Rhetorical Reflection on an Air Force IT Ad

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Graduating high school or junior college can be a difficult experience for someone who has no idea what path they should take next. When I encountered this crossroad, I was certain that college was the next best option for me. However, financial deficiencies deterred me from my initial dream and led me down another course. It led to me joining the United States Air Force as a Network Technician. I've always had a knack for understanding how information technology worked; I just never assumed that I could possibly make a career out of it. While I was still in school, most options for students that were graduating were going to the local community college or finding a job in town. Military recruiters often visited our school, but none were from the Air Force. As a current Air Force veteran, I find it strange that the Air Force isn't marketing their opportunities in the information technology (IT) career field to all high school students. I recently created an advertisement that could be used to draw the attention of young adults that may be interested in the IT career field and how the Air Force can help them achieve their goals. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on some of the rhetorical choices I made while creating the ad (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The ad

In preparation for creating the ad, I analyzed the career of a Network Technician as an activity system for research purposes. Kain and Wardle define an activity system as a group of people who share a common objective or motive over time (275). This analysis helped me understand how technicians interact among themselves and with the community surrounding them. It also gave me an in-depth look of what technicians do on a daily basis, and the purpose behind each task. This new perspective as an outsider opened my eyes to the many strengths and weaknesses within the activity system. A particular weakness that stood out to me was the lack of diversity among network technicians. This new understanding helped me form an idea of creating an ad that could attract fresh and diverse recruits to join the Air Force as a communications troop. I decided that creating an advertisement would be the most successful method for me to depict this concept.

Understanding the exigence of the ad was simple. I wanted the ad to act as a recruiter and attract a young adult to join the Air Force. I specifically wanted the audience to gain interest in working in the communications side of this branch as well. In an interview with a former colleague of mine, James Sotiroff, I asked him what he would say to individuals if they wanted to pursue a career in IT for the Air Force. He responded by saying that the Air Force has a vast array of jobs within the IT career field and that an individual has many options. As a former network technician myself, I wholeheartedly agreed with him. However, I needed to find a way to portray that statement in the ad. I decided that using pictures showing current or former members doing technical work and training could promote the variety of IT jobs that an individual could be a part of within the Air Force. I tried using pictures that had members using tools in the activity system. Tools in activity systems are defined as physical objects and symbols that people use to accomplish the activity

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(Kain and Wardle 277). Nevertheless, the pictures by themselves may not be enough to understand what the ad is saying to an audience member. I added the question, "Interested in pursuing a career in IT?" to complement the pictures. I placed the question across the ad in order to portray what the photos represent: a career in IT. I also enlarged the question so the audience would read the text and see the multiple jobs that the Air Force could provide in the communications career field. In a last attempt to depict the exigence of the ad, I added a text box to promote the Air Force's capability of providing the best equipment and training to satisfy an interest in IT. I included the web address of the branch's website for the audience to further investigate this interest. However, the website I provided represents jobs across the entire Air Force. I used this address for individuals who might be interested in the Air Force for other careers, and not just one in communications. After I completed the ad, I determined it would be best portrayed as a poster instead of a flyer. Posters tend to attract a multitude of people due to their large dimensions. However, a banner would be much too large and could possibly stretch the images being used. I wanted the audience to have a clear view of what was being advertised.

Determining the audience for this ad wasn't as easy as I would have hoped. In analyzing the activity system, I noted that most of the members of the system were white males, including my interviewee. I couldn't create the ad specifically targeting one demographic. In adding the pictures of the service members, I tried to include multiple ethnic groups and genders to convey that anyone can work in IT, not specifically white males. I did this because I wanted the intended audience—no matter their demographic—to feel that they could be a part of this organization. Keith Grant-Davie points out that rhetors may invite audiences to accept new identities for themselves, offering the readers a vision not of who they are but who they could be (356). I feel that this choice is the most successful aspect of the advertisement because of the way it speaks to the audience, as the audience may see themselves in the advertisement. I also applied a greyscale effect to each photo to depict

that each member may be a different ethnicity or gender but they represent one team: the Air Force. In doing this, I wanted the audience to feel that each service member embodied the Air Force by being shown as one color.

Trying to connect to a wider audience was difficult in its own right. The biggest constraint I encountered while creating the ad was finding pictures of multiple ethnicities doing IT work for the Air Force. I believe this constraint could be the most problematic aspect of the advertisement. I was unable to find pictures that depicted various ethnicities, and more so for non-male ethnicities other than white. This constraint hindered my efforts to try and reach out to all ethnicities and genders who might be interested in joining the Air Force as an IT technician. Another constraint I encountered was trying to find a way to make the job of a technician seem enjoyable to someone who isn't necessarily interested in information technology. The Air Force has a multitude of jobs that garner interest from multiple perspectives. Jobs such as deactivating a bomb as an explosive ordinance technician or parachuting from an airplane to save wounded soldiers as a pararescueman can seem infinitely more attractive than fixing a backup server on a weekly basis. Charles Bazerman defined this concept as a social fact: "things people believe to be true, and therefore bear on how they define a situation" (368). I disputed this social fact by adding some pictures of the more tactical jobs an IT technician can encounter while in the Air Force. I felt that in viewing these pictures, the audience could view the IT career field as being more than fixing twenty dysfunctional keyboards in one day. I wanted the audience to—in the words of Haas and Flower— "construct meaning by building multifaceted, interwoven representations of knowledge" from the genre rather than a social fact (413).

After I finished creating the ad, I analyzed each aspect of the advertisement rhetorically. I determined my purpose for the advertisement, the intended audience, and the constraints I encountered while creating the piece. Afterwards, I tried to find an association between the ad and the activity system I had previously analyzed. The connection I found was that there are many significant roles that can be filled by the Air Force's IT career field. I believe that my advertisement meets its goal by advertising the many IT jobs you can attain as a member of the U.S. Air Force. It also represents a diverse background of ethnicities and genders to convey that anyone can find their niche in communications and in the military.

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