Weblogs to Exploit the Library and Information Services

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Abstract

In early days people were communicating orally with one another, offering their perspectives on the world and sharing their passions. By lowering the barriers to publishing, the web can make those communications, whether representing individuals or their organizations, more powerful than ever before, but that require the right tools, metaphors and platforms. Through a gradual process of evolution and technology development, the communications has finally found a native online form through which to express themselves: a new form of web site called the weblog.

Keywords : Content Management, Weblogs

0.   Introduction

Some Terminology: There are words that one come across often with weblogs: bloger, blogging, client, server, host (or hosting), and more. Some of these words might be familiar or not (and most probably they're obvious to everyone).

- Weblog: A webpage containing brief, chronologically arranged (mostly in reverse order) items of information. A blog can take the form of a dairy, journal, what's new page, or linkks to other web sites. Weblogs are often also called blogs, and some publications refer to them as "web logs"(note the space between the words). There are all sorts of blog-related terms, such as blogsphere, blogosphere, blogland, etc.
- Blogger: A person who maintain a blog
- Blogging: The act of creating a blog
- Bloggroling: The act of moving from one blog to another.
- Content: Basically, information. Content is anything that can be either produced or consumed. Web pages (HTML), images, photos, videos, are all types of content. The most common type of content in weblogs today is text and links, with images growing in popularity and audio in a slightly more experimental phase. Videos are not common, but it's possible to find examples.
- Client: a PC, or a mobile device such as a Palm or a cellphone. Clients, or client devices, allow you to create content (text, images, etc) and then move them to a *server* at your leisure.
- Server: A machine that resides somewhere on the Internet that has (nearly) 100% connectivity. Servers are where the content for a weblog is *published*, that is, made available to the world. Servers are also commonly called hosts, and the "action" of leaving information on a server is usually referred to as hosting.
- URL: (Uniform Resource Locator) the text that (usually) identifies a webpage and (generally) begins with "http://...". Sample URLs are: http://www.cnn.com, http://www.nytimes.com, and so on.
- Link: a *hyperlink,* essentially a URL embedded within a webpage. Hyperlinks are those pieces of text that take you to another page. Links are a crucial component of the web, but more so (if that's at all possible) with weblogs. Links are what bind weblogs together, so to speak. Through links ONE can discover new content, follow a discussion, and make their viewpoint on something known in an unobtrusive manner.

- Client/Server: Clients create the content and then send (publish) it to a server. The server then makes the content available.
- Post: or posting, or entry, a single element of one or more types of content.
- Referrer: another crucial component of weblogs, referrer is automatically embedded by your web browser when you click on a link.
- Public weblog and Private weblog, are two terms. Public weblogs are published on the Internet without password or any other type of "protection", available for the world. Private weblogs are either published on the Internet but protected (e.g., by a password).
- Permalink: a permalink is a "permanent link", a way to reference a certain post "forever". "Forever" here means until a) the person that created the post changes their weblogging software, or b) until their server goes down for whatever reason. If you read news sites, you'll notice that news stories generally have long, convoluted URLs, this is because every single news article ever published is uniquely identified by their URL. If you copy the name of a URL and save it in a file, and then use it again six months or six years later, it should still work. All weblog software automatically and transparently generates a permalink for each post you create, and the way in which weblogs reference each other is by using the permalink of the posts or entries.

1. Weblogs

Weblogs are often-updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the web, often with comments, and to on-site articles. A weblog is kind of a continual tour, with a human guide who one gets to know. There are many guides to choose from, each develop an audience, and there is also camaraderie and politics between the people who run weblogs. They point to each other, in all kinds of structures, graphs, loops, etc.

Chicago Tribune defined Weblog as a "web site that maintains a constantly updated list of links to other sites; those links can deal with any subject or focus on a particular one. Webloggers typically offer pithy, sarcastic, commentary about the links".

Weblogs, typically, are personal web sites operated by individuals who compile chronological lists of links to stuff that interests them; interspersed with information; editorializing and personal asides. A good weblog is updated often, in a kind of real-time improvisation, with pointers to interesting events, pages, stories and happenings elsewhere on the web. New stuff piles on top of the page; older stuff sinks to the bottom.

2. History of weblogs

In 1998 there were just a handful of sites of the type that are now identified as weblogs (so named by Jorn Barger in December 1997). Jesse James Garrett, editor of Infosift, began compiling a list of "other sites like his" as he found them in his travels around the web. In November of that year, he sent that list to Cameron Barrett. Cameron published the list on Camworld, and others maintaining similar sites began sending their URLs to him for inclusion on the list. Jesse's 'page of only weblogs' lists the 23 known to be in existence at the beginning of 1999.

Peter Merholz announced that in early 1999 that he was going to pronounce it 'wee-blog' and inevitably this was shortened to 'blog' with the weblog editor referred to as a 'blogger.'

More and more people began publishing their own weblogs. Suddenly it became difficult to read every weblog every day, or even to keep track of all the new weblogs that were appearing. Cameron's list grew

so large that he began including only weblogs he actually followed himself. Other webloggers did the same. In early 1999 Brigitte Eaton compiled a list of every weblog she knew about and created the Eatonweb Portal. She evaluated all submissions by a simple criterion: that the site consists of dated entries

This rapid growth of weblogs continued steadily until July 1999 when Pitas, the first free build-your-own-weblog tool launched, and suddenly there were hundreds. In August, 1999 Pyra released *Blogger*, and *Groksoup* launched, and with the ease that these web-based tools provided, this bandwagon jumping turned into an explosion. Late in 1999, software developer, Dave Winer introduced *Edit This Page*, and Jeff A. Campbell launched *Velocinews*. All of these services are free, and all of them are designed to enable individuals to publish their own weblogs quickly and easily.

In 2000 there are thousands of weblogs , topic-oriented weblogs, alternative view points , astute examinations of the human conditions as reflected by mainstream media, short-form journals, links to the weird, and free-form notebooks of ideas. Traditional weblogs perform a valuable filtering service and provide tools for more critical evaluation of the information available on the web. Free-style blogs are nothing less than an outbreak of self-expression. Each is evidence of a staggering shift from an age of carefully controlled information provided by sanctioned authorities (and artists), to an unprecedented opportunity for individual expression on a worldwide scale. Each kind of weblog empowers individuals on many levels.

3.   Some of the characteristics of weblogs.

3.1.   A weblog is a personal website

A weblog allows you to easily publish a wide variety of content of the web, it can publish written essays, annotated links, documents (word, PDF, and powerpoint files), graphics, and multimedia.

3.2.   Don't need to be programmer

Because weblogs were built to simply publishing for the web, one can do all his publishing through a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) browser-based editing environment. One person don't need to be a programmer to use a weblog, all management is done through a point-and-click editorial menu.

3.3.   Organize over time

a weblog is not only an easy way to publish to the web but a way to organize all published product over time so that friends, associates, and customers can easily find and interact with it. A weblog places most recent posts at the top of ones homepage along with everything else that published that day.   An integrated calendar keeps track of the daily posts and allows site users to quickly access the archived posts.

3.4.   Connect

A Weblog connects you to other people. Anybody with a web browser can access your weblog to read what you have written and download files you have posted. It is a way to express your point-of-view for others to consume, digest, and respond to.

3.5.   Weblogs go beyond e-mail

While e-mail is great for one-to-one communication, it fails at one-to-many. Additionally e-mail systems don't organize information for you, while you can categorize e-mail you receive, e-mail doesn't provide you with the context of the message.

4. Need for the Library/Information Centre

Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals have to learn how to do a lot with just a little in order to promote awareness of their programmes and services. They have to seize the opportunities to market libraries/information services in the real world via traditional media: newspapers, corporate newsletters, radio, and T.V. Many libraries/information centers produce brouchers , pathfinders, and their won newsletters. So it is no surprise to see that the LIS professionals stepping up to the new technology and spreading the world online with blogs. Savvy LIS professionals have identified blogs as another means to market their services to others.

5. How to start a Libray/Information Center blog

a. Trail and error method: Many blogging programs are available either free of cost or inexpensive to use. A great and easy way to learn about blogs is to dive in and set up a free account at a service like *Blogger, livejournal, or Onclave* and take a test drive. By trying out two or three blogging tools, you will get a feel for what features you like and don't like. There is nothing like posting some sample entries to help you realize how frustrating a short tittle entry box can be or how useful a built-in WYSIWYG.

b. Service/Marketing Strategy: Once you have gotten experience, than you think about what type of blog you want to set up. Your first job is to carefully consider your service strategy and you need to be sure that a blog is the right tool for the job. Before you start a blog, you should take care about the target group (Users). Target group is online in sufficient numbers to make a blog worthwhile, characteristics of the target group, needs of the users and interest of the information and the form information i.e. short, newly updated, or depth-content etc.

c. Content and Scope: The blogger keep in his mind the things that what key messages that he want to convey, awareness of services and new sources to draw people in to the library/information center or to encourage to use virtual services, and to serve avid readers better by providing target book news and information, and interact with certain groups in your profession who might participate online but not face-to-face.

d. Project constraints and toolkits : The blogger first identify the libray/information center where he wants to install blogging software locally or a desktop or web server, either public weblog or private weblog, and the features in a blogging toolkit. Blogging software developers have been quick to add new fetures and functions to help bloggers. As a result there are dozens of features to choose from. Here are a few popular ones to think about:

  • Categories: A blogger need to know the categories of subjects that his clients would like to know. The blog readers may want to browse by broad topical subjects such as health, sports, medicine and so on.

  • Search: The site visitors want to search the archives of old posts and other related links.

  • Subscription lists: The web bloggers to know the target group who are visiting the site each day to read the posts, or would they prefer to receive a daily digest delivered to their mailboxes later.

  • Headlines: The blogger should know the interests of the user group in order to indicate the same through the headings of the current topics.

  • Design: See how easy it is to customize the design so you can make it match your library/information center site or add a new "skin".

  • Writers: Last but not least, to get a blog off the ground one needs a talented writer. One needs to find a staff member who is passionate about words and can write succinctly. Brevity is important. At the onset of blogging, it's useful to develop a set of standard editorial conventions to keep the blog consistent over time.

Below are the examples of some toolkits:

Toolkit	Type	Platform requirements	System	Free or Fee
Blogger or Blogger Pro www.blogger.com	Service	Both	-	Both
LiveJouirnal www.livejournal.com	Service	Both	-	Both
Onclave www.onclave.org	Service	-	-	Free
TypePad Www.typepad.com	Service	-	-	Free
B2 Www.cafelog.com	Instal	-	PHP, MySQL	Free,donate
Blosxom Www.blosxom.com	Instal	OS X, Unix/Linus	Perl	Free, donate

6.   Advantages of Blogs

There are dozens of ways that the LIS professionals are using blogs already. The most obvious application is for libray/information center news, which you need to be able to update frequently and easily. The informality of the net, and the ease of e-mail, leads readers to see blogs and articles on the net not as complete, finished pieces but as the beginning of a conversation, an invitation to add their own feelings. And also the weblogs highlight the valuable resources. Another few advantages are:

* Promote Library/Information Center Events : Create a blog that promotes libarary/information center events and programs. Reach out beyond the visitors to your regular Web site. Put an e-mail subscription form on the blog site and encourage visitors to sign up. This type of permission-based marketing is your chance to send library/information center news straight to the users in box on a regular basis. It's an opportunity to invite visitors to come back to the library or its web site over and over again.

    Make your blog stand out from the crowd by including some special content that captures reader's interest. For example, include a " quote of the day", run a trivia quiz, or share an interesting fact about your user community. Try to develop a unique voice for your blog, whether it is that of a friendly helper that explains mysteries or an authoritative approach that focuses on giving "just the facts".

* Support Your Dedicated Users: An obvious hit with most visitors is finding out what new books, journals, etc. have been added to the collection. Think about setting up topics on your blog for each genre: Information Technology, poetry, classics, horror, science fiction, and so on. In an academic library, prepare special alerts about new resources and web sites for particular departments or colleges.

* Engage Your User Community: Post book reviews and book award lists. Invite comments and suggestions. Create an online book discussion area by asking readers to recommend books to others.

* Support your User Community: LIS professionals are always looking for various ways to offer value-added services. Try to offer special services with the blog and to new users. For example, a local election news blog that posts announcements about candidate details, nominations, and meetings might be a natural project for libraries/information centers that are mandated to make local council minutes and agendas available to the public.

* Build New Ties: The blogger should focus on special services for different disciplines in different ways. For example, you are trying to reach teachers, you focus on programs for UGC or universities or colleges, new research resources, book lists, and seasonal web sites of interest. Some blogs allow to extended entries and include feature articles.

7. Disadvantages

- Bloggers sometime have a tendency to take themselves seriously, or to misinterpret, or to rush to judgment.
- Some people have been fired from their jobs because of their weblogs
- Some people may loose friends, make enemies, and get into huge fights(mostly war of words, but that nevertheless have impact on both on and offline life)

8. Conclusion

To promote library services, resources, and programs online can be a lot easier w ith the help of a blog. A great library blog requires three ingredients: inspiration, motivation, and dedication. Inspiration is that new attracting or marketing idea meshes perfectly with a blog as the delivery vehicle. Motivation is the energy to put good indeas into practice and helps launch the new blog. Dedication is for future purpose. It is the hardwork that keeps the blog updated with pithy, lively posts ona constant basis. Blogs can be very effective tools for reaching online users.

The weblogs are a new source of information in the lives of many workday LIS professionals. These new nodes on the net are perhaps more analogues to year-round conferences.

Few of the weblogs by LIS professionals

- ❖ The AcqWeblog
  - www.acqweb.library.vanderbilt.edu/acqweb/ms_acqs.html
- ❖ 'Library' blog
  - www.chickeninthewoods.org/librariness/
- ❖ Liblog: A Library Weblog
  - www.redwoodcity.org/library/news/liblog/
- ❖ Library News Daily
  - www.lights.com/scott/
- ❖ LISNews
  - www.lisnews.com/about.php3
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  - www.researchbuzz.com/weblog/

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