

Jumping on the Blogwagon: a Librarian's Perspective

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Definitions

Weblog or Blog: online journal/newsletter comprised of dated entries, in reverse chronological order whose author comments on a subject and often offer links to other sites.

The subset of the WWW comprising of blogs is sometimes called blogverse or blogosphere.

Biblioblogosphere Profile

First library-related blogs in 1998/1999

Now, several hundreds:

- Blogs by libraries as organizations for their patrons
- Blogs by libraries for their employees
- Blogs by library-related associations
- Blogs by librarian for other librarians
- Blogs by librarian for a general public

Why should librarians/libraries blog?

- To distribute up-to-the-minute news to users without concerns for space, time of publication or information overload for the patrons
- To offer library-related services in a new way
- To destroy stereotypes of libraries/librarians by showing a technology-savvy image, to built credibility

Why should librarians/libraries blog? (cont.)

- To help the library staff keep current with the events occurring in their environment
- On an internal blog, to enable better communication among library employees
- To build communities of interest
- To advocate, share thoughts and opinions

Things to consider before starting

- Objectives and purposes
- Audience
- Content
- Means and resources (people, money, equipment)
- Technology and related applications (RSS)
- Assessment

Technology issues

3 categories of tools:

- Off-site blog using an host (ex. Blogger, TypePad, Pitas, blogs.com, etc.)
- On-site blog using content managing software installed on your computer/server (ex. Movable Type, WordPress, Pivot, b2evolution)
- On-site blog using in-house programming (using, for example MySQL and ASP for Windows ,or PHP for Linux)

As you move down the options, you trade ease of use for more internal control, customization of functions, and independence. Remember: you can switch!

RSS feeds

- Also known as syndication
- Blogs take time to write but they also take time to read for your audience. Feeds are the content of your blog, pulled to other sites
- Readers (or aggregators) permit easy viewing
- Users subscribe to the specific RSS-enabled blogs they want surveyed. When there is new content, it appears on their reader.
- Feeds can be integrated in a blog or a website
- Feeds URLs can be kept private for limited distribution

RSS feeds (cont.)

Other library uses:

- Feeds provided by publishers for journals
- Feeds associated with search alerts – EV2
- Feeds for library events and classes
- Feeds for new books (Case Western, UofOklahoma)
- Feeds for new databases (UofOklahoma)
- Feeds for any journal or newspaper indexed in subscribing database (via Metalib) (CalState San Marcos)
- Feeds built using patrons' records (Seattle PL)

Challenges

- The publishers/developers need time and support from administration to study the tools available, determine the objectives pursued and set up the blog itself
- The need for time for publication (research, writing, etc.)
- The need to publish consistently and in a timely manner
- The need to have accurate info
- The need to have active links

Challenges (cont.)

- The need to keep the intended audience in mind
- The need to consider different ways to access information in the blog: RSS feed, weekly or monthly digests emailed to interested patrons, patron accounts for interaction
- The need for a pleasant presentation: clear layout and navigation, no spelling errors, engaging tone, etc.
- The need to publicize the blog
- The need to assess the blog

Librarians as blogging resources

- Act as blogmeisters to other departments (student services, student association, faculty with their classes, Intranet, teams and committees)
 - Behind the scenes: giving technical help; creating the structure; providing needed info for content
 - As an active participant, following entries and posting as needed
 - Best placed to help prioritize, organize and develop tools that answer needs of the users
- Advantage: builds up the librarians' image, reputation and relevance

Professional Development

Activities counting as professional development:

- Belonging to a professional association
- Attending conferences, seminars, workshops, CE activities
- Reading LIS, subject-oriented or general interest literature
- Writing and publishing in LIS, subject-oriented or general interest publications
- Interacting with other information professionals

Professional Development – Reading Blogs

- Help by filtering and pinpointing the important news in a domain – new resources or materials, technological advances, trends, research, field news, vendor activity, conferences, job postings, etc.
- Information has been pre-evaluated, filtered, summarized, annotated, commented upon and delivered in a timely manner

Professional Development – Publishing a Blog

- “Librarian personality”
- Personal motivations:
 - keeping up with the changes in the field
 - keeping up with professional reading
 - desire to share information/personal expression
 - create a discussion/exchange place
 - notoriety/professional portfolio/vanity site
- Gift of writing

Conclusion

- Blogs is another way of doing what librarians do best: organize and disseminate information – good for you and for your readers
- There are all kinds of blogs, for every budget and every skill level
- No need to reinvent the wheel: do what works best for you or your readers