kennedy are co-publishers of the site DawgPost.com, which covers athletics at the University of Georgia for TheInsiders. “It might look like a fan site, but two of the three contributors are accredited members of the media” (Abqtrib.com). Others are quick to cite the benefits of independent sites, such as Steve Patterson, who runs the competing Georgia site, UGASports.com, for Rivals. Patterson witnessed the positive impact on recruiting firsthand when his site ran a story about a high school player from Athens, Ga., who was not receiving media attention anywhere else. As a result of the story, the player was offered a scholarship from Northern Arizona University, where he not only played football, but also earned his degree – all because of a little publicity on an independent Web site (Patterson, 2003).

Stepp also asked respondents whether they viewed independent sites as competition, which 73.3 percent said that they did, with the main reason being that it drives traffic from the official site (Stepp, 2000). The final question was whether sports information offices reserve the right to deny credentials as long as it is not based on gender, race, or religion, with 97.8 percent of respondents saying they do reserve that right (Stepp, 2000). It was also found that of the 45 respondents, 11 noted that practices have been closed because of security issues regarding the content being placed on the Internet (Stepp, 2000).

An interesting recommendation that is made by Stepp for future research is to examine the potential advertising revenues between official and independent sites,

keeping in mind that they view each other as competition and each have a substantial following (Stepp, 2000). However, the literature review here is weak, mainly in that it is more of an explanation of the credentialing process than a background on the subject matter. The turnaround time on the survey was also short, just 11 days, and may be a reason why less than 40 percent responded. It would be interesting to conduct this survey again while comparing Division I and Division II football schools.

The effect of the Internet on public relations

The development of the Internet has affected the public relations industry in a number of ways, such as the definition, meaning, practice, and understanding of public relations (Ihator, 2001). This is because “Cyberspace is not physical, geometric, or geographic. Time and space no longer limit the amount of information and audience size” (Ihator, 2001). This technology also allows many people in public relations to also be editors and publishers (Marken, 1998). Additionally, it “is enhancing interactivity, feedback and evaluations, and virtual story telling” (Ihator, 2001). The Internet also presents the option to both the media and customers of bypassing traditional agenda setting and accessing unfiltered information (FitzGerald, 2003).

One characteristic of public relations on the Internet is that it can be utilized as a supplement to what is being done elsewhere as long as the message and corporate image remain the same (Gamse, 2000). Visitors to a Web site can also be directed to printed materials and vice versa (Gamse, 2000). Another advantage is that it allows for the quick dissemination of online press releases to the ever-growing number of online media, including newspapers and magazines (Gamse, 2000).

Although there is increased opportunity for the dissemination of information, the development of technology also harbors some drawbacks. For instance, one public relations firm was “blacklisted by the Associated Press for sending too much ‘spam-like’ e-mail” (FitzGerald, 2003). Marken also believes that there is a prevalence of ignorance among public relation professionals regarding the Internet.

“Unfortunately, the vast majority of PR people spend very little time understanding the depth and breadth of the Internet and the communities it serves. Companies and agencies spend hundreds and thousands of dollars on audio, video and print clipping services to analyze how their messages are being picked up, interpreted and used by the conventional media. They spend little or no time or effort finding out what people are saying in real-time in cyberspace about them” (Marken, 1998, 32).

One study showed that public relation personnel might not be using Web sites to their fullest potential. In the study, 20 journalists visited the press areas of 20 corporate Web sites to gather information for a story, and were only able to find the answers to simple questions 68 percent of the time (Nielsen, 2001). The results raised the question, “Why spend a fortune on outbound PR (trying to pitch journalists) while you neglect simple steps to increase the effectiveness of inbound PR (satisfying journalists who visit your Web site?)” (Nielsen, 2001).

The use of computer technology

A 2002 study published in the *Journal of Sport Management* examined the use of the Internet and e-mail for survey distribution. This study helps provide a foundation for

the methodology of the current study in that it shows some evidence that using the Internet in research can be a solid method. The use of e-mail increased both the number and variety of participants in the study and had the highest response rate of the three groups studied (Kent and Turner, 2002). In addition, it increases the speed of data collection, which is significantly related to the current research because of the short time span available for the study to be conducted. Another benefit is that it reduces the cost of the research.

The researchers also propose several numbers in regard to what percentage of respondents will make the results legitimate. Some people have said that results with a lower than 50 percent response rate can be rejected. However, for those in positions of “top management”, a response rate of 36 percent is normal (Kent and Turner, 2002). Since the current study surveyed college sports information directors, a position that can be considered top management, these numbers were extremely helpful when deciding upon a sample size.

However, three problems that are exclusive to web-based surveys have also been identified: the limited access of population, the reliance on the technical sophistication of the recipient, and the potential non-responsiveness of subjects (Kent and Turner, 2002). There is also the “disposability factor,” meaning that it is so easy to delete e-mails that it is often done without reading the text.

To obtain the sample for Kent and Turner’s study, a nationwide population of 1,020 NCAA head coaches was chosen from the Blue Book of College Athletics. Each listing provided the coaches’ names and e-mail addresses, where available. Another source utilized was school’s individual Web sites. From this sample, 525 coaches with

valid e-mail addresses were identified. Of the original 1,020 coaches used in the study, 448 returned usable questionnaires for a response rate of 43.9 percent. The response rate for those subjects pre-notified via e-mail was the highest, at 51.5 percent (Kent and Turner, 2002). The results of this study suggest that web-based surveys and use of e-mail are valuable methods that allow researchers to cut costs and save time without sacrificing effectiveness in methodology.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of official school Web sites on the job of Division I college sports information directors. The target population included all 327 Division I sports information directors. Directors from Division I schools were chosen because of the high probability that their school maintains an official Web site and that it has had an impact on the sports information director position. This study chose to focus on Division I because of the possibility for variance among Division I-A, Division I-AA, and Division I-AAA along with the chance that schools in Division II may not all have official athletic Web sites or use them as frequently.

The instrument that was used in this study was an online survey. The survey was created by the researcher and put online with help from the Statistical Consulting Center at the University of Tennessee. As a result, the Web address was “utk.edu” based and helped to lend credibility by being associated with the university and not a random free site. The survey focused on the sports information directors’ experiences with official school Web sites and the issue of who is responsible for the extra work created as a result of these sites. The survey consisted primarily of multiple choice and yes/no questions but also offered a couple of open-ended questions. The survey contained 21 questions in all.

A pretest was administered to a small number of sports information directors at Division II institutions prior to the survey in order to receive feedback about survey structure, phrasing of questions, and topic areas. This intended to help create a stronger

survey that addressed the most relevant issues and helped to eliminate any ambiguity surrounding the questions. A group of 10 Division II sports information directors whose schools maintained an official athletic Web site were chosen for the pretest. In addition, an administrator from the College Sports Information Directors of America was asked to participate in the pretest.

An e-mail was sent to this group on Sept. 17, 2004, that explained the research and the purpose and importance of the pretest. A link to the survey was included, and participants were asked to make comments, suggestions, and criticisms on the survey design, structure, answer choices, etc. by Sept. 21, 2004. Based on the results of the pretest, changes were made to the survey to improve it before being sent to the Division I sports information directors. It was also determined that the survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

On Sept. 27, 2004, all 327 Division I sports information directors were sent an e-mail that outlined the project and asked them to partake in the survey. They were given a direct link to the survey, and asked to complete it by Oct. 11, 2004. The letter also explained that all answers would be kept confidential and reported as group data only, and that no identifying characteristics were asked. Respondents were also told to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. To avoid the possibility of the e-mail being misperceived as a mass-mailing junk letter, the e-mail was sent to only 8-10 people at a time. A reminder e-mail was sent on Oct. 4, 2004, asking anyone who had not yet participated in the survey to please visit the site and respond within one week to meet the original deadline of Oct. 11, 2004.

The reason for choosing to e-mail the invitation was to eliminate the mailing costs associated with a paper survey as well as reduce the amount of time spent gathering the data. It was also likely that all SIDs have access to, and use, an e-mail address. E-mail addresses were collected from the online directory of the College Sports Information Directors of America as well as from schools' official athletic Web sites.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of official athletic Web sites on the job of Division I sports information directors and how the position has changed as a result. First, a pretest was conducted to test the survey design and attempt to locate any problems that could occur with the survey. Although 11 people were contacted about participating in the pretest – 10 Division II sports information directors and 1 member of CoSIDA – there was only one response. Therefore, there was not a lot of feedback about the survey content, but it was still important in ensuring that the survey was functioning properly online and that it was accessible through the link provided in the e-mail.

For the final survey, all 327 Division I sports information directors were invited via e-mail to participate in the online survey. However, problems arose with a handful of e-mail addresses. Four were returned because the recipient was no longer employed at the school in that capacity, and the new contact information was gathered from the schools' official Web sites and the invitation was resent. However, there were eight addresses that returned the e-mail and upon checking the contact information, nothing had been updated on the official school sites that would suggest another person was working as the sports information director. One e-mail was returned because it was identified as "spam" mail. The e-mail was then resent individually to that recipient, but it was once again refused. Therefore, there were nine recipients who could not be reached and this decreased the sample size to 318. Of those successfully contacted, 142 participated in the survey for a

response rate of 44.6 percent. Because respondents were not required to answer all questions, the tables and percentages calculated in this chapter have been done so based on the actual number of valid responses for each question.

Background

Since the survey was conducted anonymously and no identifying characteristics were asked of the participants, basic demographic questions were asked in order to ascertain an understanding of the overall group of respondents. It was learned that 54.5 percent work for an institution that competes athletically at the Division I-A level, with 35.5 percent competing at Division I-AA and 10 percent at Division I-AAA, as seen in table 1. These numbers are slightly inconsistent with the actual makeup of Division I, in which I-A comprises 35.8 percent, I-AA 36.1 percent, and I-AAA 28.1 percent (ncaa.org). It is possible that a skewing occurred here because not all participants responded to this question. Therefore, certain subdivisions may have been better represented than what was reported.

Table 1: Level of athletic competition

Level	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Division I-A	60	54.5%
Division I-AA	39	35.5%
Division I-AAA	11	10.0%

Schools of various sizes were each well represented, with the largest number (24.3 percent) of respondents coming from schools with a total enrollment of 5,000 – 10,000 students and the smallest number (13.5 percent) representing schools with an enrollment of 15,001 – 20,000, as seen in table A-1, Appendix H. Finally, 60.7 percent of respondents work for a public institution and 39.3 for a private institution, as seen in table A-2, Appendix H.

Because the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I sports information directors, it was necessary for all respondents to work in a department that manages such a site. Therefore, participants were asked if their college or university has an official athletic Web site. Only one person replied negatively, as seen in table A-3, Appendix H, and he/she was then taken directly to the end of the survey because the questions asked were not pertinent to someone without a Web site.

The results

While official college athletic Web sites may function in various roles depending on the program, one thing that can be agreed upon is their importance. An overwhelming majority of sports information directors rate the importance of their site to their collegiate program as above average, with more than half (53.2 percent) labeling it as crucial. Based on that response, it is surprising that one respondent still said that his/her site is of minimal importance, as seen in table 2.

Table 2: Importance of official athletic Web sites to collegiate programs

Importance	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Crucial, cannot live without	59	53.2%
Very important	47	42.3%
Average importance	4	3.6%
Minimal importance	1	0.9%
Not important	0	0%

One of the reasons that these sites have become so important is the ability to reach a large audience. While most schools have a wide target audience that often includes media, students, alumni, athletes' families, other schools, and the general public, some reach farther beyond. Some sites also direct content toward the school's faculty and staff, while some have found it useful for donors, ticket buyers, coaches, conference offices, researchers, and the general sports fan.

For some schools, this target audience has not changed over time, and some SIDs contend that it has been the goal all along to reach everyone possible. Others find it more beneficial to have a smaller target audience, such as the respondent who said his/her site has "always aimed at the parents and families and fans. The main reason is that we get little to no coverage in any media outside our community, so this is the first place people can look for any information."

But many programs have seen a shift in intended audience, particularly in the area of recruiting. It may not necessarily be a new audience for some schools, but one of increased importance. For instance, one school that had primarily focused on the fans and media has since added a form for prospective student-athletes, a useful tool for recruits. Another SID mentioned that recruits are more likely to look at the online version of the

media guide instead of the print copy, and another pointed out the value of the site for coaches, who can use it as a way of informing recruits of the type of exposure they can expect.

Another area that is becoming more targeted is a school's alumni, and some sites look to benefit in terms of marketing and fundraising, including one school that utilizes its site to help efforts to increase revenue for scholarships and capital projects. Athletes' families are visiting some sites more heavily, and the focus has shifted in that direction. One SID said that the parents "seem to live and die for our postings." While some schools find that the media are becoming less of a target audience, the opposite is true for others. One SID said this is "because they have become more accepting of our site as reliable" while for others it is driven by an increase in information, with one respondent even saying that some "reporters are using web info almost verbatim."

Overall, more respondents said that the target audience for their site has not changed. However, fans and the general public are becoming more prominent as they become more aware of the content available on the site and are more comfortable accessing it. In order to gain a general idea of the amount of traffic that passes through these sites, respondents were asked if their site has a counter to record the number of hits it receives. Just slightly less than half (47.3 percent) of the SIDs had counters on their site, as seen in table A-4, Appendix H.

For those that did have a counter, it is difficult to directly compare statistics because not all sites were launched at the same time, and it is more likely that sites that have been online longer will have more hits. However, the number of hits that a site has received varied greatly. A couple of sites boasted astronomical numbers, such as

51,430,559 and 25 million. While many surpassed the one million mark, some did not even begin to approach it, providing figures such as 14,300 and 45,024.

Some of these fans search for added features such as live stats, videos, or audio streaming. The widespread use of the Internet can also be a factor, as one SID said, “Ten years ago the audience was very young, but as more and more people become comfortable with computers, our audience has grown.” Another opinion is that the audience has not necessarily changed, but the order in which people obtain information has. “Now, the website is usually the first stop to look up info,” the respondent added.

Whether the target audience has changed or not, the urgency for quick, up to the minute information has become apparent for most schools. Because the sites are of such importance to most Division I programs, they are updated frequently, with 61.7 percent of respondents saying that their site is updated more than two times a day, as seen in table 3. However, this number is actually higher given that some of the responses for the “other” category also fall into this distinction, such as “3-4 times a day,” “all day,” and “continuously.” A popular answer here was “as often as needed.” Only one SID said that his/her site is only updated once a week.

Table 3: Frequency of Web site being updated

Frequency	Number of responses	Percent of responses
More than 2 times a day	71	61.7%
Twice a day	9	7.8%
Once a day	17	14.8%
Once a week	1	0.9%
Other	17	14.8%

Despite the fact that almost all of the sites are updated at least once a day, 17.5 percent of respondents felt this was not often enough, as seen in table A-5, Appendix H. The most common restrictions that prevent the site from being updated more often were overwhelmingly a lack of time and personnel. This sentiment was especially strong from respondents who serve as the only person in their school's sports information department. One respondent said, "I am the only sports information director at the university so I would say that not enough time would be a valid answer," while another said, "Our entire SID staff consists of ONE – I repeat, one full-time person for 16 sports."

Another SID who also cited a shortage of support staff recognized the impact that having a larger staff would have on the Web site, saying, "We could have someone changing things every day and our hits would probably rise after the audience was trained to know it would be a constant flow of information." Others realize the value of posting and updating the most important information first, then handling excess projects if time permits, such as the SID who said, "With a two-person staff and no other help (no interns or students) there is only a limited amount of time that can be spent on projects with the Web other than the regular maintenance." Another respondent said, "You really need a full-time person to do just Web if you want to have everything updated. It isn't difficult to do just releases, stats, etc., but to put up head shots, new bios, alumni info, directions, fundraisers, etc. can be time consuming."

Another SID agreed that a full-time person would be the best solution, but is unrealistic due to budgetary constraints, saying, "We should have a full time editor who moves and posts stories throughout the day, but like everything else, that costs money." One respondent addressed another issue that sometimes prevents the site from being

updated more often: other schools not sending results or information quick enough to get it posted on the site. In general, respondents voiced a frustration at not having the time or staff to make changes on the Web site as often as they are needed.

While many people recognize the need for a full-time employee to maintain the Web site, that duty in most offices falls to the sports information director or the entire sports information staff. Only 6.4 percent of respondents currently have someone working full-time on the site, as seen in table 4. Many of the 47.3 percent who responded “other” specified that it is the responsibility of all staff members in the sports information department while some said that each person is delegated to cover a specific sport or area of the site. The SID is primarily responsible 35.5 percent of the time. Overall, the duty is often delegated to someone already in the department, adding that task to the others already required of that person’s position. Only one respondent (0.9 percent) works for a school that employs an outside company.

Table 4: Responsibility for updating Web site

Person responsible	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Other	52	47.3%
I am	39	35.5%
An assistant sports information director	9	8.2%
A full-time employee in the athletics department	7	6.4%
An office intern or graduate assistant	2	1.8%
An outside company	1	0.9%

Table 5: Extra work created for sports information director

Hours of work	Number of responses	Percent of responses
2 hours or more per week	86	74.1%
Between 1 and 2 hours per week	22	19%
Less than 1 hour per week	4	3.4%
No extra work	4	3.4%

Therefore, this responsibility of maintaining the Web site translates into extra work for most sports information directors, with 74.1 percent saying that it adds two hours or more per week, as seen in table 5. For some SIDs, this extra work is simply added onto what is already expected of the position. For others, it replaces other tasks that previously would have received more attention, such as writing features on athletes. One respondent said, “My time is distributed differently, and I must now learn/possess skills I did not need before, such as Photoshop and html language. Much of the time I used to spend working on things like feature stories is now spent on the Web site.”

It was found that 12.3 percent of respondents work in a department where a position has been created for Web personnel, as seen in table A-6, Appendix H. Of those 14 respondents, 57.1 percent said that the position was created two years ago or more (as seen in table A-7, Appendix H), showing that the hiring of Web personnel is not a recent practice and was actually adopted by a handful of schools early on. This, however, does not mean that it is a procedure that will become commonplace in college athletics. Most respondents (88.9 percent) said there is no plan to create a position for Web personnel in their department, as seen in table A-8, Appendix H.

Table 6: Trend toward hiring Web personnel

Prediction	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Yes	65	55.6%
No	31	26.5%
Not sure	21	17.9%

While only 6.4 percent of respondents currently have a full-time person within their department whose sole responsibility is the maintenance of the school's official athletic Web site, more than half (55.6 percent) foresee this as a growing trend in the future. Another 17.9 percent are unsure of what will happen, as seen in table 6.

Several respondents said that more departments will employ Web personnel in the future out of necessity. One SID said that these Web sites are the future, and expanded on that belief by making a bold prediction, saying, "I expect that within the next five years media guides will be obsolete and everyone will get information from college websites and there will be a greater necessity to get information up quicker." Another person said, "Eventually, all schools will have to have professionally done web sites to keep up," while another expressed the belief that "The sites are becoming too multi-faceted to simply be added to an existing job description."

But for the 26.5 percent who do not envision this as the movement of the future, most believe that is exactly what will be done: the duty will remain the responsibility of the SID or someone else already employed by the department. One main reason is once again budgetary restrictions, as expressed by the individual who said, "It's needed, but budgets will always stand in the way when you can get something done out of the people you already have." One SID said, "Budgets are shrinking, not growing," while one said simply, "colleges are cheap."

A number of respondents expressed the belief that hiring Web personnel may be feasible for the larger athletic programs, but not the smaller ones, with one of the reasons being the aforementioned budget restrictions. One SID said, "Depends on the size of the school ... big BCS schools that can afford them already have them ... the small schools that need them, can't afford them." A difference may be present among the various levels of Division I, as one SID commented, "At the I-AA and I-AAA levels, the budget will not allow for the creation of a position solely to create and maintain an athletics department Web site." But while smaller schools may not have the money to hire a full-time person to run the Web site, others believe that the lack of growth toward this may be because those schools that would be interested in pursuing this option have already done so.

The overall effect on the job of sports information director

The division of feelings over the future role of Web personnel is mirrored in the sentiments about how an individual's job has changed as a result of official college athletic Web sites. For some, the effect has been positive, as one SID mentioned that while there is more content to update, it is also easier to answer questions because people can be directed to the Web site, which cuts down on the number of phone calls. Another respondent echoed this thought, pointing out that it makes it easier to deal with both the media and fans. For some, the presence of the Web site means an elimination of a lot of faxing or e-mailing, and "hours that used to be spent stuffing envelopes and mailing are now spent on the immediate."

But while the job has improved for some, the Web site has simply equated into a heavier workload and added stress for others. One SID said that, “we spend probably 10-15 hours per week on the website ... difficult challenge considering we did not add any personnel so we either work more ... or do less!” while another said, “It has created a great deal of stress related to balancing the desire to keep up with other schools, give the athletes and teams the attention they deserve and also do the other things an SID is required to do.”

Several respondents discussed the fact that the site has effectively made it necessary for an SID to be available at any time, stressing the need to be attentive to Web site updates 24 hours a day. One respondent said, “it forces us to be on hand at all hours of nights and weekends to update with results from away contests. The site inevitably has grown to the point where it needs editing and updating multiple times a day.” Another SID acknowledged the improved ability to promote and market athletic teams, but also that it has now “increased workload roughly 20% overall and more than doubled the amount of time put in on the job outside of regular office hours.”

Along with the constant need to monitor the site’s content, some SIDs are also feeling the increased pressure to have immediate results and information available on the site. One SID said that having the site means “more work and higher expectations of it being up on the web site and almost immediately after it is done. Greater demand from all parties.” Another similar response was, “It has made the immediacy of information even more prominent. People cannot wait for the site to be updated, and if it is not updated within an hour of a game being completed, we hear about it.” In order to emphasize this need for a quick turnaround, one SID said, “Used to be deadlines for news and

newspapers, now if a tennis match is over at 1:30 p.m. results better be online by 1:32 p.m.” For some sports information directors, pressure is coming to update information that is not necessarily even timely. “I had tennis and track parents complaining their student-athlete bios were not on the web site when our school year began in September,” one SID said, “and their seasons do not officially begin until next semester.” And for one SID, the sentiment is clear, saying it has “increased the demands 1,000-fold; really, it’s become an albatross.”

Several respondents appear to have a love-hate relationship with their Web site, recognizing it has value but is simultaneously cumbersome. A prime example is the statement that “The web site has made it easier to spread the word about our sports. However, it has meant more time and energy in providing the information.” A more detailed situation was given by the SID who said, “Sports which were only publicized in a weekly release now have detailed up to the minute coverage. Sports which were publicized regularly are now publicized constantly.” But the drawback is that “interaction with media, opponents, conference, fans, and alumni have become less personal.” It has, in at least one case, also made the workplace a little less inviting for the SID who said, “While the sites are a great benefit, it has really made the office a more difficult place to work. In our business you don’t expect 40 hour work weeks, but the web has just added to the amount of work.”

In some instances, the Web site has not necessarily changed the sports information director’s job, but rather the way he/she works. The advances in technology have meant that the job is still about providing information, but now in a different format. A few respondents expressed the belief that it has become the number one source of

information, moving people away from the fax machine and into an electronic field. One SID said, “We now gear live stats, web broadcasts and everything we can think of to service our audiences through our website. It comes first. Everything else is next in line in terms of priorities.”

Overall, it is impossible to categorize the effect as either positive or negative because the feelings are so divided. Much of this depends on an SID’s budget and staff size, and therefore how much of the workload he/she is directly responsible for handling. What can be said is that official athletic Web sites do have an effect on the sports information director position. This is apparent from the interest in the topic and the solid response rate as well as the respondents’ willingness to speak candidly about their experiences and views on the subject.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand the effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I sports information directors. Through the data collected in the survey, conclusions were drawn regarding the four research questions presented at the start of this research.

1. Who is responsible for maintaining a school's official Web site?

It was found that 35.5 percent of the sports information directors who responded to this question were personally responsible for the maintenance of the Web site. In several situations, respondents said that the responsibility falls to the entire sports information department or that each person is delegated to cover a specific sport or area of the site. The duty of maintaining the site is not universal and is addressed by individual departments to fit their needs.

2. Has a position within the sports information department been created to handle the work of maintaining a Web site?

It was found that only 12.3 percent of respondents work for a department that has created a position specifically for the purpose of maintaining the Web site, and only 6.4 percent of all respondents have a full-time person working in that capacity. Several sports information directors acknowledged that having a full-time person to work on the site would be beneficial, but is unrealistic because of budgetary constraints. However, 55.6 percent foresee this as a growing trend for the future, mainly out of necessity to stay competitive. For those that do not believe Web personnel will be hired more frequently in the future, the reason is once again because of a limited budget.

3. How often is the official site updated?

The urgency for quick, up to the minute information has become apparent since 61.7 percent of respondents say their site is updated more than two times a day. This number is actually higher given that some of the responses for the “other” category also fall into this distinction, such as “3-4 times a day,” “all day,” and “continuously.” Despite the amount of time many SIDs invest in updating the site, 17.5 percent still felt their site was not updated often enough. The most common restrictions were overwhelmingly a lack of time and personnel.

4. How many extra hours of work per week are created for the sports information director as a direct effect of having an official Web site?

Because of the demand for constantly updated information, 74.1 percent of respondents said that maintaining the official Web site adds two hours or more of work per week to their job. Another 19 percent said it adds between one and two hours per week. For some SIDs, this extra work is added onto the duties already expected of the position. For others, it replaces tasks such as writing features on athletes.

To summarize the findings of this study, an overwhelming majority of sports information directors rate the importance of their site as above average, with more than half (53.2 percent) labeling it as crucial and just one respondent saying the site is of minimal importance. Most schools have a wide target audience that includes media, students, alumni, athletes' families, other schools, and the general public. Some schools have chosen to focus the site toward one particular group. One example is the school that targets parents, families and friends because there is little media coverage outside of the community and the site enables them to keep informed about the athletics program. Another example is having the site be used by student-athletes as a recruiting tool.

Fans and the general public are becoming a more prominent target audience as they become more aware of the content available on the site. Some fans search for special features such as live stats or video streaming, and many now use the site as the primary source of information. Therefore, it is not surprising that these sites are updated frequently, with 61.7 percent of respondents saying their site is updated more than twice a

day. However, 17.5 percent of respondents still feel this is not often enough but they are prevented from updating more often because of a lack of time and personnel.

In most offices, the responsibility of updating the Web site belongs to the sports information director or the staff. Only 6.4 percent of respondents currently have a full-time employee whose sole responsibility is maintaining the site. This translates into more work for the SID, with 71.4 percent saying it adds an extra two hours or more of work per week. For some, it means added work on top of regular duties while for others, the work on the site replaces other tasks.

Although only a small number of departments currently employ Web personnel, 55.6 percent of respondents foresee this as a growing trend in the future and another 17.9 percent are unsure. Several SIDs believe this trend will grow out of necessity because of a “survival of the fittest” mentality. For those who do not foresee a change, the main reason is budgetary restrictions. Some respondents argued that it might be feasible for larger programs, but unrealistic for any school not competing at the Division I-A level.

The feelings were divided about the overall effect of the Web sites on the job of a sports information director. Some of the positive changes mentioned are that it is easier to answer questions because people can be directed to the Web site instead of spending time on the phone, and that it eliminates hours of faxing, e-mailing, and stuffing envelopes. Some of the negative changes mentioned are that it creates a heavier workload which equates into added stress, it essentially creates the need to be available 24 hours a day to update the site as needed, and there is increased pressure to have immediate results and updated information available on the site. Some SIDs have a love-hate relationship with their Web site, recognizing that it has value but is also cumbersome. In some instances,

the site has not necessarily changed the SID's job, but the way he/she works. The job is still about providing information, but in a different format.

The effect of these sites cannot be narrowly defined. It is extremely situational, depending on factors such as staff size, budget, and level of athletic competition. It will take more time to fully understand the effect, but as the technology becomes even more widespread, it is more likely that personnel will be added to handle the Web site and the benefits will become greater for the SID.

One of the impacts of these sites has been the building of a nationwide fan base. The availability of information allows anyone, anywhere to follow any team across the country. Many sites also provide the opportunity to purchase team merchandise and media guides so fan bases are no longer concentrated in the school's immediate vicinity. It is a great way for alumni to stay connected to the school's athletics program, particularly when they may move out of state and be unable to travel to games. As a result of a having a stronger fan base, the school benefits from added revenue generated from not only tickets and online sales, but also donations from alumni who stay connected to, and interested in, the program.

It is possible that one of the reasons a number of SIDs foresee that Web personnel will be hired in the future is because of the need to compete with independent Web sites. These sites have the advantage in that they employ an entire staff of writers who have the ability to report breaking news and provide in-depth analysis to satisfy the fans' need for constant information. However, some college athletics departments are not keen on these sites because they believe the sites foster rumors or post inaccurate information regarding the school's program. Therefore, the schools will want to ensure that fans are visiting the

official site to receive correct information, and will need to employ full-time Web personnel to make sure the necessary updates are made to attract the audience.

The researcher was pleased with the response rate of 44.6 percent given that previous research by Kent and Turner said that a response rate of 36 percent is good for top management. Because the sports information director can be considered top management, the results of this study exceed expectation. The reminder e-mail that was sent to participants one week after the original invitation was a key tool, as the total number of responses in the first week was 98. After the reminder, another 44 people responded, bolstering the overall response rate significantly. However, it may have been helpful to require participants to submit their e-mail address to be removed from the reminder list, which was optional on this survey. Very few people did enter their e-mail address and as a result, were sent the reminder e-mail because the researcher had no way of knowing who had answered the survey already. This appeared to be bothersome to some recipients. However, the drawback of requiring an e-mail address is that it takes away a feature of anonymity, which in turn could reduce the number of responses.

A question also arises about allowing respondents to skip any questions he/she would like. For this survey, any given question averaged 30 non-responses out of 142 possible, and there were several people who only answered a small number of questions on the survey. Perhaps the direction should not be so lenient in allowing questions to be skipped, since some such as job title are important to ensure that a random person is not answering the survey and skewing the data, an unlikely situation but one which is always possible. However, this again raises the issue of anonymity and also the question of how many allowances can be made without sacrificing data.

For the pretest, it definitely would have been beneficial to solidify participants beforehand instead of relying on a random sampling. People were much less willing to participate than expected, and the lack of involvement really negated the entire point of having a pretest since there was little feedback to work off of. When sending the e-mail invitation to the survey, there was a problem with a few of the e-mail addresses and therefore, it would be beneficial to try and find a way to confirm them ahead of time. However, this particular study had too large of a sample to contact each person individually, and it also may turn some people off from the survey before they are even invited to it. Therefore, the best solution may be to wait as long as possible to collect the e-mail addresses. For this study, that collection began approximately two months before the invitation was sent and proved to be an extremely time consuming process. With that in mind, it would probably not be wise to wait until the last minute to collect the addresses and may just be a factor that the researcher has to deal with and prepare for. The sample size in this study was a bit difficult to manage, but a smaller sample size would have meant less data, a tradeoff that is not necessarily one worth making.

This study provides a foundation for work in the future that could greatly expand on the topic and examine it in greater detail. Sports information directors from different school sizes varied greatly on their opinions of the Web sites, indicating that there is a greater divide among Division I programs than originally perceived. The underlying factor that appears to be causing the discrepancies is money, an issue that was not addressed in the current research but should be a focus of future studies. Here are some suggestions for future research:

Examine a further breakdown of this issue within Division I, taking a closer look at I-A, I-AA, and I-AAA to see what differences there are, particularly in terms of budget and staff size, and why. Also, are football schools more inclined to have more developed Web sites?

Repeat the study with Division II schools to see the difference across divisions. This may be tough because not all Division II schools may have official sites or if they do, they may not be of very much importance. This would in itself provide insight, but not allow for much data collection.

Examine and compare the budgets of athletics programs either within Division I-A or across all subdivisions of Division I, focusing on the total annual allotment of funds and the percentage spent on employing sports information personnel. Since many schools cited a lack of funds as reasons for not employing more staff, it would be beneficial to see how drastic a difference exists in budgets and why some programs can afford what others cannot. This should include an examination of revenue sources as well as salaries of schools' athletics administrators.

Examine the relationship between official athletic Web sites and independent Web sites to determine to what extent they are in direct competition with one another and the subsequent effect on an athletics program. Additionally, it should be researched whether independent Web sites have an effect on the decision by schools to hire full-time web personnel to maintain the official sites.

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Appendices

Appendix A

List of NCAA Division I Colleges & Universities

Air Force Academy
University of Akron
University of Alabama-Birmingham
University of Alabama
Alabama A&M University
Alabama State University
University at Albany
Alcorn State University
American University
Appalachian State University
University of Arizona
Arizona State University
University of Arkansas
University of Arkansas, Little Rock
University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff
Arkansas State University
Army
Auburn University
Austin Peay State University
Ball State University
Baylor University
Belmont University
Bethune-Cookman College
State University of New York at Binghamton
Birmingham-Southern College
Boise State University
Boston College
Boston University
Bowling Green State University
Bradley University
Brigham Young University
Brown University
Bucknell University
University of Buffalo
Butler University
University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, Riverside
University of California, Santa Barbara
California Polytechnic State University

California State University, Fresno
California State University, Fullerton
California State University, Northridge
California State University, Sacramento
Campbell University
Canisius College
Centenary College (Louisiana)
Central Connecticut State University
University of Central Florida
Central Michigan University
College of Charleston (South Carolina)
Charleston Southern University
Chicago State University
University of Cincinnati
The Citadel
Clemson University
Cleveland State University
Coastal Carolina University
Colgate University
University of Colorado
Colorado State University
Columbia University-Barnard College
University of Connecticut
Coppin State University
Cornell University
Creighton University
Dartmouth University
Davidson College
University of Dayton
University of Delaware
Delaware State University
University of Denver
DePaul University
University of Detroit Mercy
Drake University
Drexel University
Duke University
Duquesne University
East Carolina University
East Tennessee State University
Eastern Illinois University
Eastern Kentucky University
Eastern Michigan University
Eastern Washington University
Elon University

University of Evansville
Fairfield University
Fairleigh Dickinson University
University of Florida
Florida A&M University
Florida Atlantic University
Florida International University
Florida State University
Fordham University
Furman University
Gardner-Webb University
George Mason University
George Washington University
Georgetown University
University of Georgia
Georgia Institute of Technology
Georgia Southern University
Georgia State University
Gonzaga University
Grambling State University
Hampton University
University of Hartford
Harvard University
University of Hawaii
High Point
Hofstra University
College of the Holy Cross
University of Houston
Howard University
University of Idaho
Idaho State University
University of Illinois
University of Illinois at Chicago
Illinois State University
Indiana State University
University of Indiana
Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne
Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis
Iona College
University of Iowa
Iowa State University
Jackson State University
Jacksonville State University
Jacksonville University
James Madison University

University of Kansas
Kansas State University
Kent State University
University of Kentucky
LaSalle University
Lafayette College
Lamar University
Lehigh University
Liberty University
Lipscomb University
Long Beach State University
Long Island University-Brooklyn Campus
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Louisiana at Monroe
Louisiana State University
Louisiana Tech University
University of Louisville
Loyola College (Maryland)
Loyola Marymount University
Loyola University (Illinois)
University of Maine
Manhattan College
Marist College
Marquette University
Marshall University
University of Maryland Baltimore County
University of Maryland
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
University of Massachusetts
McNeese State University
University of Memphis
Mercer University
University of Miami
Miami University
University of Michigan
Michigan State University
Middle Tennessee State University
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
Mississippi State University
Mississippi Valley State University
University of Missouri
University of Missouri-Kansas City
Monmouth University
University of Montana

Montana State University
Morehead State University
Morgan State University
Mount St. Mary's College
Murray State University
Naval Academy
University of Nebraska
University of Nevada
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
University of New Hampshire
University of New Mexico
New Mexico State University
University of New Orleans
Niagara University
Nicholls State University
Norfolk State University
University of North Carolina, Asheville
University of North Carolina
University of North Carolina, Charlotte
University of North Carolina, Greensboro
University of North Carolina, Wilmington
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina State University
University of North Texas
Northeastern University
Northern Arizona University
Northern Illinois University
University of Northern Iowa
Northwestern State University
Northwestern University
University of Notre Dame
Oakland University
Ohio State University
University of Ohio
University of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State University
Old Dominion University
Oral Roberts University
University of Oregon
Oregon State University
University of the Pacific
University of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania State University
Pepperdine University
University of Pittsburgh

University of Portland
Portland State University
Prairie View A&M University
Princeton University
Providence College
Purdue University
Quinnipiac University
Radford University
University of Rhode Island
Rice University
University of Richmond
Rider University
Robert Morris University
Rutgers University
Sacred Heart University
St. Bonaventure University
St. Francis College (New York)
St. Francis University (Pennsylvania)
St. John's University
Saint Joseph's University
Saint Louis University
Saint Mary's College (California)
Saint Peter's College
Sam Houston State University
Samford University
University of San Diego
San Diego State University
University of San Francisco
San Jose State University
Santa Clara University
Savannah State University
Seton Hall University
Siena College
University of South Alabama
University of South Carolina
South Carolina State University
University of South Florida
Southeast Missouri State University
Southeastern Louisiana University
University of Southern California
Southern Illinois University
Southern Methodist University
University of Southern Mississippi
Southern University, Baton Rouge
Southern Utah University

Southwest Missouri State University
Stanford University
Stephen F. Austin State University
Stetson University
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Syracuse University
Temple University
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
University of Tennessee
University of Tennessee at Martin
Tennessee State University
Tennessee Technological University
University of Texas at Arlington
University of Texas
University of Texas at El Paso
University of Texas, Pan American
University of Texas at San Antonio
Texas A&M University
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Texas Christian University
Texas Southern University
Texas Tech University
Texas State University-San Marcos
University of Toledo
Towson University
Troy State University
Tulane University
University of Tulsa
University of Utah
Utah State University
Utah Valley State College
Valparaiso University
Vanderbilt University
University of Vermont
Villanova University
University of Virginia
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Military Institute
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
Wagner College
Wake Forest University
University of Washington
Washington State University
Weber State University
West Virginia University

Western Carolina University
Western Illinois University
Western Kentucky University
Western Michigan University
Wichita State University
College of William & Mary
Winthrop University
University of Wisconsin, Green Bay
University of Wisconsin
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Wofford College
Wright State University
University of Wyoming
Xavier University
Yale University
Youngstown State University

Appendix B

List of Division II Colleges Contacted for Pretest

Adelphi University
Bentley College
Chaminade University
Erskine College
Fayetteville State University
Harding University
Lewis University
University of North Dakota
Slippery Rock University
University of Tampa

Appendix C

Pretest E-mail Sent to Division II Schools

Dear Sports Information Director,

My name is Karen Bielak and I am a Master's Degree candidate in electronic media at the University of Tennessee. For my thesis, titled The effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I Sports Information Directors, I am examining how the SID job has changed as a result of official athletic Web sites, and more specifically, who is responsible for updating the content on these sites and how often that duty is performed.

The study will provide valuable information that can lead to a better understanding of the overall effect of the Internet in the area of college athletics while helping to redefine the position of a sports information director.

However, before the study can be conducted, a pretest must be done to create the strongest survey possible that will in turn yield the best results. Therefore, I am asking a small group of Division II SIDs to look over the survey and provide feedback regarding survey structure, phrasing of questions, and topic areas in hope that only the most relevant issues will be addressed and any ambiguity surrounding the questions will be eliminated.

Your participation in this pretest would be greatly appreciated. The survey can be accessed at <http://surveys.utk.edu/kbielak1/index.htm> and you may choose to answer the questions as if you were a respondent or you may simply read over the questions and provide comments at the end. If you choose to answer the questions, please note that some may not be applicable to your own situation. This is because the focus here is not on collecting data, but on gathering opinions about the survey. However, if you do respond to the survey, please take note of how long it takes to finish, as this will be asked at the end of the survey.

All comments, suggestions, and feedback about the survey can be left in the final box of the survey, which asks if you have any additional comments. Please let me know if there are topics that should be included or excluded, questions that are unclear, answer choices that should be added, or anything else you feel would improve the overall quality of the survey.

All results will be kept confidential and no identifying characteristics are asked. You may omit any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

This research is being supported by the College Sports Information Directors of America and results will be made available to the organization following the completion of the research. Any questions regarding the project can be directed to kbielak1@utk.edu or

(865) 544-7810. You can also contact the University of Tennessee research compliance office at (865) 974-3466.

The pretest will be available until Tuesday, Sept. 21, and once again, your participation would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Karen Bielak

Appendix D

Pretest survey

Survey of Division I Sports Information Directors

The purpose of this survey is to gather information regarding the effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I sports information directors, with a primary focus on who is responsible for updating content on the site and how often that duty is performed.

Your responses to this survey are voluntary and will remain confidential. Please select one answer for each question unless otherwise noted. Please respond to the best of your ability and skip any questions you are not comfortable answering.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. Any questions can be directed to Karen Bielak at kbielak1@utk.edu or (865) 544-7810.

Job Title

At what level does your institution compete athletically?

- ☐ Division I-A
- ☐ Division I-AA

What is the total enrollment at your institution?

- ☐ Less than 5,000
- ☐ 5,000 - 10,000
- ☐ 10,001 - 15,000
- ☐ 15,001 - 20,000
- ☐ More than 20,000

Is your institution public or private?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

Does your college or university have an official athletics Web site?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What do you see as the role of your Web site?

How important is the Web site to the athletics program at your institution?

- ☐ Not important
- ☐ Minimal importance
- ☐ Average importance
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Crucial, cannot live without

Does your Web site have a counter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please indicate the number of hits your site has had and since what date.

Number of hits

Date (MM/YYYY)

Who is the target audience for your site? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Reporters
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Alumni
- ☐ General public
- ☐ Other schools
- ☐ Recruits
- ☐ Athletes' parents/families
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify

--

Has this target audience changed over time, and if so, why?

--

How frequently is your athletics Web site updated?

- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ Twice a day
- ☐ More than 2 times a day
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify

--

Do you consider this to be frequent enough?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If no, what factors prevent the site from being updated more frequently?

Who is primarily responsible for updating the Web site?

- ☐ I am
- ☐ An assistant sports information director
- ☐ An office intern or graduate assistant
- ☐ A full-time employee in the athletics department
- ☐ Someone on campus, but not in the athletics department
- ☐ An outside company
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify

Was a position created within the athletics department specifically for this person for the sole purpose of maintaining the site?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

When was this position created?

- ☐ Less than 6 months ago
- ☐ 6 months to 1 year ago

- ☐ More than 1 year ago, but less than 2 years ago
- ☐ 2 years ago or more
- ☐ Not sure

Are there plans to create such a position in your department?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

How many extra hours of work per week are created for the sports information director as a direct result of having an official Web site?

- ☐ No extra work
- ☐ Less than 1 hour per week
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 hours per week
- ☐ 2 hours or more per week

How many extra hours of work per week are created for the Web site manager as a direct result of having an official Web site?

- ☐ No extra work
- ☐ Less than 1 hour per week
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 hours per week
- ☐ 2 or more hours per week
- ☐ Not a separate position

How has your job as a sports information director changed as a result of the creation of official athletic Web sites?

Do you foresee that there will be a growing trend of schools hiring personnel for the sole purpose of maintaining the official athletics Web site?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Why or why not?

Approximately how long did it take you to complete this survey?

minutes

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Thank you for your time, effort and cooperation with this study. The results will be made available in November to the College Sports Information Directors of America at www.cosida.com.

Please click the SEND ANSWERS button to submit your responses.

Appendix E

Survey e-mail

Dear Sports Information Director,

My name is Karen Bielak and I am a Master's Degree candidate in electronic media at the University of Tennessee. For my thesis, titled *The effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I Sports Information Directors*, I am examining how the SID job has changed as a result of official athletic Web sites, and more specifically, who is responsible for updating the content on these sites and how often that duty is performed.

The study will provide valuable information that can lead to a better understanding of the overall effect of the Internet in the area of college athletics while helping to redefine the position of a sports information director. Your participation in an online survey, found at <http://surveys.utk.edu/kbielak1/index.htm>, would be greatly appreciated. All results will be kept confidential and reported as group data only, and no identifying characteristics are asked. You may omit any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

This research is being supported by the College Sports Information Directors of America and results will be made available to the organization following the completion of the research. Any questions regarding the project can be directed to kbielak1@utk.edu or (865) 544-7810. You can also contact the University of Tennessee research compliance office at (865) 974-3466.

The survey will be available until Monday, October 11, and once again, your participation would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Karen Bielak

Appendix F

Survey

Survey of Division I Sports Information Directors

The purpose of this survey is to gather information regarding the effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I sports information directors, with a primary focus on who is responsible for updating content on the site and how often that duty is performed.

Your responses to this survey are voluntary and will remain confidential. Please select one answer for each question unless otherwise noted. Please respond to the best of your ability and skip any questions you are not comfortable answering. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and please be sure to hit the "send answers" button on the final page to submit your responses.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. Any questions can be directed to Karen Bielak at kbielak1@utk.edu or (865) 544-7810.

Job Title

At what level does your institution compete athletically?

- ☐ Division I-A
- ☐ Division I-AA
- ☐ Division I-AAA

What is the total enrollment at your institution?

- ☐ Less than 5,000
- ☐ 5,000 - 10,000
- ☐ 10,001 - 15,000
- ☐ 15,001 - 20,000
- ☐ More than 20,000

Is your institution public or private?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

Does your college or university have an official athletics Web site?

- ☐ Yes

☐ No

What do you see as the role of your Web site?

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How important is the Web site to the athletics program at your institution?

- ☐ Not important
- ☐ Minimal importance
- ☐ Average importance
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Crucial, cannot live without

Does your Web site have a counter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please indicate the number of hits your site has had and since what date.

Number of hits

Date (MM/YYYY)

Who is the target audience for your site? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Reporters
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Alumni
- ☐ General public
- ☐ Other schools
- ☐ Recruits
- ☐ Athletes' parents/families
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify

Has this target audience changed over time, and if so, why?

How frequently is your athletics Web site updated?

- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ Twice a day
- ☐ More than 2 times a day
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify

Do you consider this to be frequent enough?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If no, what factors prevent the site from being updated more frequently?

Who is primarily responsible for updating the Web site?

- ☐ I am
- ☐ An assistant sports information director
- ☐ An office intern or graduate assistant
- ☐ A full-time employee in the athletics department
- ☐ Someone on campus, but not in the athletics department
- ☐ An outside company
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify

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Was a position created within the athletics department specifically for this person for the sole purpose of maintaining the site?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

When was this position created?

- ☐ Less than 6 months ago
- ☐ 6 months to 1 year ago
- ☐ More than 1 year ago, but less than 2 years ago
- ☐ 2 years ago or more
- ☐ Not sure

Are there plans to create such a position in your department?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

How many extra hours of work per week are created for the sports information director as a direct result of having an official Web site?

- ☐ No extra work
- ☐ Less than 1 hour per week
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 hours per week
- ☐ 2 hours or more per week

How many extra hours of work per week are created for the Web site manager as a direct result of having an official Web site?

- ☐ No extra work
- ☐ Less than 1 hour per week
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 hours per week
- ☐ 2 or more hours per week
- ☐ Not a separate position

How has your job as a sports information director changed as a result of the creation of official athletic Web sites?

Do you foresee that there will be a growing trend of schools hiring personnel for the sole purpose of maintaining the official athletics Web site?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Why or why not?

Do you have any additional comments?

Please enter your email address if you would like to be removed from the reminder list.

Thank you for your time, effort and cooperation with this study. The results will be made available in November to the College Sports Information Directors of America at www.cosida.com.

Please click the SEND ANSWERS button to submit your responses.

Appendix G

Reminder E-mail

Dear Sports Information Director,

My name is Karen Bielak and I am a Master's Degree candidate in electronic media at the University of Tennessee. For my thesis, titled "The effect of official college athletic Web sites on the job of Division I Sports Information Directors," I am examining how the SID job has changed as a result of official athletic Web sites, and more specifically, who is responsible for updating the content on these sites and how often that duty is performed.

On Sept. 27, I e-mailed you an invitation to participate in an online survey. If you have not yet responded, I would like to invite you once again to participate in the survey, found at <http://surveys.utk.edu/kbielak1/index.htm>. All results will be kept confidential and reported as group data only, and no identifying characteristics are asked. You may omit any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

If you have already completed the survey but did not submit for your e-mail address to be removed from this reminder list, please disregard this letter and thank you for your participation.

This research is being supported by the College Sports Information Directors of America and results will be made available to the organization following the completion of the research. Any questions regarding the project can be directed to kbielak1@utk.edu or (865) 544-7810. You can also contact the University of Tennessee research compliance office at (865) 974-3466.

The survey will be available until Monday, October 11, and once again, your participation would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Karen Bielak

Appendix H

Tables

Table A-1: Total school enrollment

Enrollment	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Less than 5,000	25	22.5%
5,000 – 10,000	27	24.3%
10,001 – 15,000	18	16.2%
15,001 – 20,000	15	13.5%
More than 20,000	26	23.4%

Table A-2: Public or private institution

Public or private	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Public	68	60.7%
Private	44	39.3%

Table A-3: Presence of official athletic Web site

Web site	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Yes	110	99.1%
No	1	0.9%

Table A-4: Presence of a counter on Web site

Counter	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Yes	52	47.3%
No	58	52.7%

Table A-5: Is site updated often enough?

Updated enough	Number of responses	Percent of responses
Yes	94	82.5
No	20	17.5

Table A-6: Creation of a position for the sole purpose of maintaining site

Position created	Number of responses	Percent of responses
No	98	86%
Yes	14	12.3%
Not sure	2	1.8%

Table A-7: When position was created

When created	Number of responses	Percent of responses
2 years ago or more	8	57.1%
More than 1 year ago, but less than 2 years ago	2	14.3%
6 months to 1 year ago	2	14.3%
Less than 6 months ago	2	14.3%

Table A-8: Plans to create a position for Web maintenance

Plans to create position	Number of responses	Percent of responses
No	96	88.9%
Not sure	7	6.5%
Yes	5	4.6%

Vita

Karen J. Bielak was born in Toms River, N.J., on Sept. 12, 1981. She grew up in Howell, N.J., and graduated from Howell High School in June 1999. Bielak then attended the University of Pittsburgh where she was a tri-major in Communication, Journalism, and History and worked as the sports editor of the daily student newspaper before graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in April 2003.

That fall, Bielak accepted a graduate assistantship with the School of Journalism and Electronic Media at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She received her Master of Science degree in December 2004, with a major in Communication and specialization in Electronic Media.

Bielak plans to pursue a career in college athletic administration, first in a marketing/promotions capacity, then later as an athletics director.