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Meet the fake Steve Jobs...

... and several other satirists blogging in the guise of famous CEOs as interest in captains of industry grows.

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Fake diaries of real figures have a long, colorful history, from the faux writings of Adolf Hitler to the fictional blog by Paris Hilton.

But recently, a new subgenre of the "made-up memoir" has appeared online: the "fake CEO" blog. These satiric, Internet blogs parody the inner dreams and outer schemes of business titans such as Apple CEO Steve Jobs, Oracle's Larry Ellison, and News Corporation's Rupert Murdoch. Their often hilarious riffs on business strategies, personal rivalries, and most important, say new-media watchers, their impressive audience numbers, underscore the "celebritization" of those formerly gray-flannel folks known as "suits."

"The role of CEO has changed from good manager to charismatic leader over the last decade," says Alex Halavais, communications professor at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Conn. This is particularly true with consumer technology, which increasingly affects people's lives so directly. As Mr. Halavais points out, Mr. Jobs waits to unveil new products until he can do so personally, "in idiosyncratic fashion, in front of a crowd of admirers."

At the same time, these CEOs are in a high-stakes, nondisclosure world, where trade secrets can make or break huge companies. "Parody is a good way to touch a figure that doesn't want – or can't take – the time to be bothered with honest and direct communication," says Joel Postman, executive vice president of emerging media at San Francisco's Eastwick Communications.

Forbes Magazine reporter Dan Lyons, who has just published a book, "Options: the Secret Diary of Steve Jobs, a Parody," launched the genre with his "fake Steve Jobs" blog, an improvisatory parody that he still updates daily. The imaginary musings (recent posts include a chat with former Vice President Al Gore and the Klingon Ambassador after Mr. Gore receives a prize from the United Federation of Planets), began over a year ago as an experiment, says Mr. Lyons. His own life as a technology reporter for a business magazine would be too boring to write about so, he figured, "why not do somebody everyone wants to know about?"

The patently fake blog promptly drew a huge following (it currently pulls in more than a million monthly visitors) but he quit a few weeks into the venture. Fans relaunched the site by demanding more of "fake Steve." "I was stunned," says Lyons, "I'd clearly waded into the 'cult of Steve.'"

CEOs have become the third leg of American royalty, just after athletes and movie stars, says Cedarville University President and CEO Bill Brown, who has blogged for three years. CEOs seem most approachable, he adds. "You don't have to be gorgeous or athletically gifted, you just have to have business skills and those are things we can all develop."

"Fake Steve" is filling a growing demand for information, says Dr. Brown, because the public wants more personal information about the people who affect their lives. This form of satire is the response of a generation that demands communication from powers that be.

The funny thing is that some CEOs don't actually write their own blogs at all. Ghostwritten blogs are a growing trend in the corporate world.

"Everybody thinks they need one now," says Allison Nazarian, founder of Get It in Writing, a ghostwriting service, "but nobody has the time." There are rules, she adds. Ms. Nazarian only writes "informational, corporate type blogs," she says, and will not masquerade as someone else. Just recently, she turned down an offer from a high-profile female executive, known for her parenting and homemaking tips, who wanted a first-person blog – but didn't have the time. "That violates the rule that readers have with bloggers," says Nazarian, "which is that you know who's behind the words."

The blogosphere is full of ethical and legal minefields, say legal experts. Lyons says he took great pains to make clear that his blog was fake, which nonetheless did not prevent many fans from speculating that Jobs was its author.

New revelations about blogging bungles have begun to appear regularly, from The New Republic, which recently retracted a series of blogs about military life in Iraq because of its questionable sources, to Wal-Mart's digital faux pas earlier this year. In that situation, the company took a big PR hit after revelations that it secretly sponsored a "spontaneous" road-trip blog in which a couple visited and wrote enthusiastically about Wal-Marts nationwide.

"Intention is the key," says New York lawyer Michael Lasky. "Is there a deliberate desire to deceive for the purpose of manipulating stock price or consumer behavior?" asks Mr. Lasky. "Truth and transparency matter just as much in the new-media world as they do in direct-mail or any other form of old business practices."

While some early imitators of the "fake Steve" blog have shut down, the trend is just getting started, says Postman, who calls the genre a great tool to talk back to big companies.

"Once people figure out the formula," he says, "what a great opportunity for, say, activists to fake blog about oil companies despoiling the environment," he says, adding "you can say almost anything you want without risk."

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