

BLOGS: A Online Tool for Library Services

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Abstract

Blog a new online tool is being effectively used by various libraries across the world to update users regarding library resources and services. The paper highlights on types of blogs, blogs in library sphere, how to start a blog with suitable examples, areas in which it can be best implemented.

Keywords : Webblog, Library Blogs

1. What is a Blog

Blogs are a relatively recent Internet phenomenon, dating from the late 1990s. Blogs began as primarily personal diaries, they have now morphed into powerhouses of opinion and information, as they are ideal for publishing rich information on any topic, no matter how big or how small. Blogs are used to consolidate resources that may otherwise be shared through an excessive number of e-mails to advocate a position or personal points of view, to cover areas of interest too small for print publishing and for news and commentary or any topic or area that requires frequent updating. [1] As the users and the uses of blogs have multiplied, they have begun to take on different forms and shapes to meet a wide variety of needs. However, the basic definition for a blog has remained the same. "A Weblog (now more commonly known as a blog) is a Web page that provides frequent continuing publication of Web links and/or comments on a specific topic or subject (broad or narrow in scope), often in the form of short entries arranged in reverse chronological order, the most recently added piece of information appearing first. An example in the field of library and information science is LISNews.com, which accepts postings from its readers [2].

2. Types of Blogs

There are various types of blogs, and each differs in the way content is delivered or written[3].

1. By Media Type: A Blog comprising videos is called a vlog, one comprising links is called a linklog, a site containing a portfolio of sketches is called a sketchblog or one comprising photos is called a photoblog. Blogs with shorter posts and mixed media types are called tumblelogs.
2. By Device: Blogs can also be defined by which type of device is used to compose it. A blog written by a mobile device like a mobile phone or PDA is called a moblog.
3. By Subject: Some blogs focuses on a particular subject, such as political blogs, travel blogs, fashion blogs, project blogs, legal blogs or dreamlogs.

A blog can be private, as in most cases, or it can be for business purposes. Blogs, either used internally to enhance the communication and culture in a corporation or externally for marketing, branding or PR purposes are called corporate blogs.

3. Blogs in Library Sphere

Within a short period only librarians have made blog popular in their users community. Following are few examples provide insight regarding the popularity of the bolgs and their information contents to deliver quick information to their users[4].

- a) The St. Joseph County Public Library Book Blog focuses on upcoming releases in publishing and entertainment. <http://homepage.mac.com/nrdtsjcp/B1732759005/index.html>
- b) Roselle Public Library's Blogger Book Club is an online book discussion group for kids to share their thoughts about books. <http://bloggerbookclub.blogspot.com>
- c) LISNews.com focuses on news for information professionals and is a collaborative Weblog. <http://www.lisnews.com>
- d) Library News is a Weblog featuring library-related news, events, and resources for Georgia State University. <http://www.library.gsu.edu/news/index.asp>
- e) ... h20boro lib blog is Waterboro Public Library's Weblog of literary and library news and resources. <http://www.waterborolibrary.org/blog.htm>
- f) Engineering Library Blog features news and events in one column of the library home page. <http://library.usask.ca/engin>
- g) Stark County Law Library Blawg serves the legal community of Stark County, Ohio. <http://temp.starklawlibrary.org/blog>
- h) Urbana Free Library has one called Construction News featuring photos and updates on the building underway. <http://urbanafreelibrary.org/bldgblog.html>
- i) Jenny Levine's Shifted Librarian looks at how to make libraries more portable to serve users better. <http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com>
- j) Peter Scott's Library Blog offers links and news about library resources and libraries around the world. <http://blog.xrefer.com>

A comprehensive list of library blogs is available at: <http://www.libdex.com/weblogs.html>

4. Aim or Purpose of Library Blogs

The aim and purpose of setting a blog in the library is basically to provide information on the following aspects:

- ◆ News or Information for Users
- ◆ Links to recommended Internet resources

- ◆ Book Reviews, Information about new books
- ◆ Entertainment and amusement for users
- ◆ News or Information for Librarians
- ◆ Research Tips

5. Starting a Library Blog

One of the special features of the blogs is that much blogging software is either free or inexpensive to use. One can have free account at a service like Blogger, Onclave or LiveJournal. Before starting a library blog one should make it clear the type of audience the library is serving, whether blog is a right tool for reaching the users? What key messages the library wish to send? What is the purpose of the blog? Also one has to think of the sufficient number of target users to make a blog worthwhile. What are the characteristics of the users? Will they appreciate short, newsy updates?

Next one needs to decide on the content and scope of the blog. What are the key messages that the library wants to convey? Whether the library wants to promote awareness of services and new resources to draw users attention to the library or to encourage the use of virtual services? or the library is looking for a way to be more interactive with certain groups of community, such as researchers, faculty, students, children etc. who might participate online but not face to face?

Once the target audience, key messages and purpose of the blog, toolkit requirements are decided, narrow down the field of dozens of blogging tools to a few by answering three questions.

- a. Would the library want to install blogging software locally on a desktop or on web server?
- b. What type of security is necessary? will the blog be available to anyone or willing be password protected will there be mandated guidelines for content to stay within the organization's firewall?
- c. What features is the library looking for in the blogging toolkit.

Depending on the situation, using a remote blogging service might be the ideal solution. If web developers are overburdened, a remote hosted blogging service that allows setting up a blog site by filling out a registration form may be just a thing. If it is planned to install blogging software locally, one will need to select software that runs either on library's webserver or on desktop computers and use a supported programming language like PHP, Perl, Java, Coldfusion, etc.

6. Library Application

Blogs can be useful in the library and information centers to promote the following services in the library.

6.1 Outreach Services

Building a community of library users depending on the type of users library can post information e.g. teens, students, neo-literate etc. Many other outreach services can be planned /executed using blog e.g. library can facilitate linking between online book stores and users for personal purchases of library users. It is observed that book vendors do give higher discount, if users are ordering from specific blog/site.

6.2 Dissemination of Information

Useful in dissemination of information to the library users such as information about new websites, service notices, announcements, updates, event information etc. Current awareness service can be delivered very efficiently using blogs. For example new additions list can be posted on page with RSS enabled features; users will get only entries matching to their requests on their blogs and don't need to visit library pages for this purpose. All the users can subscribe to RSS feeds of specific section and library can keep posting information at one place thus avoiding mass mailing. Blogging enables instant delivery of information being published to all RSS feed subscribers in a respective area. Also, if any changes or corrections need to be done, it is possible to do at only one place.

6.3 Library Administrator

Thoughts from library staff encourage openness, transparency, and add a voice to the library. Blogs provide platform to all staff members to express / share / contribute more on various professional issues. Information about training, conferences, tacit knowledge on tools, etc captured / measured easily using library blog.

6.4 Community Building

Librarians benefit from sharing of best practices and experiences. Blogs are a timely way to offer advice and commentary on current library issues. Blogs also provide facility to reader to post his/her opinion or experience. Sharing of experience, views from different users (across globe) builds strong community of user base. Learning and sharing becomes very easy and effective using Blogs.

6.5 Library Resources

Blogs can be used to highlight new and valuable resources added into the library. Blogs even work as web page and provide access to various free / subscribed electronic resources. Same area can be used for collecting feedback, providing training tips, sharing experience, rating information products etc which finally result in better utilization of library resources

6.6 Fast communication

Blogs are useful to facilitate communication between the project team, who are working on projects in the institutions/libraries. RSS enabled information publishing provides easy way of communication

between RSS feed subscribers / users of blog. Any information published will be automatically collated on individual blogs/pages. Similarly, blogs can be used for collecting inputs from different sites / sources without any additional repetitive efforts.

6.7 Marketing of Library

There is increased awareness about return of investment in all types of libraries including corporate, special, academic and public libraries. In few cases fund / budget is being allotted to libraries on the basis of inputs of library to organization for the development. Many libraries keep providing valuable services but reach of those services is limited to few users. If user base is increased, visibility of library services as well as inputs for organizational development too increases. For such things librarians need to market library services (Lending, Reference, CAS, SDI etc), resources (Collection of books reports, A/v Material, e journals, databases, etc), expertise (especially information searching and repackaging skills), database searching etc to the users.

Effective marketing of all the above is possible from blogs, which removes time and geographical barrier. Promoting library services through blog is most economical and creative way. Sharing of resources also becomes extremely easy as well as it promotes sharing of resources within users without coming to the library.

7. Problems of Blogs

Following are some of the problems may arise due to the use of blogs, hence library staff have to be careful about these aspects:

- a. Copy right issues related to information being published on a blog
- b. Confidentiality of information.
- c. Use of blog as anti-propaganda tool against a person/institution/country or anything which is harmful to everyone, any group. public or

8. Conclusion

Blog is a welcome and easy tool to be used in the libraries to provide various modern library services and expose electronic resources especially it is a best place to espose thought, aim and vision of the library. However, this tool can be best used only when library professionals try and apply it in their libraries. This kind of new tools being given as the gift of Internet need to be learnt and applied then only libraries can add value addition to their services and show their existence to the world.

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