In 2006, the editors of *Time* magazine named "You" (yes, *you*) their "Person of the Year." Some may consider this blanket accolade a blatant and shameless attempt to grab the attention of Boxing Day shoppers who passed by news stands on their way to the biggest deal of the 2006 holiday season. And, considering the Christmas date of the issue's release, it probably was. But the honour may not have been bestowed entirely without merit. After all, *Time*'s celebration of You was really more of a tribute to the technology that allows You to broadcast yourself to anyone who cares to listen—with the advent of Web 2.0 websites came a "new digital democracy," whereby anyone with an Internet connection may lobby, postulate and discuss ideas to and with a mass audience (Grossman). In effect, *Time*'s dedication to You was a signal for You to get blogging, YouTubing or Facebooking (if You have not been already), almost as if it were your civic duty.

However, consistent with the technological development of the Internet as a whole, this utopian vision of Web 2.0 has been met with its share of criticism. In fact, in the "Talk Back" section of the 2006 *Time* Person of the Year issue, a reader named Eli Stephens pointed out the irony "in having named 'us'—bloggers, YouTubers, Wikipediasts, and others expressing ourselves on the web, as [Persons of the Year], but then, despite talking about 'digital democracy,' not even bothering to MENTION the results of [*Time*'s] online poll [for Person of the Year], won by Hugo Chavez in a landslide." Eli's comment reminds us, perhaps, of the true authoritative voice that (so far) remains in print. But even this—with diminishing newspaper sales as proof—is becoming less of a concern for online publishers.

What has become a bigger concern for users of Web 2.0 technology has been the debate surrounding whether there is too much information published online. Are those who publish personal information or opinions in the frontier of "new democracy" opening themselves up to public scrutiny or harassment? How secure is the information entered behind the walls set up by popular Social Network Sites (SNSs)? How do our online personas reflect our offline identities? These questions have become particularly pressing of late due to the growing use of SNSs by employers who are looking to find out more about job applicants. Horror stories of hopeful job applicants who have had their dreams of employment dashed due to an ill-advised Facebook photo or inebriated tweet can be found all over the Internet. But as popular marketing guru Scott Stratten would tell us, for every opportunity we are given to fail online, we are given a reciprocal opportunity to "be awesome."

In this presentation, I want to stress that by creating a professional, respectable persona (or personal brand) online, one does not have to remove or neglect the personal information they wish to share with their family and friends. Rather, this element of personal information is critical in building one's personal brand. It is, after all, precisely why employers are looking up candidates on SNSs in the first place (Labrecque, et al.). They want to discover information about their potential employees that they will not find on their resumes. Do they seem like "people people"? Do they communicate appropriately and effectively? Do they seem happy?

Ultimately I will touch upon the three basic modes of persuasion (logos, pathos and ethos) and explain how people should think about the information they provide, how they provide it, and to whom it is provided. I will also talk about the autobiographical

"I"s discussed in Smith and Watson's *Reading Autobiography*, and how they are constructed and developed on SNSs. I will show that SNSs give people the ability to construct and promote a life narrative publicly, so that when the time comes, they are prepared to rhetorically present themselves in a positive way.

Our collective rise to Persons of the Year in 2006 did not happen overnight. In fact, many claim that the idea that You have an enhanced ability to express yourself and your ideas online began with Tim Peters almost a decade earlier. In 1997, Peters wrote an article for the magazine *Fast Company* titled "The Brand Called You," in which he called for people to begin developing and marketing their personal "brand" in order to gain footing and advance within the working world. Peters lists a number of different ways in which people can market themselves, but certainly one of the most cutting-edge at the time was for individuals to create their own web pages, which could be done cheaply and relatively easily.

Two years later, in 1999, Heather Champ left her mark on the World Wide Web by posting digital self-portraits on her website (mirrorproject.com), which she took with a digital camera while posing in front of a mirror. Although The Mirror Project began as an artistic attempt at therapy to mourn the loss of her parents, Champ eventually invited others to submit their photos as well, resulting in over 30,000 participants and one of the most notorious image-memes on the Internet today. More importantly, however, Champ showed that there are many ways—certainly more creative ways than blog writing or link-sharing—in which people can use the Internet to explore their personal identities, express themselves to others, and learn from—or share with—one another (Walker).

Though Heather Champ's Mirror Project preceded it, the collaborative nature in which digital information (in this case personal photos) was compiled and shared is symbolic of Web 2.0 technology as a whole. Simply put, Web 2.0 is a term used to describe technology and Internet services that allow users to gather and create content in which they are interested, and publish, share and manage that content online using specialized websites and/or web-centric applications (O'Reilly). Millions of users use blogs, peer-to-peer file sharing services and Social Network Sites (SNSs) like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and LinkedIn to distribute and gather information from friends, family and people they have never met in person.

It is important to note that social network sites are a *form* of Web 2.0 technology, and that the terms "social network site" and Web 2.0 are not synonymous. Digital media experts Boyd and Ellison "define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." Unlike other Web 2.0 websites like Wikipedia, which act as a repository for collective intelligence, SNSs organize information into networks of people, and give individuals their own "space" on the web, as the name of the popular SNS "MySpace" implies. As Danish social media guru Steffen Dalsgaard explains,

> Social network sites are more than just a reproduction of the work of distinction that takes place in real social life. They go further in that they are meant to present people as being in the centre of the world. They allow people to display themselves not just as self-made individual persons, but as dividuals… No matter who you are, your Facebook website has you as the one in focus. (9)

Today, SNSs like Facebook, MySpace and Flickr provide average middle-class North

Americans with little programming knowledge the opportunity to create their own mirror

projects and share their self-portraits with the world. There is no longer a need for

individuals to have their own Internet domains, and in fact the networked structure of

SNSs provide more visibility and a greater potential for collaboration than a personalized

domain. Rather than needing a specific address find a friend, we need only enter that

friend's name into Facebook and we can check out their online profile, leave them a

message or share with them some digital content. If only finding a friend's house or the

new restaurant in town was that simple.

In addition to being symbolic of Web 2.0, Champ's Mirror Project can be seen as

a literal example of the personal branding process. In fact, there are many similarities

between the projects of Peters and Champ. Obviously, Peters is setting out to build a

personal brand with the intention of finding a job or obtaining a promotion, while

Champ's motivation is more recreational and/or artistic. But both projects require a

reflexive study of oneself and a creative projection of that self to others, just as is the case

when establishing a "personal brand." As marketing professional Dan Schwabel says,

> Personal branding describes the process by which individuals and
> entrepreneurs differentiate themselves and stand out from a crowd by
> identifying and articulating their unique value proposition, whether
> professional or personal, and then leveraging it across platforms with a
> consistent message and image to achieve a specific goal. In this way,
> individuals can enhance their recognition as experts in their field,
> establish reputation and credibility, advance their careers, and build self-
> confidence. ("Wiki")

The need to "identify" and "leverage" one's true self in order to effectively build a

personal brand is the key takeaway from Schwabel's definition. Other scholars agree, like

sociologists Wee and Brooks who say, "personal branding… involves defining who you

really are, clarifying yourself… [it is] a process of self-reflection, which for most people will be the introduction to inner self-development. The benefit of this process is that you have to explore and express your own view of yourself and how you actually want to be perceived" (46). Champ's Mirror Project is a literal self-reflection, but more interestingly, her retrospective experience shows that participants engaged in a sort of inadvertent branding practice as well. When it comes to self-portraits, says Champ, "you tend to see people as they see themselves… [they are] less likely to put on a happy face" (Walker). But perhaps that is simply how some choose to be represented. As Jill Walker explains in her article on the subject, "self-portraits can never portray the whole truth and nothing but the truth about their creator, and neither are they intended to do so" (2).

Just as self-portraits are manipulated by their author to present an image that is almost invariably positive, so too are personal brands established to boost the image of the branded subject. As marketing scholars Lair, Sullivan and Cheney explain, "success is not determined by individuals' internal set of skills, motivations, and interests but, rather, by how effectively they are arranged, crystallized, and labeled—in other words, branded" (308). With so many people obtaining postsecondary certificates and degrees, it is no longer enough for an educated job candidate to simply let his/her skill set and past experience sell him/her to a hiring manager (IES). What sets apart two people with the same degree or certificate? This is where branding comes in. This is why establishing yourself as a valuable asset whenever and wherever you can is becoming more and more important. We need potential employers to know that in addition to our postsecondary education and relevant past experience, we can be effective team players, possess leadership qualities and a sense of humour, are creative, and, in short, are people they

would want to hire. After all, "people hire people," says Schwabel, "they do not hire resumes" ("With the Brand" 84).

Due to the fact that I am presenting this paper at the "Writing the Self Online" conference, and after hearing several presentations on life writing and the exploration of the self already today, you have probably made a connection or two between the theories of personal branding and life writing. I too see similarities between personal branding and life writing, particularly when it comes to what life narrative experts Smith and Watson call the "autobiographical I" [as in the letter I], which is a term used to describe the complex autobiographical subject, or protagonist, in life writing (71). Specifically, Smith and Watson point out that it is common for critics to analyze life writing by 1) its narrative, as revealed to readers by the "narrat*ing* I" and 2) the subject whose life is "narrat*ed*" (72-3). In a similar fashion, the brand I cultivate—my branded self—is narrated to an audience in one way or another when I communicate online or otherwise. The narrating I and narrated I work very closely with one another. In fact, most of the time the narrating I works to confuse the reader's perception of the narrated I—to the benefit of the autobiographical subject, if the autobiographer is skilled enough. Life narratives do not need to be written to have narrating and narrated I's. Consider Champ's Mirror Project once more. The subject shown in a particular photograph is the narrated I, while the photographer (though the same person) is the narrating I. We might say the photographing I manipulates the photographed I and may even edit the photo after it is taken, altering the viewer's perception of the photographed I—now a still being eternally captured in a previous moment. Perhaps the same can be done on SNSs—can there be such a thing as a Facebooked I?

Certainly life narrative can be told through SNSs like Facebook and Twitter, but some scholars such as Kristin Arola argue that while SNSs provide us with templates that allow even the most novice web surfer to maintain an online profile and connect with other people, the same templates limit our creativity, and possibly our authenticity, when we attempt to express ourselves. "In a Web 2.0 world where design remains primarily beyond a user's control," explains Arola, "the interface seemingly functions in an arhetorical way; an interface that allows an easy post is a success. Yet as we know, interfaces do rhetorical work. If we are to critically engage with the rhetoric of the interface and critically engage with Web 2.0, we must pay attention to how Web 2.0 interfaces are shaping our interactions and ourselves" (7).

In addition to Arola's concern over the role SNS templates play in our self-representation, there is a growing paranoia around the amount of personal information that we divulge in the public domain. Recent statistics show this paranoia may be well founded. According to scholars Peluchette and Karl, 77% of 100 corporate executives interviewed in a 2006 survey claimed they "use search engines as part of their recruitment process and 35% have eliminated job candidates based on information they have found on the Internet" (30-1). Similarly, a study on CareerBuilder.com revealed that 63% of the hiring managers who claimed to use social network sites in their recruitment process "said they did not hire a person based on what they found" (Peluchette and Karl 31). What are these hiring managers finding on the Facebook pages of job candidates? Of the 200 Facebook profiles Peluchette and Karl investigated, "53% had photos involving alcohol use… 25% had seminude or sexually provocative photos… 25% involved derogatory comments about employers, 18% involved sexual activities, and 10%

involved negative racial comments" (30). Clearly this is not the kind of content potential employers—or professional peers, for that matter—are hoping to find.

In order for one to ensure that one has complete control over his/her personal brand, s/he must have an understanding of the most basic principles of rhetoric, and apply them at every turn—perhaps especially online, due to the ready availability of everything we publish there. What better place to start than with Aristotle's three *pisteis,* or artistic proofs? The great philosopher Aristotle, in his seminal work *Rhetoric*, describes *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* as being the three key elements to persuasive language, and certainly they remain the most elementary, yet foundational, tools in the arsenal of any talented rhetorician. But over the years—indeed, millennia—the terms have been debated, refined, translated and retranslated. In 1963, Wayne Booth may have provided the best contemporary explanation of Aristotle's artistic proofs. "The common ingredient that I find in all of the writing I admire," says Booth,

> is something which I shall reluctantly call the rhetorical stance, a stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: [1) logos,] the available arguments about the subject itself, [2) pathos,] the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and [3) ethos,] the voice, the implied character, of the speaker. (141)

In the context of personal branding online, the term logos represents the facts that you would like to present about yourself, pathos represents the way in which you massage the presentation of those facts in order to engage your audience, and ethos represents the way in which you present your facts so as to impress others.

The connection should now be drawn between the three artistic proofs, the process of personal branding (after which I have titled this presentation "Deflections and Reflections") and the autobiographical I's, because while all three theories mean different

things to different people, they are actually all very much rhetorical strategies that can—

and should—be thought about when managing your online persona. Begin with self-

reflection, think about the logos that will best define you, as a brand, to your peers.

Consider how you can present the facts in a way that resonates with your audience. In this

regard, think about the rhetorical situation, "the context in which speakers or writers

create rhetorical discourse" (Bitzer 1). For instance, do you organize your personal

collateral based on the strengths of each SNS platform? I have already talked about how

templates can act rhetorically—do not let them constrain you. Post photos on Flickr,

videos on YouTube, professional exploits on LinkedIn, and leave Facebook for

conducting personal communications with friends. By playing to the advantages of each

SNS platform, not only will your content be better organized, and better received by your

audience, but you will also look more tech-savvy as a result. This brings me to my final

point: conduct yourself in a way that makes you appealing to a universal audience. Check

your spelling; be selective in the photos you post—not only in terms of their

appropriateness, but their visual appeal. Engage in friendly conversation with others and

use the public "wall," or forum, space to exhibit your wit and intelligence. First

impressions can make or break careers, and SNSs give us every opportunity to succeed

(and fail) at this.

     Today, you do not need to stand atop a soapbox, publish a lengthy diatribe or rent

billboard space to market your branded self—there are plenty of tools available to you

online that can help you create your personal brand, and communicate that brand to the

appropriate people. Certainly there are risks associated with disclosing personal

information in a public place, and SNSs may not offer you the most creative way of

presenting yourself, but with a basic knowledge of Web 2.0 and effective rhetoric, these are barriers you can overcome. You just need to take a look in the mirror and find out who you are, who you want to be, and who you want people to see. It's time to start painting the web red with Brand You.