

## Chapter II

# Metaphors for E-Collaboration: A Study of Nonprofit Theatre Web Presence

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### ABSTRACT

*What constitutes regional commerce? What creates and enhances a regional identity? In the United States, regions can be quite large and may even cover geographical territory from several surrounding counties or states. They are larger than any one individual company, shopping street, or district. Regional cooperation of commercial businesses is often manifested through special events, cooperative advertising with coordinated signage, extended opening hours, and special discounts that contribute to building a sense of community, and which eventually develop a sense of region. The political and environmental exigencies for the creation and expansion of regions have meant an increase in the popularity and importance of regions and a subsequent movement to enhance and differentiate their identities. We now see the rise of regional governments, water authorities, and educational institutions among many others. One little-explored idea has been the use of e-collaboration to forge, reinforce, and sustain a regional identity via the virtual world. Although geographical separation of many miles might dictate that bricks-and-mortar theatres cannot easily collaborate physically (i.e., they cannot share costumes, props, ushers, and so on), the possibility of e-collaboration opens potential opportunities for attracting wider audiences, reaching and ultimately casting fresh talent, and building reciprocal audiences who possess a passion for the arts and who have the means and desire to travel to attend performances throughout the geographical region. In this study, a methodology built on the conceptual foundation of metaphor research was used to comprehend and then interpret the Web presence of 15 nonprofit theatres that comprise the total regional theatre of southern New Jersey that exists on the Web. In order to add additional insight, our earlier research findings from working with off-Broadway and regional theatre festivals were extended to analyze the Web presence of the theatres in southern New*

*Jersey. We contribute to the literature by systematic and deep investigation of the strategic importance of the Web for nonprofit theatre groups in the southern New Jersey region. In addition, our use of the metaphor methodology in order to create a telling portrait of what transpires on the Web in relation to nonprofit organizations is also an original contribution. Our work is meant to heighten the awareness of administrators to the rapidly accelerating need for the strategic use of e-collaboration. We propose that with the use of the Web, administrators can move toward creating a regional theatre Web presence for South Jersey, one which would make use of an evolutionary metaphor. To this end, we suggest the use of an organism metaphor. Through the creation of reciprocal hyperlinks, theatres can be supported in improving their practice of colocation on the Web, wherein they will be taking strides to cooperate as a regional theatre community.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Web presence is the perception of influence and organizational identity that organizations attempt to create in their customers and Web site visitors. Used as a strategic positioning instrument, Web presence goes well beyond the basic graphics, text, and hyperlinks that are the building blocks of a Web site. The Web presence of the organization should have a positive effect on its operations, meaning that these operations should be made easier, faster, and more efficient and effective. An organization's competitiveness is expected to be sharpened through a strong Web presence so that it will gain additional market share, expand operations into new markets, and attract additional customers (Abuhamdieh, Kendall, & Kendall, 2000, 2002, 2007).

Developing an organizational Web presence is expected to enhance the organization's adaptation and growth by enhancing its relationship with its customers. This will make the organization more alert to its customers' needs and expectations. This translates into a good outlook for an organization's growth prospects.

Nonprofit organizations traditionally lag behind commercial enterprises in their approach to implementing integrated information technology,

particularly in the area of developing a strategic IT plan. This occurs for a number of reasons, but they include the lack of expertise and knowledge concerning the importance of information technology to an organization (specifically in the performing arts community), the lack of a predictable source of funding for endeavors that are earmarked as exclusively for IT development, and reticence to include IT as a funding priority when grant requests are made. Additionally, many funding agencies specifically will not grant requests for standard items required to build IT infrastructure, such as computers, software, and expertise to develop information systems and IT policy. Because of these concerns, oftentimes information technology enhancements are not even broached (Te'eni & Kendall, 2004).

I chose to look at an exhaustive list of regional theatres that have a Web presence in southern New Jersey (widely known to residents as South Jersey). South Jersey is made up of eight counties and has a population of about 2.3 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). This fairly densely populated region can support a number of different theatre groups, but the theatres are spread over the region.

As surprising as it may seem, creative arts have a critical part to play in the economy of New Jersey and in the economy of South Jersey as well.

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